



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

ACCUMULATION BY DISPOSSESSION IN PALESTINE:  
THE NEW IMPERIALISM AND LAND TENURE UNDER  
THE BRITISH MANDATE

by  
MICHAEL AVANZATO

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
to the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration  
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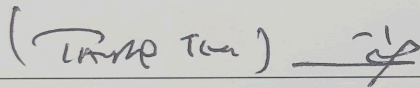
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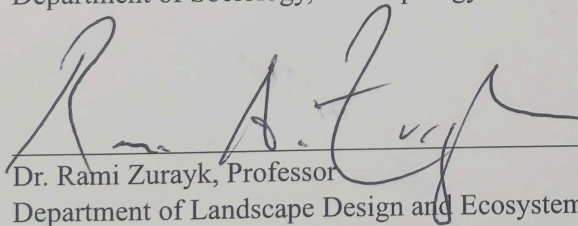
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Thank you,

Mike

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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The New Imperialism and Land Tenure Under the British Mandate

David Harvey coined the phrase “accumulation by dispossession” in reference to the American invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq. Having written his piece immediately following the invasion in 2003, it is unsurprising that Iraq was the centerpiece of his “New Imperialism.” This paper takes his theory, derived from Marx’s theory of primitive accumulation, and applies it instead to the case of the British Mandate in Palestine. Through the examination of primary source documents, including the correspondence of British officials, cabinet meeting minutes, British reports, and the archived land tenure laws of Palestine (made available via Martin Bunton’s collection, *Land Legislation in Mandate Palestine*), as well as secondary sources concerning theories of imperialism and Middle Eastern history, I argue that British land polices dispossessed the Palestinian population. Particularly, the British dismantled collective land in Palestine, known as the *musha’*. This process was similar to the dynamics of English enclosure, as well as the dispossession of the Native Americans. The dispossession of the Palestinians under the British Mandate is best viewed through Harvey’s model of imperialism with an eye to settler-colonialism. After giving proper historical background, this paper focuses on the period of 1920 to 1936 (the founding of the British Mandate to the Great Revolt). The paper concludes looking forward towards the revolt, the Nakba, and the modern era, making the case that this dispossession is not relegated to the past, and its dynamics can be seen throughout Palestinian history, and in Palestine today.

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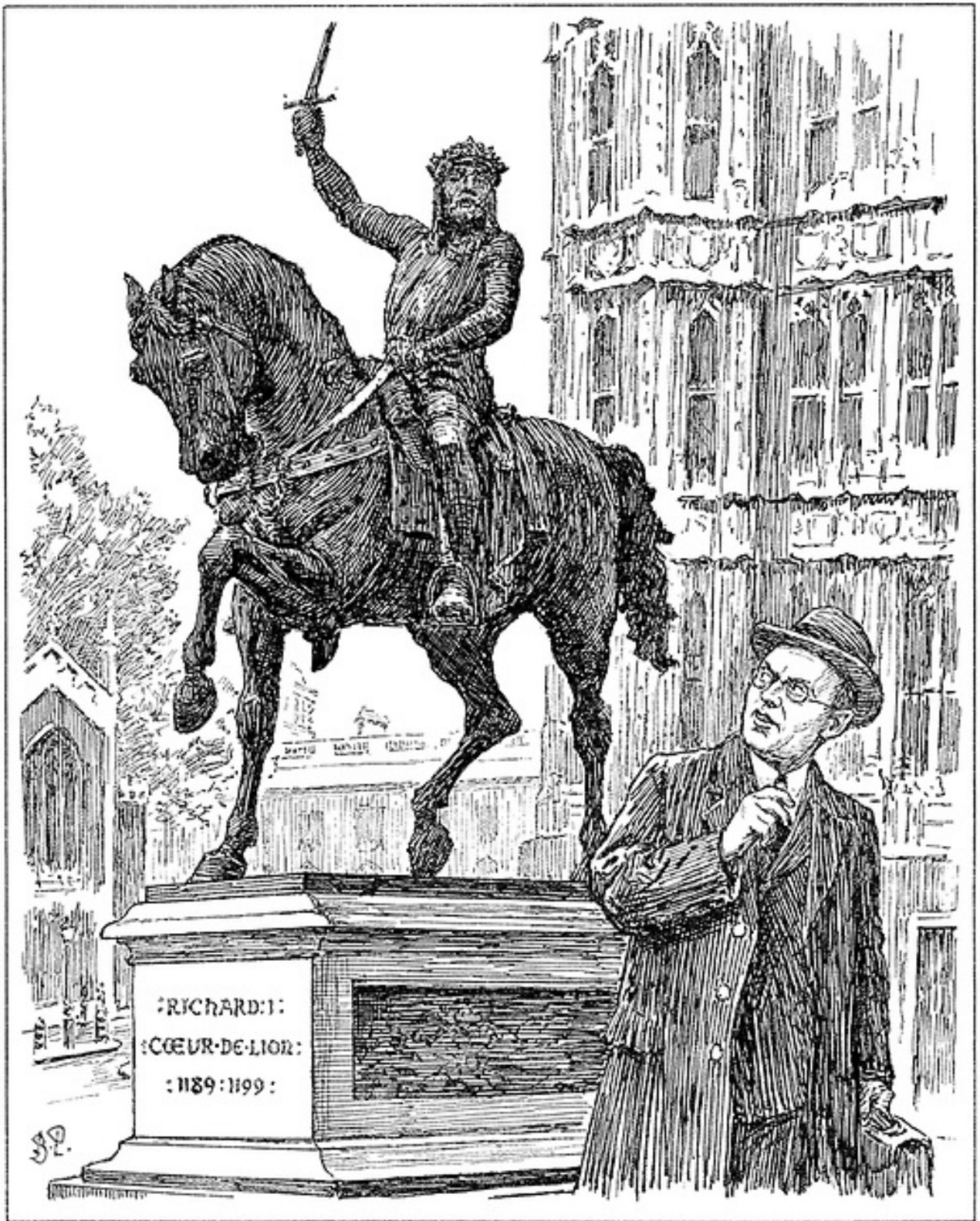
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### THE MARCH OF TIME

"What! still having trouble in Palestine?"

Figure 1: The statue of Richard I - Coeur de Lion, speaks to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Malcolm MacDonald in front of the Houses of Parliament

Partridge, Bernard. "The March of Time." *Inter War Cartoons 1919-1936*, Punch Magazine, 1938.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: THE GOALS AND MECHANICS OF IMPERIALISM

“When we speak of confronting Empire, we need to identify what Empire means. Does it mean the US government (and its European satellites), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and multinational corporations? Or is it something more than that?” - Arundhati Roy, *The End of Imagination*

“I spent 33 years and four months in active military service and during that period I spent most of my time as a high class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism. I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. I helped purify Nicaragua for the International Banking House of Brown Brothers in 1902-1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for the American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras right for the American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went on its way unmolested. Looking back on it, I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three districts. I operated on three continents.” - Smedley Butler, *War is a Racket*

#### A. New Imperialism, Old Logics

Robert Cooper, a senior British diplomat in Tony Blair’s government, expressed his belief, in a 2002 article for *The Guardian*, that, “What is needed then is a new kind of imperialism, one acceptable to a world of human rights and cosmopolitan values.”<sup>1</sup>

This statement advocates the development of a ‘new imperialism,’ but implicitly acknowledges the existence of an ‘old imperialism.’ It seems this prophecy (of the coming ‘new imperialism,’ though not of its compatibility with human rights) was to be

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Cooper, “The New Liberal Imperialism.” *The Guardian*

self-fulfilling. Joining Cooper is historian Niall Ferguson, a self described, “fully paid-up member of the neoimperialist gang.”<sup>2</sup> He complicates this burgeoning support of US empire. As a British imperial historian, he compares the American logics of empire unfavorably with the British. As Ferguson puts it, the British were in the empire game for the long haul. They were ready to deploy endless troops and resources to securing the more far flung reaches of their empire if need be; however, they were also more often able to find local collaborators with real social power, crucially for our purposes, often rooted in the control of the landed resources on which the mass of the colonial populations depended. These collaborators worked with imperial proconsuls to bring order to the hodgepodge of dependent entities that made up Whitehall’s imperium. The Americans, in the estimation of Ferguson, are far less ready to admit, never mind commit, to their own imperial project. Ferguson points to the raising, and then pulling down, of an American flag over Saddam’s statue in Baghdad’s Firdos Square on April 9, 2003, symbolically marking the end of the American conquest of Baghdad. Out of fear of poor optics, it was quickly replaced by an Iraqi flag. Seeing this, Ferguson laments: “You didn’t have to wait long for a perfect symbol of the fundamental weakness at the heart of the new American imperialism -- sorry, humanitarianism.”<sup>3</sup>

Ferguson’s lamentation is revealing, yet incomplete. Where he sees ‘weakness,’ others merely see a distinction between a British imperialism, developed somewhat in tandem with the early emergence of capitalist imperialism (and therefore still caught up in feudal structures) and the American model which evolved after capitalist hegemony

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<sup>2</sup> Jeevan Vasagar, “Niall Ferguson: Admirable Historian, or Imperial Mischief Maker?” *The Guardian*

<sup>3</sup> Niall Ferguson, “The Empire Slinks Back.” *The New York Times*

had been consolidated on a global scale. Ellen Meiksins Wood explains this transition via the illuminating case of capitalist Britain's first colony in Ireland. Early British efforts to establish their rule in Ireland were unfruitful, as the squabbling of English feudal lords prevented any serious progress of the imperial project. However, according to Wood's account, once the British started evaluating land by productive value, and therefore endeavoring to alter the local relations of production, they became far more successful. Eventually, she argues, the most important goal of English expansion became gaining, "value understood in a specifically English sense. Irish lands can be expropriated, not because they are unoccupied (which they are not), nor even because they are uncultivated (which they are not), but because they are not fruitful and profitable by the standards of English commercial agriculture."<sup>4</sup> This was clearly distinct from a desire to control the population or conquer land for its own sake, though the results were often the same. In pursuing 'value,' land needed to be driven into the marketplace, as, "human beings and nature - in the form of labour and land - are treated, however fictitiously, as commodities in a self-regulating system of markets driven by the price mechanism."<sup>5</sup>

These English feudal lords and their British allies, however, did not disappear. Rather, they successfully negotiated the transition to modernity as capitalist landlords, sending their sons and allies overseas as the ruling caste of an empire largely built on the indirect rule of Maharajas, chiefs, and landlords. This means that the old feudal structures, while largely replaced at home by the assimilation of industrial capital into

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<sup>4</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital*, p. 82

<sup>5</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism*, p. 23

an ‘open elite,’ still influenced the newly developing form of ‘Gentlemanly Capitalism’. That being said, despite the pull of the feudal past, Wood believes Ireland still represents a divergence point between the old and new forms of empire:

No longer is empire simply a means of subjecting populations for the purposes of tax and tribute or the extraction of precious resources. Nor is it simply a means of ensuring commercial supremacy by controlling the networks of trade. We can observe here the transition from commercial conceptions of profit - the profits of unequal exchange, ‘buying cheap’ and ‘selling dear’ - to capitalist profit, the profit derived from competitive production, from the increased productivity enabled by ‘improvement.’<sup>6</sup>

This capitalist transformation took on a particular form of dispossession where settlers allied with the imperial power, in effect the lineal descendants of the British colonists in Ireland, seized control of the land held by indigenous peoples under a variety of communal or common property regimes (‘commons’).

The Native American maxim that, “land cannot be sold...Nothing can be sold but such things as can be carried away,”<sup>7</sup> recounted famously by Black Hawk, the great chief of the Sauk Nation, ran directly counter to the British Empire’s understanding of land tenure. Black Hawk is not arguing that there are no rights to land, but rather that tribes have demarcated territories and do not recognize individual ownership over plots of land. Gary Fields, in his *Enclosure: Palestinian Landscapes in a Historical Mirror*, describes this conflict, before comparing it to the Palestinian case: “Where the English elevated individual ownership of plots of ground, Amerindians vested tenure in collectives and, prior to contact, had no concept of owning and alienating pieces of the

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<sup>6</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital*, p. 83

<sup>7</sup> Black Hawk (Ma-Ka-Tai-Me-She-Kia-Kiak). *An Autobiography*. Edited by Donald Jackson, p. 114

earth... where the English enclosed pieces of ground to designate improvement and possession and prevent trespass, Amerindians utilized open landscapes as areas of use and improvement.”<sup>8</sup>

One of the more relevant arguments Fields deploys when making this point is his review of the connection between English cartography and native dispossession.

William Penn, the founder of modern Pennsylvania, oversaw one of the more ambitious land settlement projects in the colonies. Penn’s official surveyor, Thomas Holme,



Figure 2: “A Mapp of ye Improved Part of the Pensilvania in America, divided into Countieyes, Townships, and Lotts.” by Thomas Holme 1687

Library of Congress G3820 1687 H62. Retrieved from Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/82690543/>

<sup>8</sup> Gary Fields, *Enclosure: Palestinian Landscapes in a Historical Mirror*, pp. 113-114

created a map (shown in Figure 2) intended to show the recent purchases of land in Pennsylvania, as well as market the remaining land to potential consumers. Even the title of the map, “A Mapp of ye Improved Part of the Pensilvania in America, divided into Countyes, Townships, and Lotts,” is revealing. The ‘improved’ part of Pennsylvania is the section neatly divided into plots of land. At the borders, however, lies vast amounts of unmarked, forested land. According to Fields, “this area of the map therefore beckons to new buyers who will do to the land what the parcel owners in the eastern portion have already done in making improved land. In this way, the map presents a cartographically rendered narrative narrative of property and land improvement overpowering the unimproved and un-propertied former landscape. It is an instrument calling people to settle and populate the land.”<sup>9</sup> Pointedly, this ‘blank corner of the map’ does not include any Native American presence. The message is clear: if you fall outside of the framework of carefully plotted English land tenure, you simply do not exist.

As the English parceled out land in the Americas, they were unknowingly forging their own successors. The neoliberal managers of the new American imperium evinced clear connections with their British colonial predecessors. This was also true of the latter day mercenaries who have emerged as key auxiliary prosecutors of America’s wars. Many avail themselves of a Kiplingesque nostalgia for the previous incarnations of empire in British India and its dependencies (which of course included large parts of the Arab East). Erik Prince, the founder of Blackwater, the most (in)famous of the US private security firms that entered the public consciousness after the invasion of Iraq,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 136



and now a close confidant of President Donald Trump, and brother of Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, has been advocating a new approach to the seemingly endless US war in Afghanistan:

These deficits can be remedied by a different, centuries-old approach. For 250 years, the East India Company prevailed in the region through the use of private military units known as "presidency armies." They were locally recruited and trained, supported and led by contracted European professional soldiers. The professionals lived, patrolled, and -- when necessary -- fought shoulder-to-shoulder with their local counterparts for multiyear deployments...An East India Company approach would use cheaper private solutions to fill the gaps that plague the Afghan security forces, including reliable logistics and aviation support. The U.S. military should maintain a small special-operations command presence in the country to enable it to carry out targeted strikes, with the crucial difference that the viceroy would have complete decision-making authority in the country.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, Prince is fondly recalling the British experience of using 'native troops' in India, and hoping to replicate their model for Afghanistan. Prince and Ferguson both express at other times a half-hearted reticence for reinvigorating the imperial project, though they ultimately find it both necessary and possible (although Ferguson is slightly more timid, and would still condemn the East India Company and the earlier more savage incarnations of the British Empire). Prince definitively articulates a martial, militant colonialism, whereas Ferguson and his ilk seek, ideally, a less coercive colonial presence. Neither of these latter day imperial cheerleaders gives much attention to the social dislocation that is likely to accompany the imposition of (neo) colonial control, a process that has been directly linked to contemporary imperialist expansion by David Harvey and his followers.

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<sup>10</sup> Erik D. Prince. "The MacArthur Model for Afghanistan." *Wall Street Journal*, Jun 01, 2017

Descending from Marx's writings on the expropriation of the English commons, Harvey's theory of accumulation by dispossession, as well as the way in which it has played out in other settings, will prove the most useful theory for this study. Not only does Harvey provide an excellent framework to understand imperial/colonial dynamics, he will soundly answer the advocates for a 'new imperialism,' as well as historical institutionalist defenders of liberal Zionism such as Joel Migdal. Harvey, a Marxist geographer and historian, took the phrase for the title of his 2003 book, *The New Imperialism*. Harvey's work in both this book, and his articles, will provide the basis for this paper, and the following study of land tenure in Palestine. Harvey's work focuses on Iraq, and having written his piece immediately following the American invasion, it is unsurprising that Iraq was the focal point of his "New Imperialism." Why, though, could his theory not have been created to describe the situation in Palestine? Both Iraq and Palestine were formerly British Mandates, and each fell into a style of American occupation thereafter (direct American occupation, in the case of Iraq, and outsourced via support for the Israeli government in the case of Palestine). If Harvey begins his story with the American entrance into Iraq, it seems appropriate to then look to the British entrance into Palestine. Just how 'new' is this 'New Imperialism,' and were its effects felt in Palestine under the British? This paper seeks to answer that question through an examination of land law and policy under the British Mandate in Palestine. An understanding of this land regime is critical, as the governance of land, and the dispossession of the peasantry, are key elements to Harvey's architecture of New Imperialism generally, and his theory of 'accumulation by dispossession' specifically.

Harvey developed his theory of accumulation by dispossession within the context of the American invasion of Iraq of 2003, and since his publication has been invoked in the cases of India, South Africa, Great Britain, Brazil and a great many others (see Vasudevan, 2008; and Hall, 2013). Palestine, however, has not been the subject of considerable study concerning accumulation by dispossession and the ‘new imperialism.’ The comparative failure of scholars to apply this theory to Palestine leads to several questions: How, exactly, did accumulation take place under the British? Can Palestine be said to fit into Harvey’s model? What was the British relationship to Zionist settler-colonialism, and how did this settler-colonialism fit into the British imperial project? This leads us to modern questions, such as the degree to which British land governance and accumulation affected, and continues to affect, the current Israeli occupation of Palestine. I argue that the British, following their understanding of land as purely ‘value’ in Wood’s sense, dismantled and privatizing Palestinian collective land (known as the *musha*). The British enclosed land, privatized it, and pushed it into the market across their domains. This project was crucial to their development of social control, and rule of their empire.

## **B. Imperial Collaborators, Land, and the Legacies of Late Colonialism**

Joel Migdal’s *Strong Societies and Weak States*, as well as his other works, provides a justification for the colonial origins of the division between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ states that Ferguson could recognize. Much like Ferguson, Migdal believes that certain patterns of imperial control can, if managed correctly, create strong robust states in the future. For (colonized) societies that experience, “direct, outside hegemonic

rule,” the most important factor in their success in ensuring, “the channeling of resources to indigenous organizations capable of extending social control throughout the society.”<sup>11</sup> If the Empire can find a loyal, capable collaborator to manage these networks of resources, and in largely agrarian societies, to control those associated with land in particular, the task of managing the colonial peripheries is made much easier. Additionally, once that state gains independence, the collaborators’ institutions (built in tandem with the colonial power) should carry forward, creating the basis for a ‘strong state.’

Imperial powers have therefore historically found themselves in need of a collaborating elite in their colonies. From the onset of British involvement in the Middle East, collaborators played an important role in their colonial rule, as is the case for all colonial/imperial powers. It is first important to note that ‘collaborator’ is not strictly relegated to its historical pejorative. Ronald Robinson identifies two linkages which are most critical to the collaborative system: “one consisting of arrangements between the agents of industrial society and the indigenous elites drawn into cooperation with them; and the other connecting these elites to the rigidities of local interests and institutions. Collaborators had to perform one set of functions in the external of ‘modern sector’ yet ‘square’ them with another and more crucial set in the indigenous society.”<sup>12</sup>

The collaborators thus form a type of bridge, connecting the occupying power to the indigenous population. The success or failure of imperial projects depend on the

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<sup>11</sup> Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, p. 173

<sup>12</sup> Roger Owens and Robert Sutcliffe, *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, pp. 121-22

ability of the collaborators to successfully ‘square’ the contradictions between the core country’s rule and the locals. This becomes more crucial the less military force a country has at their direct disposal. The French in Algeria, for instance, deployed massive military force, thus lessening the need for local intermediaries. How, then, do other powers bind collaborators to their will? In particular, the British create an economic dependence, fostering a more subtle, mutually beneficial relationship. This form of control also revealed other benefits, not only for the collaborators, but not the imperial power itself:

The bread was buttered in the Mother Country. Exporter and importer, banker and docker, farmer, sheep drover and cattle and herder in the colony voted for politicians who would respect the arrangements to keep export markets open and capital flowing in. Unemployment and defeat at the next election were the penalties for breaking them. Direct imperial control in such conditions was unnecessary. Indeed since it provoked violent nationalist reaction, it was a positive disadvantage and rusted into disuse. Imperial cooperation was achieved mainly by economic attraction through the normal internal political processes of the colony itself. There were sufficient economic inputs to maintain political alliance.<sup>13</sup>

Particularly in the case of the British in Palestine, collaboration and land are linked intrinsically. If ‘forming a bridge’ and ensuring the free flow of goods between the core and colony were the logics of collaboration, land tenure arrangements were the methods of identifying and supporting valuable collaborators. Much of the political and economic power across the territories over which Britain was to assume control lay in the hands of sheikhs and large landholders. Thus, in both ensuring collaboration and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp. 124-25

reworking the social relations of the newly minted Mandates, land tenure reform was the order of the day.

The British faced a serious problem in Palestine in this regard, especially following the publication of the Balfour Declaration (which promised to build a Jewish ‘national home’ in Palestine, and will be examined in detail later). They were unable to find effective indigenous collaborators. However, Britain was still able to satisfy Migdal and find collaborators via settler-colonialism. Maintaining economic and social control via implanting settlers amongst a reticent native population was a common tactic within the British Empire. Settlers are uniquely suited to play the role of collaborator:

He [the settler] was the ideal, prefabricated collaborator; but by what kind of mechanism did Britain project these profitable economic satellites, these congenial imperial dominions, onto continents thousands of miles away? — For the greater part of the century these colonies had no alternative to Britain as a source of capital, export markets, immigrants and protection.<sup>14</sup>

Migdal’s view of the state is incredibly inward looking, marked by a clear methodological nationalism, based off of internal institutions (under colonialism, often built by collaborators). Migdal says as much with his declaration that, “the sole means toward sustained political mobilization is through building state agencies and related political parties that can provide the primary elements for viable strategies of survival to the people in all spheres of their lives.”<sup>15</sup> Colonialism, in Migdal’s estimation, can therefore create both strong and weak states, depending partially on the effectiveness of the collaborator. In Sierra Leone, the British laid the foundation for a weak state, and

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<sup>14</sup> Roger Owens and Robert Sutcliffe, *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, p. 124

<sup>15</sup> Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, p. 263

with the Zionists in Palestine, a strong one. If this is the case, however, why does Migdal later argue that, by his definition, nearly all strong states are western, colonial powers? He states that, “only a handful of Asian, African, and Latin American states fall high on the continuum of ‘stateness’ or state capabilities.”<sup>16</sup> The only specific examples of ‘strong states’ in Asia, Africa, and Latin America are Israel, Cuba, China, Japan, Vietnam, North Korea, and South Korea.<sup>17</sup>

This is quite an odd (and small) collection of states. How is it that no other states outside of the West qualify for Migdal? Presumably the United States counts as a ‘strong state,’ yet, it lacks state services such as government sponsored healthcare and education, which can be found across Latin American, Asian, and African states, and require complex systems of social control and resource allotment. Migdal’s shortcomings are also illustrated in his failure to understand the crisis of Chile. Cuba, partially, is a ‘strong state’ because so many Cubans emigrated to the United States, freeing opportunities for those who remained. Migdal cites an Allende government (Migdal uses the word ‘regime’) official, who believes socialism failed because, “Chile did not have a Florida only ninety miles away.”<sup>18</sup> Migdal ignores US foreign policy in this discussion, and does not note that the US government actively overthrew the Allende government as part of an overarching policy of opening Latin American governments to neoliberal reform. Migdal’s failure to consider either US imperialism,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 269

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

or movements of global capital, leave his analysis lacking. Unfortunately, he runs directly into the same problem while as he examines Palestine.

Joel Migdal's work focusses on colonially mediated state-building and late development, and the specific lineages of a 'strong' state, and a 'weak' one. His general theory is that the crisis and disruption that accompanied European expansion across the long 19<sup>th</sup> century brought about a reconfiguration of the 'strategies of survival' pursued by societal actors in the global south. This in turn allowed the new states that emerged from the European carve-up of Africa and Asia to impose new 'rules,' and increase their capacity for social control, and therefore their relative 'strength.' Displacement, war, or other society-altering forces (such as new avenues of trade and transportation, or, importantly, land tenure laws) compelled the new societies that emerged from Late Colonialism to adopt new survival strategies based on resources under the control imperial administrators or their local collaborators (in the case of Britain, chiefs, shaykhs, or Zionist colonialists). Disruption opens the gate for the reconstitution of social rules, and, according to Migdal, is the crucible in which strong states may be formed:

In sum, a state's capacities in making and enforcing new rules—gaining social control among its population—have depended on its ability to have the strategies of survival that it offered accepted by the population. Serendipity played a major role in determining the state's success in pressing its strategies on the society. Where people were tied tightly to their existing strategies of survival, state officials found the going very difficult. But where exogenous forces widely disrupted social life and made existing strategies unbearable or irrelevant—as vast social changes in Europe coupled with the trauma of migration had for the Jewish population in mandatory Palestine—those states (or



prospective states) faced much more promising circumstances for having their own strategies accepted.<sup>19</sup>

In what were in were largely agrarian societies, land tenure 'reform' represents the most important type of disruption Migdal refers to here. Yet, his story is woefully incomplete, particularly where imperialism and colonialism are concerned. Migdal's focus on Palestine leaves out large swaths of history, as he fails to take seriously British power and influence, instead he is fixated purely on the Jewish Agency.

For Migdal, the Jewish agency in Palestine, and the development of the Israeli state and society, represents a prototypical 'strong state.' The Jewish Agency, though not a state, played an important role in state construction and is largely responsible for the 'strong' condition of the early Israeli state. Migdal lays out several reasons explaining the development of such a strong state. While these factors were specific to the growing Jewish community in Palestine, Migdal's observations are clearly meant to be generalized to other states and circumstances.

His first point regards the nature of Jewish immigration to the country. Namely, he asserts that, as these immigrants were fleeing economic circumstances and anti-semitism, they were in search for a new form of society. Their desire for a new social structure meant a disregard of older structures and societies. The Jewish Agency used the immigrants' tenuous situation, and need for new social structures, to their advantage. Migdal also explains that the Jewish agency prospered due to its superior leadership, particularly that of Ben Gurion. He also believes that the nascent state gained social cohesion both from the military threats facing it, and the ingenuity of their labor leaders.

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<sup>19</sup> Joel Migdal, *Through the Lens of Israel*, p. 12

Migdal does not dedicate much time to another point, though it seems the most important. Migdal states that, “The Mandate for Palestine created the opportunity for consolidated social control through the latitude given to the Jewish Agency and allied organizations.”<sup>20</sup>

This statement falls short of describing the advantage of the Jewish agency. Not only did the Jewish Agency and its allied organizations (such as the Jewish National Fund, the primary Zionist land purchasing vehicle) have the ‘opportunity’ to consolidate power, the terms of the Mandate made it inevitable. The Mandate empowered the Jewish Agency, and gave it the authority to negotiate with the British government. The Palestinians, however, had no analogous organization. Zionist settlers were therefore at a great advantage and their settlements were able to sweep, “across the landscape, enclosing territorial spaces in geometrically ordered patterns of development demarcating Jewish space...these built forms not only reinforce the exclusionary character of the spaces they occupy; they also function as powerful cultural markers imbuing the spaces where they are situated and the surrounding landscapes with symbolic messages regarding who belongs within and who lies outside these boundaries of belonging.”<sup>21</sup> Clearly, not only were Zionist institutions being strengthened by the British, they were, in turn, encroaching upon and dismembering Palestinian society.

Migdal is aware that the Jewish Agency was entirely a creation of the Mandatory regime imposed by the British Empire. Yet, he still views the strengthening of the Jewish community as somehow isolated from, and not necessarily detrimental to the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 172

<sup>21</sup> Gary Fields, *Enclosure: Palestinian Landscapes in a Historical Mirror*, p. 316

indigenous Palestinians. Its status as the progenitor of a strong state is in no way related to the very British favoritism Migdal himself outlines:

“The British had divided their collaborative efforts between the two competing communities of Arabs and Jews. Arab rejection of a British offer to back a counterpart to the Jewish Agency was at the center of a number of factors fragmenting social control... What had started as organizations to establish social control exclusively among the Jews of Palestine now [following the Nakba] became the basis of a state exercising such control over Jews *and* the Arab remnant populations alike.”<sup>22</sup>

Here Migdal highlights the role of the Arabs in ‘rejecting’ a British offer, without so much as a word regarding the goals of settler-colonialism. Jewish supremacy in Palestine, and the dominance of the Jewish Agency, is not an outgrowth of British nurturing and imperialism in Migdal’s understanding. Rather, Migdal’s approach to strong and weak states more generally is focused inward, and thus he views the Jewish Agency as ‘strong’ in its own right, not due to a benefactor.

The Jewish Agency and the Jewish community writ large in Palestine, did not develop in a vacuum. As the British experienced failure after failure in terms of collaborating with the Arab population (who distrusted the British after the publication of the Balfour Declaration, which granted their homeland to another community), they increasingly relied on the Jewish settlers. Prior to the Nakba, these settlers faced two disadvantages in relation to the native Palestinian population: numerical inferiority and lack of familiarity with the local economic structures. Therefore, they were entirely reliant on international and British support in their early years, which the British were

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<sup>22</sup> Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, p.170

more than happy to provide within the framework of the post-Sykes-Picot British Mandate.

Migdal, however, ignores not only the British's support for the Jewish Agency, but land policy during the Mandate years as well. He focuses on singular dispossessing events, and in concluding his piece on Palestine, mentions only the Nakba (which he refers to as the "1948 War of Independence,") in examining 'dislocation' in Palestine:

A second basis for major twentieth-century dislocations, weakening old social control and allowing new, has been mass migration... In Israel, the unsettling effects of in-migration of Jews on their own social organizations was more than matched in importance by the flight and expulsion of Arabs, destroying most existing bases of control among Arabs... Israel's 1948 War of Independence, for example, which accelerated the influx of Jews and out-migration of Palestinian Arabs, was also its most costly in human terms of all its wars, killing nearly 1 percent of the Jewish population.

Migdal is significantly more lucid on the topic of general land tenure than when speaking on Palestine. Governments frequently enact land tenure reform in an attempt to make local land regime more manageable. Migdal, however, is fairly skeptical regarding these changes: "Despite the precise purposes and rationalizations for the changes in land tenure from one place to another, they precipitated eruptive, universal dislocations wherever enacted. Peasants' stable world suddenly became topsy-turvy. The new laws signaled changes in agricultural production and rural relations that entered so deeply into the fabric of societies that their effects are often still readily discernible today."<sup>23</sup> What is the utility of creating 'eruptive, universal dislocations' for an imperial power? The answer is complicated, and inextricably related to ideas of

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<sup>23</sup> Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, p. 59

‘rationalizing’ native land patterns, and making them manageable for sale and reallocation.

Migdal reveals the logic underlying this type of colonial action. Land tenure is one of the most fertile grounds for exerting control over colonial territory. Colonial administrators can wield massive power when it comes to land, and can reap enormous benefits, all the while seeming relatively benign: “In striking at existing land tenure patterns, the new policies hit at what was inevitably the critical set of rules of the game in agrarian societies. Property rights consist of the rules for employing productive factors in a society. What better way to assure the unviability of the old ways of producing than to attack the most important property rights of all in such societies. those involving land?”<sup>24</sup>

These sudden shifts in land tenure disrupted “people’s strategies of survival,”<sup>25</sup> according to Migdal. He argues that this is because, in largely agricultural societies, modes of social control are tied to the access or use of land. Following his logic of dislocation, this disruption of survival strategies should result in bold opportunities for crafting new rules. Migdal, though, fails to connect the activities of the Zionist settlers and the dislocation that this brought to the mass of village dwelling Palestinians. It was not only that Palestinians’ ‘survival strategies’ were disrupted by new modes of transport, shifting patterns of trade and taxation, it was also that this was done to the benefit of the growing settler population. Land is key to processes of settler colonialism, and therefore looking solely to the Nakba as a rival national struggle to that

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<sup>24</sup> Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, p. 57

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

of refugee Jewish settlers, as Migdal does, leaves us with an incomplete understanding of the ongoing dispossession of the Palestinians. Harvey's accumulation by dispossession, however, is not as insular as Migdal's institutionalism, as those who accumulate land or capital (and thus, in Migdal's view, become 'strong') do so via, often violent, forms of dispossession.

### **C. Accumulation by Dispossession and the Logics of Empire**

“Land is settler colonialism's irreducible essence in ways that go well beyond real estate. Its seizure is not merely a change of ownership but a genesis, the onset of a whole new way of being—for both parties. Settlers are not born. They are made in the dispossessing, a ceaseless obligation that has to be maintained across the generations if the Natives are not to come back.”<sup>26</sup> Britain was not alone in making sweeping land tenure reforms, nor were they the only ones to see dispossession as a result. My focus on land tenure in Palestine is not coincidental. The ownership and control of land is key not only to the British's imperial project, but settler colonialism writ large. The dynamic of accumulation by dispossession is not difficult to spot. Dispossession is not happening for its own sake, the land and wealth of the displaced is being accumulated by, and in turn forming, the settler class, as well as benefiting the imperial overseer.

Harvey's theory of accumulation by dispossession advances the Marxian concept of 'primitive accumulation,' and adapts it for the modern period. Marx believed that primitive accumulation is relegated to a time past, and, “plays in Political Economy about the same part as original sin in theology. Adam bit the apple, and thereupon sin

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<sup>26</sup> Patrick Wolfe, “The Settler Complex,” *American Indian Culture and Research* p. 1

fell on the human race. Its origin is supposed to be explained when it is told as an anecdote of the past.”<sup>27</sup> Marx gives the following definition of primitive accumulation:

In the history of primitive accumulation, all revolutions are epoch-making that act as levers for the capital class in course of formation; but, above all, those moments when great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled as free and “unattached” proletarians on the labour-market. The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the whole process. The history of this expropriation, in different countries, assumes different aspects, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different periods.<sup>28</sup>

Marx, alone amongst European theorists, expands this idea (originally developed for the English context) to the plunder of the third world, particularly by the East India Company: “the moneyocracy which had converted India into its landed estates, of the oligarchy who had conquered it by their armies, and of the millocracy who had inundated it with their fabrics, had gone hand in hand. But the more the industrial interest became dependent on the Indian market, the more it fell the necessity of creating fresh productive powers in India, after having ruined her native industry.”<sup>29</sup> Marx nears connecting his primitive accumulation with, for him, current events, but it takes Harvey to fully adapt the concept to the modern era.

Harvey extends this this period of accumulation until it covers the whole gamut of capitalist history. Primitive accumulation is not relegated to the past. In Harvey’s view, accumulation by dispossession ensures that it continues to this day, and includes:

the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations; conversion of various forms of property rights –

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<sup>27</sup> Marx, "Capital Volume One: the process of production of capital." Ch. 26

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Karl Marx. “The East India Company - Its History and Results.” *New York Daily Tribune*

common, collective, state, etc. – into exclusive private property rights; suppression of rights to the commons; commodification of labour power and the suppression of alternative, indigenous, forms of production and consumption; colonial, neo-colonial and imperial processes of appropriation of assets, including natural resources; monetization of exchange and taxation, particularly of land; slave trade; and usury, the national debt and ultimately the credit system. The state, with its monopoly of violence and definitions of legality, plays a crucial role in both backing and promoting these processes.<sup>30</sup>

These processes deeply affected Palestine, and began to take root following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, and establishment of the British Mandate.

Before moving to the particularities of the Palestinian case, a more general examination of late colonialism/imperialism must be endeavored. Firstly, are these terms interchangeable? While they certainly share similarities, colonialism necessarily involves the transfer of a colonizing power's population to the colony, and therefore the term 'settler-colonialism' may be more precise. Harry Magdoff believes these terms are too often collapsed into each other, that, "the identification of imperialism with colonialism obfuscates not only historical variation in colonial-metropolitan relations, but makes it more difficult to evaluate the latest transformation of the capitalist world system, the imperialism of monopoly capitalism."<sup>31</sup> As for Harvey, when discussing imperialism, he uses the phrase "capitalist imperialism," which he defines, "as a contradictory fusion of 'the politics of state and empire' ... and 'the molecular processes of capital accumulation in space and time,'"<sup>32</sup> this answers Magdoff's critique fairly, as

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<sup>30</sup> Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, p. 145

<sup>31</sup> Roger Owens and Robert Sutcliffe, *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* p. 146

<sup>32</sup> Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, p. 26



Harvey, in specifying his terms carefully, avoids collapsing earlier colonialisms into ‘capitalist’ imperialism.

The politics of state and empire refer to the political leadership and goals of imperial powers, whereas the processes of capital accumulation follow a very different logic. While the politics of empire and the processes of capital are fused, Harvey also sees them as contradictory. In his analysis, Harvey draws upon Giovanni Arrighi’s concept of ‘The Dialectic of Capitalism and Territorialism.’ Harvey articulates this distinction: “The capitalist holding money capital will wish to put it wherever profits can be had, and typically seeks to accumulate more capital. Politicians and statesmen typically seek outcomes that sustain or augment the power of their own state vis-a-vis other states.”<sup>33</sup> One of the first distinctions Harvey outlines is certainly true, that the logic of empire, as explicitly advocated by states, is much easier to follow than the more diffuse logics of capital. State (territorial) decisions are often voted on, or at least proclaimed, publicly, whereas the movement and investment of private capital is largely private, and less amenable to scrutiny.

While these logics (of territory and capital) are surely different, do they work in tandem, or are they at odds with one another? Not only does Harvey believe the relationship to be antagonistic, but Derek Gregory reinforces his point: “If global capitalism is aggressively *de-territorializing*, moving ever outwards in a process of ceaseless expansion and furiously tearing down barriers to capital accumulation, then colonial modernity is intrinsically *territorializing*, forever installing partitions between

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 27

‘us’ and ‘them.’ ”<sup>34</sup> Thus in Gregory’s imagining, the state, following a territorial logic, attempts to create and maintain regulated paths of capital, whereas the capitalist seeks to remove or circumvent these paths in order to maximize profit.

Gregory belongs definitively to the ‘postcolonial’ school of thought. Many in that realm describe Israel as the ‘last colonial project in the modern era’ (see Reuveny’s *The Last Colonialist* of 2008). Gregory also includes Palestine as a primary case (one of three, including Afghanistan and Iraq) in his work *The Colonial Present*. Palestine represents a key case for Gregory for much the same reason that I focus on it here. Not only is Palestine a clear example of modern settler-colonialism (the settlers of the West Bank even identify themselves as such), but it represents a territory that fairly explicitly changed hands from the British Empire, to the American Empire thereafter. It seems, however, that outside of his territoriality framework, and logics for focussing on Palestine, Gregory’s usefulness to this endeavor comes to an end. He undercuts his argument significantly by making use of Nicholas Thomas’s definition of colonialism: “Colonialism is not best understood primarily as a political or economic relationship that is legitimized or justified through ideologies of racism or progress. Rather, colonialism has always, equally importantly and deeply, been a cultural process.”<sup>35</sup>

What, then, is the value of having colonies, or an empire? In citing Thomas, Gregory seems to have entirely abandoned his prior argument regarding the logics of territory and capital. Harvey, however, addresses this question specifically. Though Harvey sees these logics as often in opposition, they can also be unified. Imperialism’s

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<sup>34</sup> Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, p. 253

<sup>35</sup> Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture*, p. 2

value to capital, in Harvey's estimation, is the resolution of the spatio-temporal contradiction that lies at the heart of capital: that capitalist overaccumulation (either of capital or labor) can, and must, be resolved by geographical expansion and reorganization. This, according to Harvey, lies at the core of imperialism. Rosa Luxemburg agrees, and gives an excellent description of the dynamic "Capital, impelled to appropriate productive forces for purposes of exploitation, ransacks the whole world, it procures its means of production from all corners of the earth, seizing them, if necessary by force, from all levels of civilization and from all forms of society."<sup>36</sup>

Here, the logic of territory and capital are linked. The territorial power of the state is deployed in order to open geographic areas to capital. For a capitalist empire, there can be no greater incentive than ensuring free flows of capital and investment throughout the world. It therefore seems reasonable to consider the territorial and capital logics of power as distinct, yet perhaps not in conflict. Harvey provides no compelling answer to this critique, namely, that it is in fact quite difficult to imagine a circumstance where the interests of capital directly run up against the interests of state authority and power. The state, by its very definition, provides the security and guarantees capital requires to move across the globe, "as the capitalist class can normally be counted on to view any overseas threat to 'its' state as a threat to itself."<sup>37</sup> When capital needs a profitable outlet for its returns, it turns to the state to crack open

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<sup>36</sup> Anthony Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism a Critical Survey*, pg. 67

<sup>37</sup> Robert Brenner. "What Is, and What Is Not, Imperialism." *Historical Materialism*

new markets. State interest in territory is not running against the imperatives of capital, it's fueling their spread.

Pressure from surplus capital, which seeks to continuously expand, forms the core of Harvey's (and many others') explanations of the root logic of imperialism. This continually expanding capital must find a spatial solution. "Spatial location always confers a certain monopolistic advantage. Private property in land entails at its very basis a certain monopolistic power: no one can place their factory where my factory is already located. And if very special advantages attach to my location, then those advantages belong to me alone."<sup>38</sup> While Harvey uses the example of a factory, the bond between monopoly and land applies equally to agricultural endeavors, and land rights writ large. The rise in monopoly and oligopoly in key sectors of the economy is particularly felt in the core countries of the global north, and capitalists and firms use spatial strategies to expand and protect their various holdings. This situation creates tension and crises, compelling capital to look outward for new paths of investment, and new spaces to grow influence. Thus, the link between oligopolistic competition and imperialism seems obvious: capital will use the state to open new markets to investment, and secure their holdings abroad, using military force when needed. "The tendency towards spatial dynamism given by the competitive search for profits is countered by the bundling together of monopoly powers in space. It is from exactly such centers that imperialist practices and calls for an imperial presence in the world typically emanate."<sup>39</sup> While calls for an imperial presence rarely involve a direct

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<sup>38</sup> Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, p. 96

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 97

invocation of the logic of capital, they do often mention ‘security,’ which invariably implies a security for capital investment.

Giovanni Arrighi reveals the extent to which these crises of over accumulation took place in Britain specifically, following the banking boom of the late nineteenth century. “As the boom intensified competition and curtailed profits in the commodity trades, this expanded and centrally controlled network could be turned into a powerful conveyor belt that pulled ‘idle’ capital into the City of London only to send it out again. This idle capital was pulled in not only from Britain, where it was accumulating very fast, but from all over Europe.”<sup>40</sup> This accumulated wealth, to follow Harvey’s logic, was now looking for an outlet. Just before World War One, British capital exports spiked sharply. As shown in Arrighi’s own examination of British capital exports (Figure 3), there was now a dire need to find outlets for this capital:

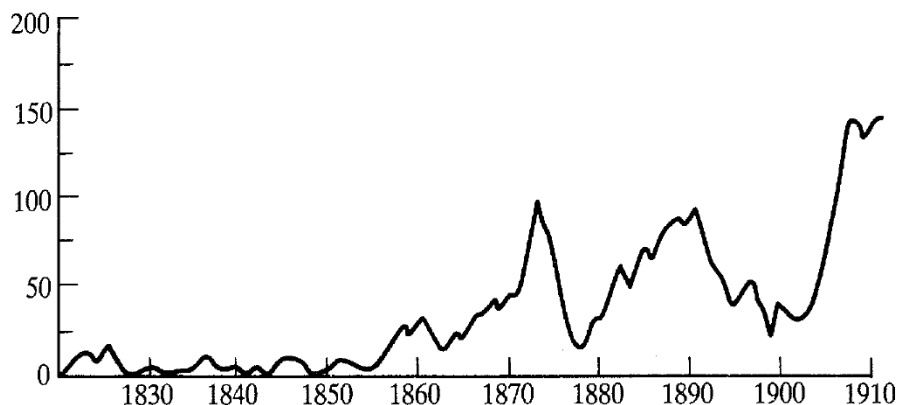


Figure 3

### British Capital Exports, 1820–1915 (millions of pounds sterling)

Arrighi, Giovanni. *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times*. Verso, 2010.

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<sup>40</sup> Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, p. 168

There are certainly times at which this desire for capital expansion/surplus absorption is expressed directly. In a 1918 address to the United States Congress (aptly titled, *In Support of an American Empire*) Indiana senator Albert J. Beveridge proclaimed, “More and more Europe will manufacture the most it needs, secure from its colonies the most it consumes. Where shall we turn for consumers of our surplus? Geography answers the question.”<sup>41</sup> Beveridge is imagining the spatio-temporal fix decades before Harvey is even born. Beveridge was referring to the American occupation of the Philippines, and arguing in favor of defending and expanding their colonial holdings. While Harvey and Beveridge both focus on surplus capital seeking profitable investment abroad as the animating force of imperialism, it is equally important to examine just how this capital moves across geographic space. One of the important avenues for capital transfer is free trade, giving rise to a new economic imperialism.

Within this imperial logic, the need for direct colonies lessens. Harry Magdoff correctly points out that while colonialism certainly predates imperialism, it is imperialism that has continued into the modern era. This shift indicates that for some reason, the model of ‘metropolitan colonial center and peripheral colony’ was largely abandoned, in favor of the ‘new imperialism.’ While of course the core-periphery dynamic did not fade, in fact it was perhaps strengthened, the direct control of colonies in an explicit manner has largely faded followed successive waves of revolutionary decolonization. Several changes signify this change, and the techniques employed (in

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<sup>41</sup> Albert J. Beveridge, “In Support of an American Empire,” *Congressional Record*, 1/9/1900

addition to those discussed above) mirror them, two of the most important are identified by Magdoff:

- (b) Manipulation and support of the local ruling groups with a view to keeping the special influence of the metropolitan centers and to preventing internal social revolution. Included here, in addition to CIA-type operations, are military assistance, training the officer corps, and economic aid for roads, airports and the like needed by the local military.
- (c) Establishing influence and control over the direction of economic development and, as much as possible, over government decisions affecting the allocation of resources. Under this heading fall bilateral economic aid arrangements and the policies and practices of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These activities, in addition to influencing the direction of economic development, tend to intensify the financial dependence of aid recipients on the metropolitan money markets.<sup>42</sup>

Point (c) leads to the discussion of one of the central features of modern imperialism, the dynamics of ‘free trade.’ While many, including Harvey and Roy (whose quote appears at the beginning of this chapter) consider free trade imperialism to be a fairly new development, this may not be the case. John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson argue that free trade has always been an integral element of imperialism. They also take umbrage with the idea that imperialism is a product, or stage, of capitalism. Rather, they argue that imperialism has always been central to capitalism, the two working in tandem. Far from being an invention of the United States, WTO, and World Bank regime, they identify the way free trade imperialism worked under the British:

But perhaps the most common political technique of British expansion was the treaty of free trade and friendship made with or imposed upon a weaker state. The treaties with Persia of 1836 and 1857, the Turkish treaties of 1838 and 1861, the Japanese treaty of 1858, the favours

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<sup>42</sup> Harry Magdoff, *Imperialism: From the Colonial Age to the Present*, p. 168

extracted from Zanzibar, Siam and Morocco, the hundreds of anti-slavery treaties signed with crosses by African chiefs-all these treaties enabled the British government to carry forward trade with these regions...The dependence of the commercial thrust upon the political arm resulted in a general tendency for British trade to follow the invisible flag of informal empire.<sup>43</sup>

This mode of imperialism has the benefits of being both inexpensive and subtle. It can also economically tether an indigenous collaborating class to the core country's imperial project. This dependence can also, if successful, lessen costs, as it can enable the core country to deploy a paltry number of soldiers to control the territory.

This was not, however, an anomaly. Analogous processes have taken place, and had dire consequences for various indigenous populations, across the globe. North America's experience of settler colonialism is strikingly similar to Palestine's. Each empire had difficulties finding collaborators, and thus fabricated collaborators in the form of settlers (much to the dismay of the indigenous population). This dynamic was bitterly felt from modern Mexico, to colonial 'New England.'

Following the Mexican revolution, the revolutionary government enacted wide sweeping land reforms to protect their indigenous population. President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, elected in 1988 (who fled the country for his role in assassinating political rivals) reworked the land system, and, practically speaking, plagiarized land managers C.F. Strickland and Ernest Dowson (both of whom will be examined later) in Palestine. Harvey, albeit briefly, mentions land tenure's link to imperialism via the Mexican context:

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<sup>43</sup> John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *The Economic History Review*, pp. 11-12



The 1917 Constitution from the Mexican revolution protected the legal rights of indigenous peoples and enshrined those rights in the ejido system, which allowed land to be collectively held and used. In 1991 the Salinas government passed a reform law that both permitted and encouraged privatization of the ejido lands. Since the ejido provided the basis for collective security among indigenous groups, the government was, in effect, divesting itself of its responsibilities to maintain the basis for that security.<sup>44</sup>

The Mexican ejido lands seem a proper stand in for the musha'a of British Palestine. Targeted by the British, and Ottomans before them, the musha'a would, like the ejido, be broken up into smaller parcels and enter the private market. Just as these reforms spurred peasant revolt in Palestine, the Zapatistas would rebel in similar fashion in Mexico. This dynamic was not new to the Americas, however, having haunted the continent since the onset of the European encounter.

One of the best examples of accumulation by dispossession in the Native American context comes from my home state, Rhode Island (on public documents, to this day, 'The State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations') in the United States. At the time of dispossession it was of course not a state, but a British colony. The largest indigenous tribe of Rhode Island, and thus the primary target for settler land acquisition, was the Narragansett tribe. Prior to the arrival of European colonialists, the Narragansett population was reported to be as high as 40,000, however, today, or as of a survey in 2000, there are less than 2,000 members of the tribe.<sup>45</sup> How, exactly, did this genocide and replacement come to pass? While outright violence and disease are responsible for the bulk of actual deaths (much as the Nakba in the Palestinian context

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<sup>44</sup> Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, p. 160

<sup>45</sup> Robert Geake, *A History of the Narragansett Tribe of Rhode Island: Keepers of the Bay*, p. 6

is largely responsible for the displacement of the Palestinians), the focus on these singular events or practices elides the role that land tenure plays even in the colonial Americas.

Michael Warren Murphy, of the Sociology Department at Rhode Island's Brown University, in his work *"No Beggars amongst Them": Primitive Accumulation, Settler Colonialism, and the Dispossession of Narragansett Indian Land*, illustrates the patterns of accumulation in post-Columbian America. He focuses on the term 'primitive accumulation' following Marx: "The processes of dispossession that characterize settler colonialism are at the same time processes of primitive accumulation in the sense that the dismantling of indigenous sovereignties and relationships to land form the basis upon which white European capitalist accumulation are built. There would be no American industrial revolution, for instance, without the acquisition of American Indian lands and resources necessary for capitalist production."<sup>46</sup>

As in Palestine, debt proved to be a key factor in making the native population willing to sell their land. Also reminiscent of the British colonial officials in Palestine, colonial courts in Rhode Island described native inhabitants in decidedly paternalistic terms in an 1718 act designed to protect the natives from predatory lenders/debt:

Whereas, several persons in this colony out of wicked, covetous and greedy designs, often draw Indians into their debt, and take advantage of their inordinate love of rum, and other strong liquors, by selling the same to them, or otherwise to take advantages, by selling them other goods, at extravagant rates, upon trust, whereby said Indians have been impoverished, to the dishonor of the government.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Michael Murphy, "No Beggars Amongst Them," *Humanity & Society*, p. 6

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 13

Like the Palestinians, or Arabs in British parlance, the Narragansett were vulnerable to falling into debt. The colonial government of Rhode Island appears to recognize this as problematic, as the Mandate government in Palestine.

Native debt, similarly to Palestinian rural debt, forced the indebted to sell land to the colonialists in order to become financially solvent. Like the Mandate authorities, colonial officials in Rhode Island believed it was a problematic dynamic. Murphy makes an argument here, regarding land and debt, similar to a following discussion on Palestinian rural debt:

Debt, then, served as a means of severing the Narragansett from their lands by making slaves out of members of the tribe on the hand, and on the other, by forcing them to sell their land to settle accounts. Settlers established their own political economy on the land carved out of Narragansett territory. With this new political economy, based upon private property and market relations, the Narragansett had little choice but to exchange land and labor in order to survive. Colonists, in turn, created their own sovereign territory on lands acquired through this process of dispossession.<sup>48</sup>

Not only were the natives forced to sell their land to pay off their debts, but the settlers were able to take advantage of this situation and create their own society in the ashes of the Narragansett's destruction.

Though the land management regime in Palestine was far more advanced than that of early colonial America, the colonialists in America still attempted, much like their counterparts in Palestine, to pass measures slowing displacement (the aforementioned act of 1718). Unfortunately, the results were predictable: "The efficacy of such an act can be evaluated based on its ability (or lack thereof) to counter the insurmountable debt that the Narragansett would come to face and the lengths they

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 17

would have to go to get from under it. Despite the colony's seemingly good intentions to protect the remaining destabilized Indian population, the interests of the colonists would rule out any such benevolence."<sup>49</sup> Not only were the British hopelessly trapped between the interests of the settlers and the Empire's desire for stability in Palestine, but they faced the same challenges (and experienced the same failure) in the Americas.

Anne Philips's *Enigma of Colonialism* is relevant here. According to Philips, the, "paradox of colonialism was at its most evident in the British territories, where officials often luxuriated in what seemed anti-capitalist bias, glorying in their self-proclaimed role as guardians of a pre-capitalist order. As Hetherington, among others, has argued, they practised a form of paternalism based on what they believed were the dangers of the modern economy [for the natives]."<sup>50</sup> To both the Palestinians and the Narragansett before them, the British practiced a double standard. Their respective countries needed to be developed/industrialized for the Empire, yet they maintained a belief that the indigenous populations were terminally incapable of keeping pace with this 'development.'

These land shifts, regardless of the setting, did not occur in a vacuum, nor did their effects end at the point of 'landlessness.' Landless peasants flocked to the cities, and were swiftly absorbed into the workforce. This dynamic is often referred to as 'proletarianization,' and is a critical element of accumulation by dispossession:

As for the rural economy and society the capitalist development process continued to generate what development economists conceptualized as 'unlimited supplies of surplus labor' for the urban labor market, and what

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 13

<sup>50</sup> Philips, *The Enigma of Colonialism*, p. 3

Marxists viewed similarly as ‘proletarianization’ (the transformation of small-scale impoverished agricultural producers or peasants into an industrial proletariat or working class), with its ‘industrial reserve army’ of proletarianized peasants whose labour is surplus to the requirements of capital.<sup>51</sup>

Palestine also underwent this period of proletarianization. Following the dispossession of the Palestinian peasantry, those who remained in Palestine were incorporated into the working class, though now entirely alienated from their means of production.

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<sup>51</sup> James Petras, editor. *Extractive Imperialism in the Americas: Capitalism's New Frontier* p. 69

## CHAPTER II

### THE BRITISH ENTER PALESTINE: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND IMPERIAL DYNAMICS

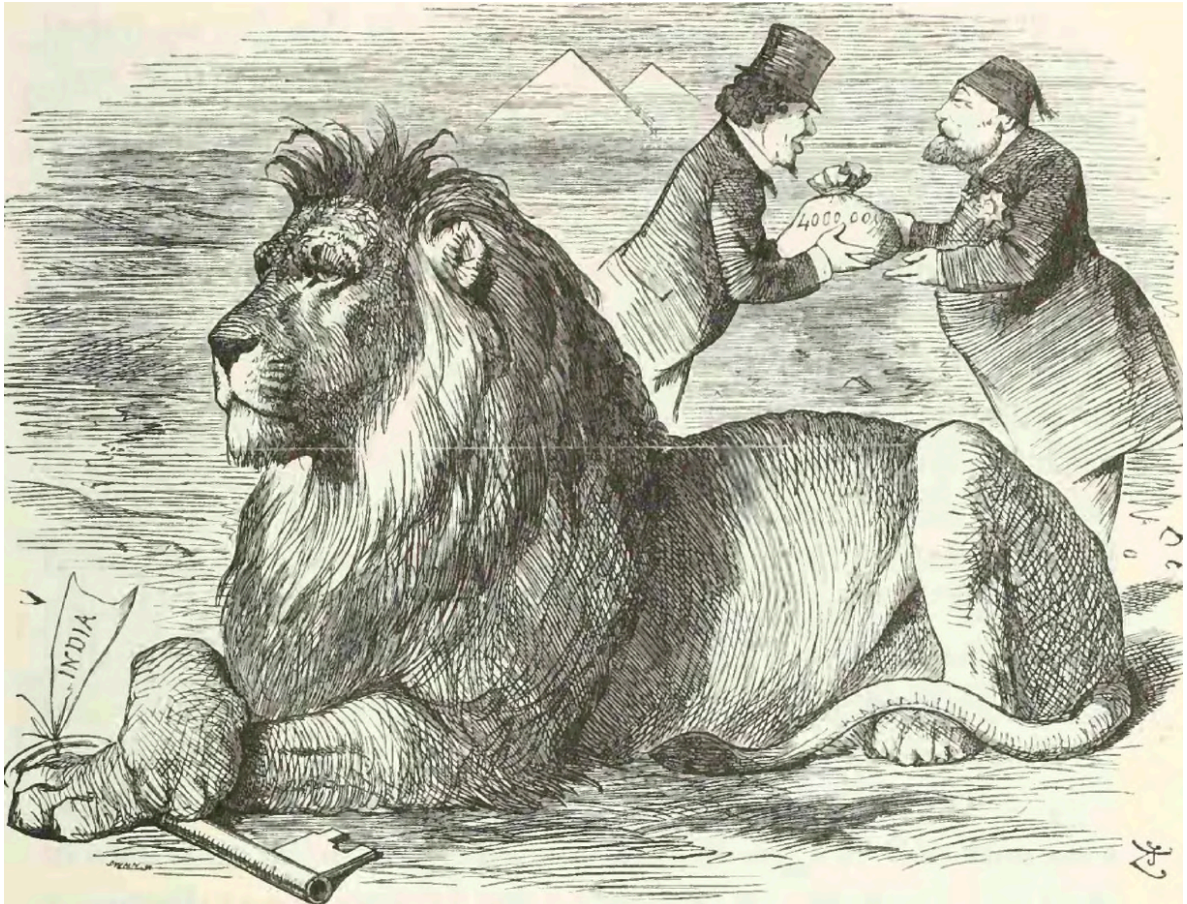


Figure 4: The British Lion occupies the Middle East in order to secure the key to India

L. Carl Brown, *International Politics and the Middle East*, p. 111

There can be no doubt that the Arab has profited largely by the installation of the colonies. Relations between the colonists and their Arab neighbours were excellent. In many cases, when land was bought by the P.I.C.A. [Palestine Jewish Colonization Association] for settlement, they combined with the development of the land for their own settlers similar development for the Arabs who previously occupied the land

Hope-Simpson Report, 1929

We may tell them whatever we like about the innocence of our aims, watering them down and sweetening them with honeyed words to make them palatable, but they know what we want, as well as we know what they do not want. They feel at least the same instinctive jealous love of Palestine, as the old Aztecs felt for ancient Mexico, and their Sioux for their rolling Prairies. To imagine, as our Arabophiles do, that they will voluntarily consent to the realisation of Zionism. In return for the moral and material conveniences which the Jewish colonist brings with him, is a childish notion, which has at bottom a kind of contempt for the Arab people; it means that they despise the Arab race, which they regard as a corrupt mob that can be bought and sold, and are willing to give up their fatherland for a good railway system.

*The Iron Wall (We and the Arabs) - Ze'ev Jabotinsky, 1923*

### **A. British Imperial Interest in Palestine and the Balfour Declaration**

The publication of the Balfour Declaration is often seen as the beginning of British support for the Zionist project. The declaration is also seen as a crowning achievement of the Zionist movement, and a symbol of the Empire's commitment to that movement's aspirations. Prime Minister Lloyd George, the titular Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour, and other officials in the British government produced the declaration because were convinced by Zionist arguments, and had deep commitments to establishing Zionist colonization in Palestine based on religious commitments. This narrative clearly obscures British interests, and ignores a long history British involvement in the region: "The British had, for several decades before 1917, been a preeminent colonial power in the Near East, demonstrated most vividly by their invasion and occupation of Egypt in 1882. From the 1890s onward dramatic changes began to take place in the nature of imperialism. Whilst colonization and colonialism would continue to exist, imperialism metamorphosed as a consequence of the rapid

growth of monopoly finance capital.”<sup>52</sup> Palestine was a central focus of British imperial thought long before the publication of the Balfour Declaration.

One of the primary lenses through which the British viewed Palestine was that of India. Their entire ‘Eastern’ strategy was built around ensuring connectivity between London and British possessions in the subcontinent. Thus, the Middle East was not solely a goal in and of itself, but was seen as integral to the sustainability of the empire as a whole:

The true lifeline to India for a seapower such as Britain lay south of Istanbul. The key was Egypt and the Suez Canal. This route and Britain’s position in Egypt were best protected by a strong British stand in the Persian Gulf, Arabia, and the Fertile Crescent. The areas of Ottoman Asia claimed by Britain during the First World War secret negotiations neatly fitted this emerging British strategy of relying on Egypt, Arabia, and a continuous belt of territory in the Fertile Crescent.<sup>53</sup>

As a largely naval empire, the British needed to maintain lines of troops and communication through to the Persian Gulf. With a developing series of air fields cropping up across the Middle East, it was also critical for the British Empire to have contiguous territory from Haifa in the Eastern Mediterranean across Jordan, Iraq, Iran, and to India.

The Anglo-Ottoman border dispute of 1892-1906 brought these interests into sharp relief. Still left undefined, the Ottoman Empire and British Egypt disagreed about the exact location of the border between Egypt and Syria. Terse diplomatic communiqués were exchanged, and, eventually, the British fleet was underway to Istanbul. The Sultan bowed to pressure from London, withdrawing his forces from the

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<sup>52</sup> Bernard Regan, *The Balfour Declaration: Empire, the Mandate and Resistance in Palestine*, p. 1

<sup>53</sup> Carl Brown, *International Politics and the Middle East*, pp. (110-111)



canal border to the Rafa-Aqaba line. Britain had thoroughly proven its commitment to defending not only the Suez, but the surrounding areas as well. The empire had also gained several thousand square miles of territory, and the recognition of a permanent border with the defeated Ottomans.<sup>54</sup>

Mark Sykes, the Conservative MP, ‘traveller,’ and Middle Eastern diplomatic advisor, was, as would be expected, a key figure in advancing British interests in the Middle East. Towards the beginning of the First World War, in a closed door meeting in 1915, Sykes made his case to the four men who had the most say in the matter: H. H. Asquith, then Prime Minister, Lloyd George, Minister for Munitions (and future prime minister), Arthur Balfour, former prime minister, and Kitchner, the Secretary of War. The men discussed what advantages the Empire could seek in the event the Ottoman Empire collapsed. In a cinematic moment, “Sykes sliced his finger across the map that lay before them on the table. ‘I should like to draw a line from the “e” in Acre to the last “k” in Kirkuk,’ he said.”<sup>55</sup>

Sykes’s line “from ‘e’ to ‘k’” was amenable to Georges Picot (Sykes’s French counterpart). The line, shown on the map of the agreement, divided the French and British zones of control. These zones would eventually become the Mandates (discussed below). There is, however, an important exception, and it is notable in the map above. As agreed by the British and French governments, Palestine would remain an international zone. Neither empire would be able to claim that territory for themselves. This provided yet another key incentive for British support of Zionism. The British

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<sup>54</sup> John Burman, “British Strategic Interests versus Ottoman Sovereign Rights” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*

<sup>55</sup> James Bar, *A Line in the Sand*, p. 25

could, potentially, gain a foothold in an area that is off limits. If Zionist immigration could be allowed, or even encouraged, the Jewish settlers would assuredly be grateful to Britain. This of course eventually came to pass. The British were able to use Zionism to effectively ‘de-internationalize’ Palestine, set up a colony, and secure Haifa, Acre, Jerusalem, and all historic Palestine within their sphere of influence.

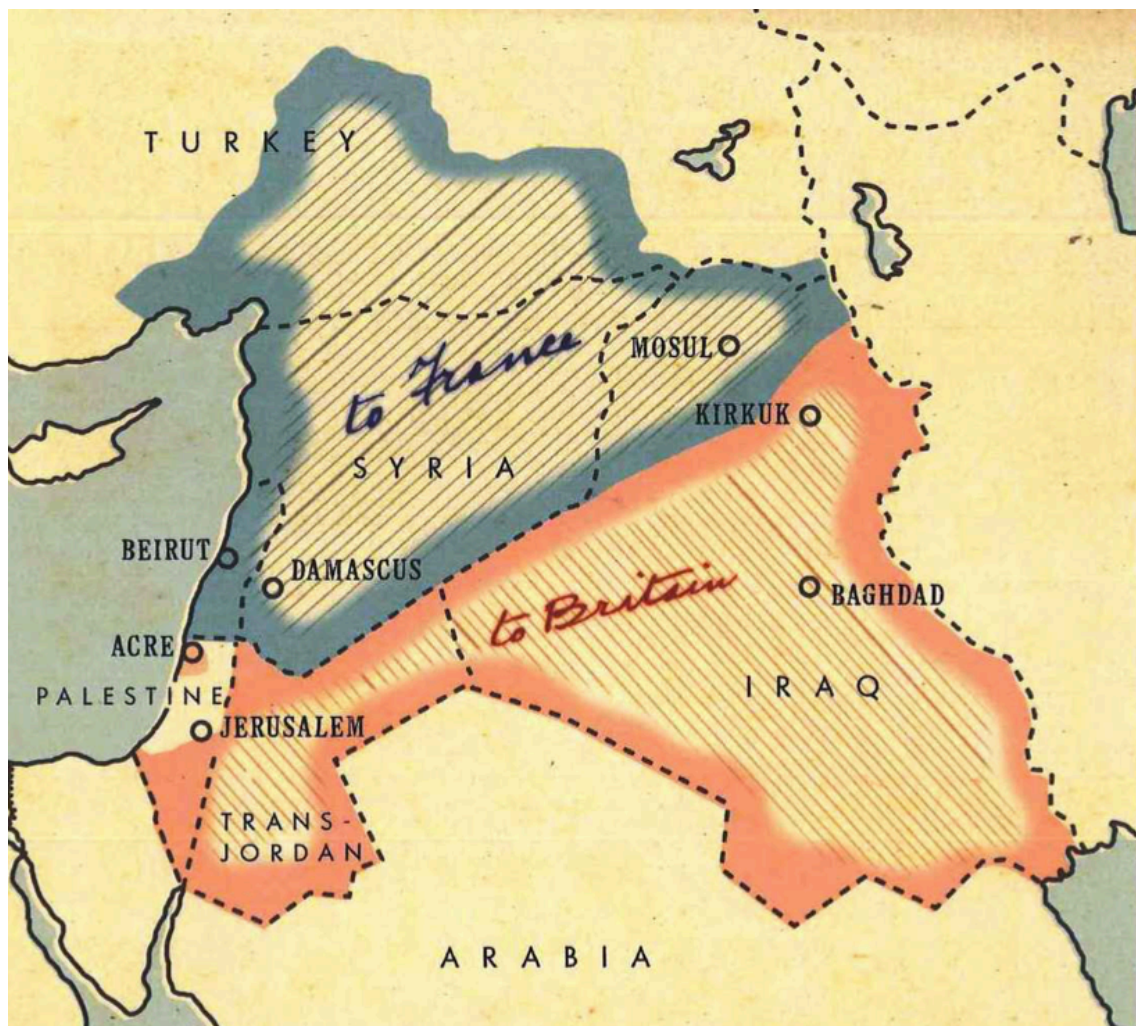


Figure 5: The Sykes Picot Agreement

Barr, James. *A Line in the Sand: Britain, France, and the Struggle That Shaped the Middle East*. Simon & Schuster, 2011.

In a report filed in 1915, Mark Sykes made the argument that Palestine was critical to British interests, “For two fundamental reasons: first, Britain needed the

intervening area between the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia chiefly for convenient communication with the Persian Gulf and...to bring military reinforcements with all speed from England [should the need arise]; second, the British ‘could scarcely tolerate’—to quote the report—that the French should have the border of their sphere of interest along the canal.”<sup>56</sup> Clear British interest in controlling Palestine thus begins to percolate with scarcely a mention of Zionism, the Zionist Organization, or Chaim Weizmann, its chair and chief lobbyist.

L.S. Amery, a member of the Conservative party in British parliament, in his memorandum of May 20, 1917 makes an explicitly territorial case for British involvement in Palestine: “Even if we retain East Africa the position will be extremely serious unless Palestine can be secured. For without control of Palestine it will be impossible either to secure eventual railway communication between Egypt and Mesopotamia, or to prevent a Turkish reoccupation or reabsorption of Arabia...The collapse of Russia has, in fact, made Palestine, of all the issues left undecided by the war, one of the most vital for the whole future of the British Empire.”<sup>57</sup> The importance of Palestine cannot be overstated, and it loomed large in the British imperial imagination. The path through which England would acquire Palestine was to be Jewish immigration.

Even Anthony Cooper, known as Lord Shaftesbury, and a Tory MP, saw imperial interest in Palestine. Lord Shaftesbury was a millennialist Christian who believed in the eminent second coming of Jesus Christ. Thus, from a biblical perspective, it was

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<sup>56</sup> Mayir Vereté, “The Balfour Declaration and its Makers,” *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* p, 52

<sup>57</sup> CAB 24/14, British National Archives

imperative to resettle the Jews to Palestine (fulfilling the biblical prophecy). While he was certainly religiously interested in returning the Jews to Palestine, in 1876 he made an explicitly imperial case for following such a policy:

Is there no other destiny for Palestine but to remain desolate or to become the appendage of an ambitious foreign power? The country wants capital and population. The Jews can give it both. And has not England a special interest in promoting such a restoration? It would be a blow to England if either of her rivals should get hold of Syria. She must preserve Syria for herself. Does not policy then — if that were all — exhort England to foster the nationality of the Jews and aid them, as opportunity may offer, to return as a leaving power to their old country? England is the great trading and maritime power of the world. To England, then, naturally belongs the role of favoring the settlement of the Jews in Palestine.<sup>58</sup>

Though Lord Shaftesbury seems to have been personally animated by religious considerations, the language he chooses to deploy to this end is revealing. The imperial pull towards Palestine must have been strong indeed if even a fundamentalist such as Shaftesbury feel compelled to adopt their language.

The traditional narrative (of Zionist/religious motivations driving British interest in Palestine) is also derailed by the fact that though Arthur Balfour bestowed his name upon the Balfour Declaration, that is very nearly the end of his involvement. Balfour did not sit on the actual committee who decided to make this statement, and then authored the declaration itself: “In consultation with sympathetic officials such as Mark Sykes and Ronald Graham, Weizmann and Sokolow [the latter two of the World Zionist Organization] worked out a method of approach. They and their colleagues would compose a Zionist statement. When it was ready, Lord Rothschild would send it to the foreign secretary, Arthur Balfour. The latter would present it to the War Cabinet for

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<sup>58</sup> Lorenzo Kamel, *Imperial Perceptions of Palestine*, p. 10

approval.”<sup>59</sup> As members of the World Zionist Organization worked on drafting the language of the declaration, they were in close conversation with Ronald Graham, of the Eastern Department of the Foreign Secretary, and Mark Sykes, the diplomat who, along with his French counterpart, negotiated the famed Sykes-Picot Agreement.

Further complicating the view of Zionism, of the Jews of Europe, being the impetus for Britain’s ultimate pro-Zionist policy was the opposition of a great many British Jews. One of the foremost of these opponents was the Secretary of State for India, Edwin Samuel Montagu. He worried that not only was the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine not supported by British Jewry, but that it was a type of extended pogrom: “Anti-Zionism is a belief held by at least half the Jews of this country...the French are anxious to establish Jews anywhere if only to have an excuse for getting rid of them.”<sup>60</sup> While Montagu is specifically targeting the French in this statement, he also believed this was the case amongst the declaration’s Protestant British supporters. While Lord Shaftesbury may have used the prophesied return of the Jews to Palestine to further his cause, the prophecy has a far darker side. The Jews, in this imagining, do not return to Israel for peace, prosperity, or even imperial profit. Instead, the Jews return to either their full conversion, or partial slaughter. This is based off of an evangelical interpretation of Zechariah 13:8, “And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be

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<sup>59</sup> Jonathan Schneer. “The Balfour Declaration.” p. 525

<sup>60</sup> Bernard Regan, *The Balfour Declaration: Empire, the Mandate and Resistance in Palestine*, pp. 59-61

left therein.”<sup>61</sup> That the biblical prophecy, as the British evangelicals understood it, would require the death of two-thirds of the enthusiastic Zionist immigrants.

While there were certainly, as shown above, religious justifications for British interest in Palestine, they worked in tandem with, and ultimately seem outshined by, imperial logics. Palestine was important for the British on at the very least three fronts: as a connection to India, a port (Haifa) in the Eastern Mediterranean, and a guarantor of the security of the Suez Canal. Therefore, from the perspective of a British imperialist, one can easily support British control over Palestine while being entirely indifferent to either religious considerations, or Zionist ideology (though it could be, and was, effectively weaponized). Historian Mayir Vereté handily summarizes this dynamic:

the sympathy alone of Balfour and Lloyd George for the Zionist cause would not have convinced the Cabinet to accept the Declaration. And had there been on their part sympathy alone without interests, or (as in the case of Balfour) without an argumentation pointing to material interest, it is nearly certain that the Zionist question would not have been raised by them at all in the Cabinet. Without Britain's interest both in Palestine and in the Zionists, or granting her interest in Palestine but not in the Zionists, it is not difficult to conclude what the Zionist leaders could have achieved at the Peace Conference.<sup>62</sup>

While certainly the Zionist inclinations of members of the British government was relevant to the Balfour Declaration, imperial interest dominated British thought.

Zionism was a convenient way to sell the proposition of British control of Palestine, and garner support, but little more. Sir Ronald Storrs, the self-described “first military governor of Jerusalem since Pontius Pilate,” went as far as to call the goal of supporting

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<sup>61</sup> King James Bible

<sup>62</sup> Mayir Verete, “The Balfour Declaration and its Makers,” *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, p. 64

the Zionists as the creation of, “a little loyal Jewish Ulster” as a bulwark against Arab nationalism.<sup>63</sup>

## **B. The Creation of the Mandate**

Britain’s control of Palestine was formalized with the issuing of a mandate by the League of Nations 1919, with civil administration beginning a year later in 1920. The establishment of a British mandate in Palestine was, in itself, a contradiction. Before examining British policy in Palestine, it is important to understand the intention of the mandate, and the distinction between Palestine and other mandates constructed by the Europeans. European powers took ownership of the territories belonging to governments (such as the Ottoman Empire) which ceased to exist following the First World War. According to the Covenant of the League of Nations, which constructed the Mandate System, they were to provide “tutelage” for lands, “which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world,” in order to secure, “the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilisation.”<sup>64</sup> The Mandate system was meant to foster self-rule, and though the concept was clearly paternalistic, the essential idea was to assist countries in building the necessary institutions of governance. Across the Mandatory System, the British and French constructed parliaments, judiciary systems, and other markers of what most European state-builders of the time would identify as a ‘proper state.’

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<sup>63</sup> Justin Butcher, *Walking to Jerusalem*, p. 5

<sup>64</sup> League of Nations, *Covenant of the League of Nations*, 28 April 1919

The French Mandate in Syria and the Lebanon is a fair example of a standard mandate. The legal instrument creating the mandate makes clear, “This organic law shall be framed in agreement with the native authorities and shall take into account the rights, interests, and wishes of all the population inhabiting the said territory.”<sup>65</sup> The British in Iraq and Jordan followed the same model as the French. The Mandate for Mesopotamia reads very similarly: “This Organic Law shall be framed in consultation with the native authorities, and shall take account of the rights, interests and wishes of all the populations inhabiting the mandated territory.”<sup>66</sup> While this first section represents a nearly verbatim facsimile of the French language, the mandate goes on to describe Mesopotamia’s intended path: “It shall contain provisions designed to facilitate the progressive development of Mesopotamia as an independent State.”<sup>67</sup>

The Palestine Mandate contained similar language, albeit, with one massive caveat. The entire rationale of the mandate system was challenged by the commitment to Jewish settlement found in the Balfour Declaration. The logic of Balfour quite clearly seeped its way into the Palestine mandatory document itself:

The Mandatory shall be responsible for placing the country under such political, administrative and economic conditions as will secure the establishment of the Jewish national home, as laid down in the preamble, and the development of self-governing institutions, and also for safeguarding the civil and religious rights of all the inhabitants of Palestine, irrespective of race and religion...An appropriate Jewish agency shall be recognised as a public body for the purpose of advising and co-operating with the Administration of Palestine in such economic, social and other matters as may affect the establishment of the Jewish national home and the interests of the Jewish population in Palestine,

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<sup>65</sup> “French Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon.” *The American Journal of International Law*.

<sup>66</sup> “The Final Draft of the Mandate for Mesopotamia” 3 Sep 1921, *The Spectator Archive*.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*



and, subject always to the control of the Administration to assist and take part in the development of the country. The Zionist organization, so long as its organization and constitution are in the opinion of the Mandatory appropriate, shall be recognised as such agency. It shall take steps in consultation with His Britannic Majesty's Government to secure the co-operation of all Jews who are willing to assist in the establishment of the Jewish national home.<sup>68</sup>

The mandate attempts to guarantee the ‘civil and religious rights’ of the native Palestinian population. Conspicuously missing from this are political rights. Also absent is the construction of institutions or modes of governance. The British also empowered the Jewish Agency within the mandatory framework. While the stated intention of the mandate system was to prepare former Ottoman provinces for statehood, this was never the case in Palestine. Rather, the British authorities are recognizing one set of (Jewish) institutions and disregarding the Palestinians, for whom they intend to provide nothing. Thus begins a theme of parallel yet uneven development. This dynamic is felt particularly powerfully within the realm of land tenure and peasant/tenant rights.

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<sup>68</sup> The Avalon Project : Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy. *The Palestine Mandate*.

### C. Geographic Contours of the British Mandate

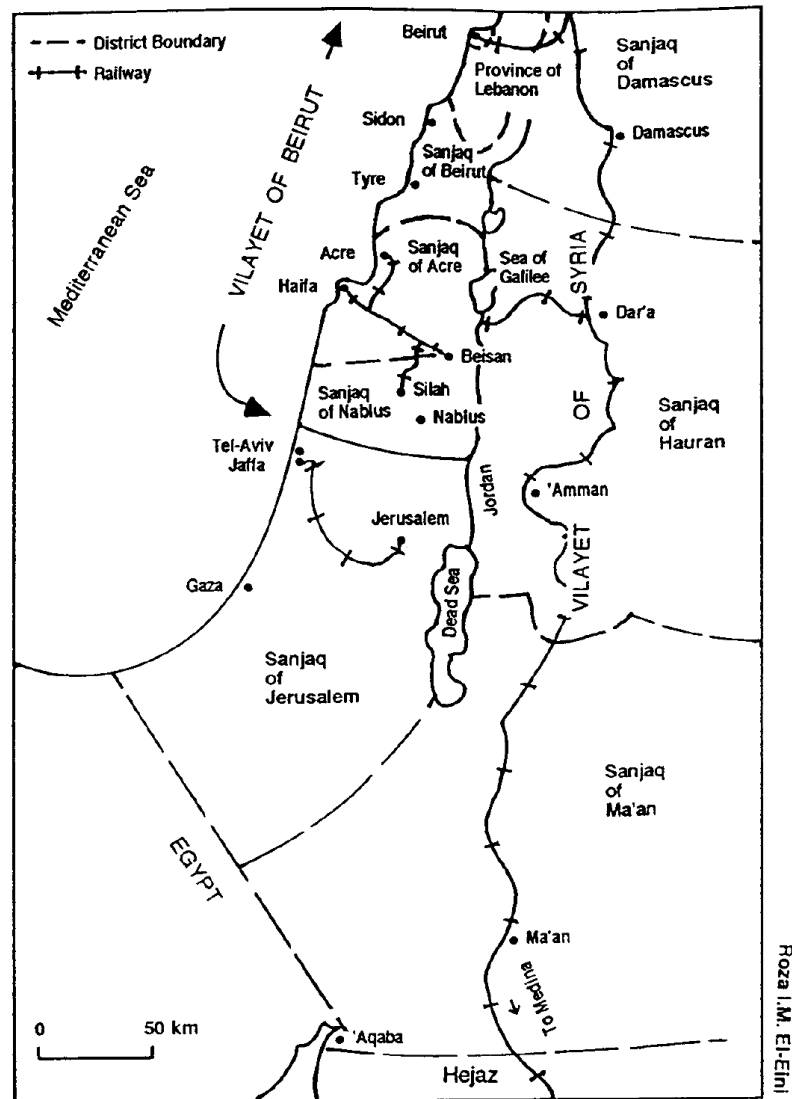


Figure 6: The Division of Ottoman Palestine

El-Eini, Roza. *Mandated Landscape: British Imperial Rule in Palestine, 1929-1948*. Routledge, 2015.

“There are few countries in the world in which surveying and mapping played so much important role in its history. Palestine, the Holy Land, was long coveted by foreigners, primarily the Crusades and European colonists. They wanted to know its physical and historical characteristics as a prelude to conquering the land.”<sup>69</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Salman Abu Sitta, *Atlas of Palestine*, p. 25

Before moving to the specificities of the colonization, or British administration, of Palestine it is important to briefly describe the physical and political geography of Palestine (much as those who conquered the land strived to do). For such a small area, Palestine is incredibly diverse geographically. In his authoritative *Atlas of Palestine*, Salman Abu-Sitta breaks the country down into seven regions:

1. Maritime Plain: extending north from the Egyptian frontier and terminating at Mount Carmel, just south of Haifa;
2. Coastal Plain of Acre: extending from Carmel north to the promontory of Ras en-Naqura;
3. A Broad Plain Running South-East from Haifa to the Jordan Valley: the western portion of this plain is Marj ibn ‘Amer (Esdraelon). The eastern section is known as the Valley of Baysan (Jezreel);
4. Central Range: comprising the hills of Jerusalem and Nablus. The highest point in this region, Mount Ebal (934 m.), is in Nablus;
5. Hills of Galilee: comprising the whole of the north of Palestine except the narrow plain of Acre and the Jordan Valley. The highest point is on Jebel Jarmaq (1,208 m.), the highest mountain in Palestine. In the same area is Jebel ‘Adathir (1,006 m);
6. Jordan Valley: extending from the Syrian frontier to the Dead Sea. The northern most section is often considered separately as the Huleh basin;
7. District of Beer Sheba: an immense triangle with its apex at the Gulf of Aqaba which contains nearly half the land of Palestine (approximately 12,576 km).<sup>70</sup>

Palestine’s economy in the British interwar period was heavily reliant on agriculture, and had been during the Ottoman period as well. These different geographic regions require vastly different approaches, both from the local cultivators and the state. Their soil differs, the rainfall is inconsistent, and they face vastly different challenges concerning irrigation and cultivation. Palestinians across these regions developed various approaches to harvesting and preparing crops.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, pp. 22-23

During the latter period of the Ottoman Empire, and at the onset of European imperial intervention in Palestine, agriculture became tied to the burgeoning process of globalization: “The subordination of the local economy to the needs of the capitalist world economy paralleled the subjugation of the peasantry. Pacification of the countryside and the onset of landlord-merchant control over agrarian production created a dramatic rise in agricultural exports. As a cash economy gradually developed, peasants were increasingly forced to sell part of their product on the market. Already by the 1870s, Palestine exported significant amounts of wheat, barley, sesame, olive oil, and citrus to Europe and to regional markets.”<sup>71</sup> This subordination did not correspond with a full capitalization of social relations. Strikingly, the pre-capitalist feudal relations of Palestine remained largely intact. While the peasants now worked for capital, within a capitalist world system, the productive relations and ideologies were still tied to local landlords in a feudal manner.<sup>72</sup>

The political divides of Palestine are equally stark. Under Ottoman administration, Palestine was divided into regions known as “sanjuks,” largely centered around the dominant urban centers. These centers remained dominant even as Europeans chipped away at the Ottoman Empire, with Palestine ultimately going to the British. Palestine was largely formed and influenced as an entity by these external forces. Salman Abu Sitta, in the same *Atlas*, gives a moving description of this process:

“The story of Palestine borders is the story of the last colonial project in the world. The first feature of these borders is this: All its boundaries have been determined by foreign powers. With the exception of

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<sup>71</sup> Swedenburg, Ted. “The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry in the Great Revolt.” *Islam, Politics, and Social Movements* p. 174

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p. 176

Palestine-Egypt administrative line agreed to in 1906 between the British-led Egyptian government and the Turkish government ruling greater Syria, before the onset of Zionism and the Israeli invasion of Palestine, all the critical eastern and northern boundaries have been determined by the colonial powers of Britain and France under the strong influence of Zionists. A second feature of these borders is that the natural inhabitants of the border regions, or the hinterland, were never consulted about the dismemberment of their territory. No consideration was given to their rights or interests, except in a very small measure when they agitated and caused difficulties in the execution of border agreements. Needless to say, these borders were designed to serve the interests of the colonial powers. Hence the dissatisfaction and unrest of the population was a secondary consideration to be dealt with by these powers firmly and quickly.”<sup>73</sup>

Sitta’s point that “the dissatisfaction and unrest of the population was a secondary consideration to be dealt with” rings especially true in the case of Britain.

The confluence of Palestine’s geographic, political, and agricultural relevance had attracted several intense waves of European Jewish colonization. Taking advantage of Palestine’s climate and resources, these colonies were primarily agricultural in nature. In the late 1800s, Jewish colonization began in earnest. They settled largely along the coastal plains, and in the Esdraelon Valley. “By 1914, 12,000 Jews lived in such colonies, which produced valuable citrus and wine exports and encompassed over 165,500 acres of land concentrated in the richest agricultural regions. Most estates were purchased from absentee landlords in Beirut [including the prominent Sursock family] who had only recently acquired them.”<sup>74</sup> This not only set the Jewish immigrants against the indigenous Palestinians economically, but was the impetus for the dispossession that was to follow.

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<sup>73</sup> Salman Abu Sitta, *Atlas of Palestine* p. 18

<sup>74</sup> Swedenburg, “The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry in the Great Revolt,” p.177

Beshara Doumani's *Rediscovering Palestine* is helpful in understanding Palestine's structure at the eve of the Ottoman Empire's fall (and thereafter the advent of the British Mandate). Doumani focuses specifically on the city of Nablus, and the Jabal Nablus area. This owing to the commercial and political dominance of Nablus vis-à-vis the Palestinian interior. While the coast may have been the economic key to Palestine, Nablus was surely its connective tissue and local manufacturing hub.

Nablus's agricultural and commercial superiority played a large role in inviting foreign influence in Palestine. Nabulsi merchants so dominated the export market, that they attracted the agents of their own downfall: "Specifically, Nabulsi merchants faced increasingly stiffer competition for access to and control of the rural surplus from three external sources: European traders and their agents working out of the port cities; regional merchants, both in the coastal cities and in such interior urban centers as Damascus, Beirut, Acre, Jaffa, and Jerusalem; and a reinvigorated and intrusive Ottoman state bent on consolidating its control and increasing its revenues."<sup>75</sup> The intrusions of these foreign powers via their merchants (namely Britain in Palestine and Jordan, and France in Lebanon and Syria) would set the stage for the subsequent scramble for the Middle East in the wake of the Ottoman Empire.

Doumani's study of Jabal Nablus is incredibly useful in other respects as well. He reveals the disconnect between official Ottoman (and later British) land law, and the peasantry's understanding of the legal system. This is particularly pronounced where land ownership is concerned. "As far as the peasants who actually farmed these lands were concerned, however, none of these arrangements touched the essential character of

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<sup>75</sup> Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, p. 110

their relationship to the land: they considered it their own...In any case, peasant attitudes in this regard were reinforced over the centuries as each clan and village became identified with particular lands, which they treated as their private property regardless of the changing faces of the tax collectors.”<sup>76</sup>

Additionally, the 1858 land reforms required mass land registration, and while technically peasants could take advantage of, though it would require possibly paying more taxes to the state. This would have afforded them the opportunity to formalize their ownership of the land. Their failure to do so made it all the easier for urban notables to register these properties, take control of the land, and ultimately sell it to Zionist colonists.<sup>77</sup> Doumani argues that the peasantry largely considered even rented state land as their own. Thus, they were surprised to find that Ottoman (and later British) land law did not agree with them on the matter. Preexisting Ottoman land codes, such as the 1858 land reforms, provide the scaffolding for the British’s regime.

#### **D. Key Events, British Reports, and Commissions**

Over the course of their nearly four decade tenure governing Palestine, the British ruminated over how to deal with the division of land between the indigenous Palestinians and Jewish settlers. To this end, they deployed numerous commissions and authored a series of corresponding reports. A cyclical pattern of crisis and report developed. In order to properly engage with British land policy in Palestine, these events and reports must first be briefly laid out. Palestinians were not blind to the

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p. 153

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, pp. 154-55

potential effects of increasing waves of Jewish immigration. There were five of these waves, called aliyahs: “The first two took place before World War I. The third, from 1919 to 1923, was composed of about 30,000 immigrants mainly from Eastern Europe. An additional 50,000 immigrants, primarily from Poland, arrived in the fourth aliyah between 1924 and 1926.”<sup>78</sup>

In the midst of the third aliyah, while the British Mandate was still in its infancy, the first instance of communal violence took place. In April 1920, the Nebi Mousa Riots began. Roberto Mazza makes the case that these riots were planned, and not, as is the common contention, an outbreak of random violence. He argues that these riots were, “clearly over projects, ideas and perceived threats that crossed the boundaries of communalism.”<sup>79</sup> The timing of this violence was far from incidental. New immigrants were pouring into Palestine, and they were not without official backing. The Balfour Declaration had instilled a sense of fear in the Palestinian population, as they were no longer the only claimants to their country. The British would go on to clarify their position throughout their policy papers over the years, which did nothing to reinforce an Arab sense of security.

The British style their policy reports ‘white papers,’ the first major piece on Palestine was christened the Churchill White Paper. This white paper (published in 1922) reconfirmed British commitment to the Balfour Declaration (which was also enshrined within the text of the mandate) but with several important caveats. Namely,

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<sup>78</sup> William Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, p. 254

<sup>79</sup> Roberto Mazza. “Transforming the Holy City: From Communal Clashes to Urban Violence, the Nebi Musa Riots in 1920.” *Urban Violence in the Middle East: Changing Cityscapes in the Transformation from Empire to Nation State*, p. 187



that this immigration could be limited to the ‘absorptive capacity’ of Palestine. This concession was largely in response to the 1921 Jaffa Riots. What originally began as an internecine fight between Jewish political parties expanded to a communal conflict between Arabs and Jews in Jaffa. The Arab population saw the increase in violence as part of a wider attack by the Jewish immigrants on the indigenous Palestinians.

In 1929 another spate of violence broke out, this time centered around the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. Mandate authorities had followed prior Ottoman policy regarding the Wailing Wall, namely, not allowing Jewish immigrants to bring benches or screens for praying at the Wailing Wall (as explicated in the 1928 Statement of Wailing Wall Policy). The conflict came to a head on August 14, 1929, with the Jewish march on the Western (Wailing) Wall. Hundreds marched on the wall, chanting ‘the Wall is ours,’ raising the Jewish national flag, and singing patriotic anthems.<sup>80</sup> The British government empaneled the Shaw Commission to investigate this series of disturbances. The conclusion of this commission, which will be discussed further, was the Hope Simpson Report on Immigration, Land Settlement, and Development.

The 1936-39 Great Revolt in Palestine represented the culmination of these efforts. Just before the revolt, as Adolf Hitler rose in Germany (in 1933), thousands of Jews fled Germany and central Europe. This was the fifth aliyah, and it nearly doubled the size of the Jewish community in Palestine. These immigrants, unlike the waves which preceded them, brought massive amounts of capital from Europe and included a larger number of businessmen.<sup>81</sup> Tens of thousands of Palestinians participated in the

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<sup>80</sup> Tom Segev, “The Nerves of Jerusalem.” *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate*

<sup>81</sup> William Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, p. 255

revolt, and the British had to deploy mass amounts of troops (mostly gathered from India) to put down the uprising. Downing Street was perplexed by the causes of the strife, and at the outset of the struggle, the Peel Commission (or the Palestine Royal Commission) was established to determine the causes of the revolt. These series of crises and reports/commissions, namely Shaw, Hope-Simpson, and Peel, are incredibly revealing of British motivations. Thus, each of these reports will figure largely in the following analysis of British land policy in Palestine.

### CHAPTER III

## BRITISH LAND TENURE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR LAND IN MANDATORY PALESTINE



Figure 7

### ORDER FIRST; OR, THE PROBLEM OF PALESTINE

ARAB. "WHERE DO I COME IN?"

BRITISH TOMMY. "WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT, MATE; BUT THIS IS WHERE I DO."

Shepard, E.H. "Order First; or, The Problem of Palestine." *Inter War Cartoons 1919-1936*, Punch Magazine, 1936.

## **A. The Proper Lens: Viewing Land Tenure in Palestine through Accumulation by Dispossession**

David Harvey includes a wide swath of processes within his description of accumulation by dispossession. Perhaps the most important in the context of British Palestine are, “the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations; the conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights,” and, “the commodification of labor power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption.”<sup>82</sup> British policy in Palestine will therefore be examined with an eye to these dynamics.

Gary Fields’ *Enclosure: Palestinian Landscapes in a Historical Mirror*, makes a similar argument. He does so, however, without reference to David Harvey’s work. Rather, he focuses on a more general process of “enclosure” by which commons and communal fields were captured by capitalist classes or allied landlords. In his view this process originated in the English context and then expanded with Britain imperial mission, eventually so as to include the Palestinians as well as the Native Americans. Fields explains the similarities in the processes of land management in these three cases:

In each case, systems of landholding deriving from custom and imbued with collective rights of use and cooperative forms of management came under attack by modernizers. The latter sought to eradicate those systems and impose a land regime given to the creation of more measurably “legible” spaces on the landscape. English common fields; Amerindian agricultural fields, foraging areas, and hunting and fishing grounds; and Palestinian village lands in *mushā* tenure all embodied systems of landholding with long-standing customary practices and strong collective and cooperative traditions of use rights and governance. In all three cases, modernizers, confronted by these

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<sup>82</sup> David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, p. 145

collectively driven systems of landholding, overturned and replaced them with patterns of landholding deriving from cadastral surveys that established landscapes of ownership on geometrically regularized, measurable plots of ground. In these more rectilinear plots of ground, land emerged with new conditions of exclusion. Under the hegemony of estate owners, white settlers, and Zionists, the cadastral-based system of landholding enabled the creation of exclusionary landscapes in which spaces reserved for private ownership, white ownership, and Jewish ownership were fundamentally similar in their exclusionary character.<sup>83</sup>

One aspect of this quote is certainly worth clarifying. Palestine cannot truly be considered to have been under the “hegemony” of the Zionists until after the 1948 War. As a Mandate of the British Empire, the British were certainly the hegemon. However, his work still proves useful, as the English process of enclosure loomed large in the minds of Marx and Harvey. Just as the British landlords enclosed their own common lands, the common lands of Palestine would also fall prey to this process, to the benefit of the Jewish settlers. Though Fields is not concerned with accumulation in Harvey’s sense, he nevertheless regards land as the critical factor in all three of his cases.

Fields, however, does have one significant failing, which appears at the end of his work. He accurately describes the act of enclosure as an ongoing one in Palestine (which is why my piece ends with a brief overview of Palestinian dispossession following the end of the Mandate, and stretching to the modern period). In his view, English and Native American enclosure, however, “have reached their conclusion.”<sup>84</sup> In the Native American context, this is certainly not the case. Ongoing acts of ‘enclosure’ are certainly occurring on native land (perhaps his failing stems from the common

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<sup>83</sup> Gary Fields, *Enclosure*, pp. 315-16

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, p. 318

misconception that the genocide of the native peoples of the Americas was a total one). Currently, indigenous protestors are having to stand against large oil companies constructing pipelines through their land, and defend what little autonomy still remains across their reservations.

Even in the English case, it is unclear whether processes of enclosure are entirely at an end. The divide of the 'commons' and the 'enclosed' is ever shifting. Harvey's framework, though, works ably in this context. Privatization does not seem an entirely different process than 'enclosure,' yet it is difficult to use Fields' framework to examine it as such. Harvey gives more room than Fields to examine a variety of processes under the umbrella of accumulation by dispossession. Importantly, this includes debt-debtor relationships, which are critical to both the above discussion on the Native American experience, and the below discussion on dispossession in Palestine. Therefore, while Fields presents an excellent narrative of historical patterns of enclosure, Harvey's theory of accumulation by dispossession is more useful in examining dispossession in Palestine.

## **B. Ottoman Inheritors: Origins and Characteristics of The British Land Law Regime**

British land legislation draws extensively from their Ottoman predecessors. It is therefore crucial to understand the ways in which the Ottoman's own land code failed the peasantry, and set the stage for the issues the British would later encounter. In 1858 the Porte enacted a series of dramatic reforms related to land tenure. In 1894 Samuel Bergheim of the Palestine Exploration Fund described the larger contours of Ottoman policy changes in decidedly critical terms:

The Turkish laws which have been introduced within the last few years in Palestine with reference to land tenure, and which are being rigorously enforced, are changing all these ancient laws and customs, much against the will and wish of the people. The lands are divided by an Imperial Commissioner into various portions and given to individual villagers. They receive title-deeds for individual ownership, and each one is at liberty to sell his portion to whomever he pleases, either to a member of the village or to a stranger. The villager then sees his Hak el Muzara'a (right of cultivation) in the land; not as *mulk*, but as *ameeriyeh (miri)*, and subject to taxes as such; the object of the government being to break down the old custom of *musha'a*.<sup>85</sup>

The legal categories of land ownership (including the *mulk* and *miri* mentioned above) are essentially carbon copies of the Ottoman Code of 1858. Though clearly this shift towards individualized, private, land was unpopular amongst the peasantry (Bergheim says as much himself) the British altered very little from the basic land classification scheme. The Mandate government maintained the following five classes of land (the italics being mine), as described in British Judge G.W. Williamson's 1919 'Note on Land Law':

1. *Mulk*, property over which the holder exercises a complete right or ownership, with powers of disposition of will up to one third.
2. *Miri*, property over which the state has a right of ownership but over which a right of usufruct is conferred on private persons. The holder has a right to use the property and enjoy or dispose of its fruits. In practice he has approximately the same rights as the holder of *Mulk*, *except that he cannot dispose of it by will, and is subject to forfeiture in certain circumstances with possible rights of re-purchase.*
3. *Wakf*, mortmain property; land devised for some religious or charitable object. *Wakf* may be either *Mulk* or *Miri*. *Wakf* or *Mulk* is the only true *Wakf*. It is governed by the rules of the Sharia, *and the land law does not apply to it.* *Wakf* or *Miri* exists where the revenues of *Miri* property have been dedicated by the Sultan or by his permission for religious or charitable foundations. The land law concerning *Miri* applies to this form of *Wakf*.

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<sup>85</sup> Lorenzo Kamel, *Imperial Perceptions of Palestine*, p. 63

4. Metrouke. - property which forms part of the Public Domain made over to the *public use* such as the public roads, or pastures which *are used in common* by the inhabitants of the village, etc.
5. Mevat, waste land *owned by the state not possessed by any one*, and not forming part of the lands of the Public Domain.<sup>86</sup>

Of these categories, two in particular attracted the attention of the British, Miri and Wakf land. Mulk land is fairly straight forward, as it is essentially privately owned property. The Miri, however, is land that is technically owned by the state, yet is inhabited by private persons who have a limited right to use the land. The tenants of Miri land cannot pass their land down directly through inheritance, and their land seems far more tenuous. Wakf land is quite the opposite.

These categories of land were not equally common in Palestine, and nor did the British take equal interest in them. Williamson explains, “The greater part of the cultivated land is Miri in the sense that the ultimate proprietary interest is the state; but a cultivating interest is enjoyed by grantees whose right, though assignable and inheritable, is yet less than ownership...If there is no heir entitled to succeed under the Miri law of succession, the land should in principle escheat to the state.”<sup>87</sup> This begins the conflict over state land in Palestine. While mulk, and particularly wakf land, followed straight forward inheritance laws, the vulnerability of miri land to state claims would prove problematic.

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<sup>86</sup> G.W. Williamson, “Note on Land Law.” *Land Legislation in Mandate Palestine*, Bunton, vol. 5

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p. 14, 27



The Palestinian peasantry, however, often had a far different view of their own land than that of Ottoman administrators. The predominant Indigenous Palestinian organization of land was largely under the form of a communal landholding system known as *musha'*. Generally, the term *musha'* refers to a regime of collective land ownership. The Palestinians understood it as a model of joint ownership where, “commonly held land was divided into equal shares, and after a set period all the shares were redistributed among the shareholders (who were sometimes also the landowners, as when a tenant leased another’s shares). In this way, “a person who was allotted a fraction of the *musha'* land...would begin to cultivate lands he had not cultivated in the previous distribution.”<sup>88</sup> The specific characteristics of the *musha'* in Palestine were that each division typically lasted for two years, and was divided by either types of crops (summer vs winter) types of soil, or irrigation level. Thus, crop rotation, highly useful in the Palestinian context, was still possible under this system.

Unlike other forms of land tenure, the *musha'* was not necessarily tabulated by land registries, making it somewhat of an enigma to both the Ottomans (though they lack the cadasters of the British) and the British thereafter. There were several methods of dividing the number of shares in *musha'* that were not land based. *Dhukur'* refers to *musha'* land where the shares are divided by number of males (this could be a total number, or working males). The other predominant type was the *faddan*, which counted shares by productive capacity (meaning by number of plows, animals, or laborers).<sup>89</sup> The communal nature of the *musha'* also allowed the peasantry to resist “avaricious

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<sup>88</sup> Amos Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy Under the Mandate*, p. 262

<sup>89</sup> Ya'akov Firestone, “The Land-Equalizing *Musha'* Village: a Reassessment .” *Ottoman Palestine: 1800-1914: Studies in Economic and Social History*, edited by Gad G. Gilbar, pp. 92-93

sheikhs” and, to a certain extent, Ottoman land registry.<sup>90</sup> This reliance would ultimately make the musha’ a target of both Zionist colonists, and British land managers.

This distinction between the Ottoman land code, and the Palestinians’ own understanding of their land rights, would have dire consequences. The British and Zionists entirely disregarded, or dismantled, indigenous Palestinian modes of land tenure, as they based their view of Palestinian land on the Ottoman’s. At the beginning of their colonization project:

Zionists still described the country as barren and neglected. In *The Jewish State and Altneuland*, [Zionist leader Theodore] Herzl hinted that the work of the Jewish society to ameliorate neglect conferred upon the Jewish community a moral right to those areas where they had improved the ground with their own effort. In this way, despite overwhelming evidence of Palestinian presence, visions of a Jewish landscape in Palestine were able to emerge from a largely improvement-driven notion of rights to land.<sup>91</sup>

This ‘improvement-driven’ notion is indicative of the British’s understanding of land tenure, and highly reminiscent of Holme’s map of Pennsylvania.

From the onset of the British Mandate, Zionists maintained the belief that they would ultimately come into possession of large tracts of state land:

At the Peace Conference the Zionists voiced an ardent interest in acquiring state lands, unoccupied lands, lands of uncertain ownership, and uncultivated lands. The belief that there was easy access to these lands became an integral element in the Zionist land-acquisition plans for the period to 1925. The secretary of the Zionist Commission as early as May 1918 requested that the British set up land commissions in order to determine the extent of jiftlik [the land originally owned by Sultan Abdul Hamid], mudawara, mawaty mahluly and state land. In August 1920, Samuel appointed a land commission with a twofold responsibility: to identify the exact dunam amounts of the above land categories and to

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<sup>90</sup> Amos Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy Under the Mandate*, p. 264

<sup>91</sup> Gary Fields, *Enclosure*, p. 209

recommend means to increase agricultural productivity so that dense settlement of Jews could be encouraged.<sup>92</sup>

While, strictly speaking, Miri land was not completely state owned or ‘state land’ in the most restrictive definition, without heirs, or in other circumstances, this land (which, again, is privately tenanted and maintained) would return to the state. Miri land, therefore, was vulnerable to Zionist colonization. As Miri land made up the bulk of all cultivatable land in Mandatory Palestine, this distinction would prove impactful.

Chaim Weizmann, the chair of the Zionist Organization, took greatest issue with Wakf land (though he also expressed concerns regarding property transfers, which will be discussed in more detail later), from Weizmann’s notes: “Realizing the inconveniences occasioned by the absolute prohibition of all transaction in land, the Zionist Organization appreciates the need of a relaxation of the present restrictions. It also appreciates the intention of His Majesty’s government, as expressed in the proposed Ordinance to prevent indiscriminate dealings in land for speculative purposes. I cannot but view with concern, however, the relaxation of the restrictions regarding the dedication of Wakf and the transfer of property by the way of gift.”<sup>93</sup> Wakf land, as it is a religious dispensation, was far less vulnerable to purchase, state acquisition, or any form of transfer. With Miri land vulnerable via the state, and mulk largely available for purchase barring British restrictions, Wakf land was clearly the most threatening to Zionist aims and colonization.

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<sup>92</sup> Kenneth Stein, *The Land Question in Palestine*, p. 61

<sup>93</sup> Chaim Weizmann, “Draft of 1919 Land Ordinance, with Notes on the Same by Dr. Ch. Weizmann Et. All.” *Land Legislation in Mandate Palestine*, edited by Martin Bunton p. 17

### C. Uneven Development: Growing Inequality Between the Palestinians and the Settlers

The legacy of the 1858 Ottoman Code and the biases of early British Mandatory governance combined to create an ecosystem where Zionist settlement flourished: “The number of Jewish settlements and their agricultural population rose from 19 settlements with 3,000 inhabitants in 1900 to 43 settlements with 7,500 inhabitants in 1914.”<sup>94</sup> This trend only worsened as British rule continued. Zionist land acquisition advanced so quickly in fact that British officials, while they still endorsed the Balfour Declaration, began to worry that this development may jeopardize the potentially volatile situation in their fledgling mandate. These acquisitions did not exist in a vacuum, and the Mandate government began to realize that these land gains represented a zero-sum contest between the Jewish settlers and indigenous Palestinians: “Experience shows that where

Comparison of Holdings of Various Jewish Colonization Companies From Different Sources (The Jewish Agency, Survey of Palestine, and Kenneth Stein’s *The Land Question*)

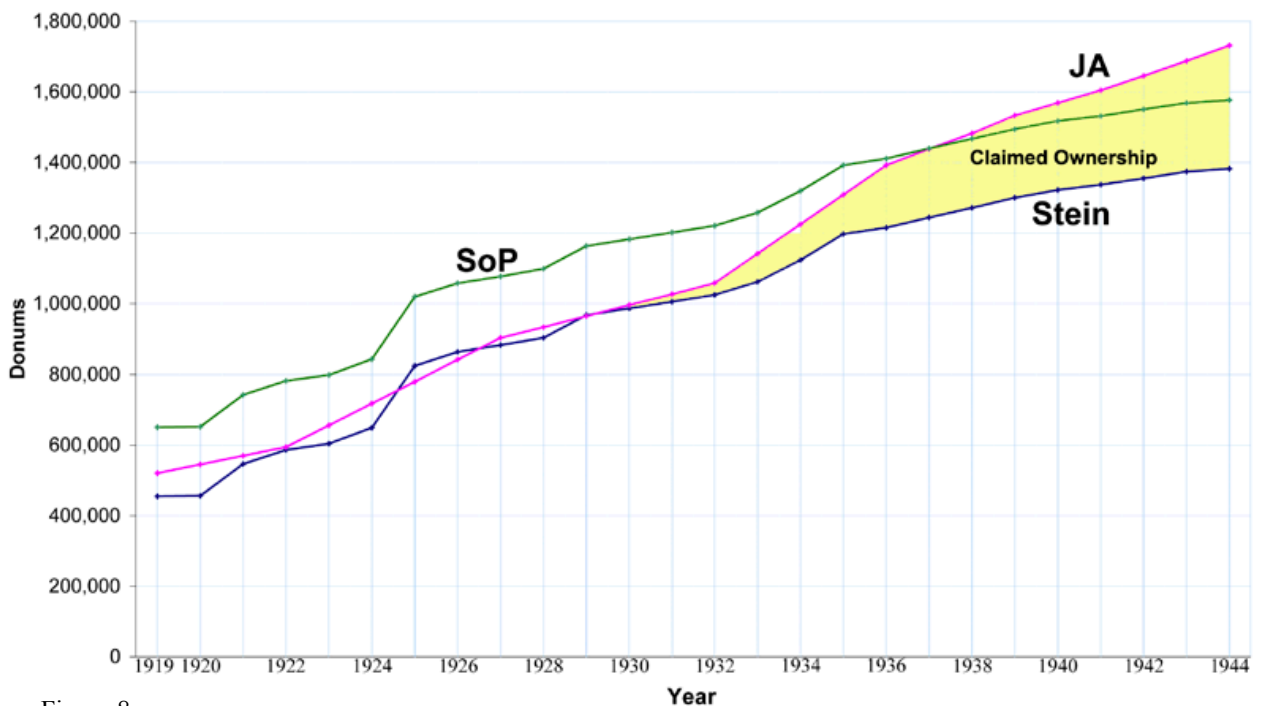


Figure 8  
FIGURE 8. JACOBSON, *Great Britain and Palestine*, p. 27  
 Abu-Sitta, Salman H. *Atlas of Palestine 1948*. Palestine Land Society, 2004.

existing tenants of land were left on the land by the purchaser of the estate, they did not normally stay on the land, but disposed of their rights to the purchaser or contracted out of their rights of receiving land in consideration of money compensation. The tenants, therefore, become liable to eviction without notice.”<sup>95</sup> This eviction surely only worked in the favor of Zionist land settlement, who showed a clear preference for absorbing land already cleared of its inhabitants. The advancement of Zionist land holdings is shown in the graph in Figure 8, which includes three different sources of Jewish land settlement: numbers: the Jewish Agency, the primary colonial force, the Survey of Palestine, representing the British government, and Kenneth Stein’s own calculations.

“In April 1918, in his first report as Britain’s liaison with the Zionist Commission, William Ormsby-Gore [British liaison with the Zionists, and future British representative to the Permanent Mandates Commission] strongly urged the suspension of all purchase and sale of land in Palestine. His primary reason for this action was the growing impoverishment of the local population.”<sup>96</sup> As the Zionist Commission lobbied the British government to extend land purchases, the government’s own representative to the body urged quite the opposite. The Empire was gravely concerned that rapid land transfer could lead to a large landless, dispossessed class, one that could destabilize their system. In an attempt to curb the growth of such a class, and ensure stability in the Palestinian village sector, the British enacted the Land Transfer Ordinance:

The general goals of the Land Transfer Ordinance were identical to those of the proposed 1919 draft: prevent speculation, afford the small owner and tenant protection against eviction, and provide access to a minimum

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<sup>95</sup> Martin Bunton Volume 2, “The Land Law of Palestine, Chapter XV — Protection of Agricultural Tenants,” *Land Legislation in Mandate Palestine*, p. 242

<sup>96</sup> Stein, *The Land Question in Palestine*, p. 39

amount of capital. All transactions had to be made at the Land Registry Department and receive the consent of the administration. Consent to a disposition that included waqf dedication was provided if (i) property value did not exceed a value of £3,000 or 300 Turkish dunams of agricultural land or 30 Turkish dunams of urban land; (2) the person acquiring the property was resident in Palestine (thereby precluding speculation by landowners and land brokers outside of Palestine); and (3) the person acquiring the property intended to cultivate or develop the land immediately.<sup>97</sup>

Norman Bentwich, as Attorney General of Mandatory Palestine, was the highest ranking British legal official in the country during the drafting of the Land Transfer Ordinance (signed by High Commissioner Herbert Samuel in October 1920). Bentwich commented on the proposed draft, and while, “no mention was made of protecting the cultivation or tenancy rights of the fellaheen [farmers]... There were precise area and size restrictions in the proposed draft to enable the fellaheen to acquire minimally required capital.”<sup>98</sup> This clause was promptly deleted from the ordinance, though Bentwich still encouraged minor protections for the fellaheen. The Shaw Commission on “The Land Problem” in 1929 revealed the depth of the failure of the Land Transfer Ordinance, and is worth quoting at length:

The Ordinances of 1920 and 1921 were designed to avert the danger which now appears to be imminent, namely, that large numbers of Arab tenants and cultivators for whom no alternative land is available would be deprived of their holdings. These Ordinances failed to achieve the objects which those who framed them had in view and the Director of Lands offered the following explanation of their failure to do so. When asked as to the number of cases in which the provisions of Section 8 (1) of the 1921 Ordinance had been applied and sufficient land had been retained by tenants over whose heads an estate was being sold, he replied that he did

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, pp. 45-46

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 45

not think that there was any case and that the Ordinance had in fact proved unworkable. This he explained in the following terms:— ‘A vendor would come along and make a contract for sale and purchase with the Jews. We would know nothing of this until 4, 5, or 6 months later when the transaction would come to the office. We then instructed the District Officer to report on the tenants. He would go out to the village and in some cases he would find that the whole population had already evacuated the village. They had taken certain sums of money and had gone, and we could not afford them any protection whatever. In other cases it was found that a large percentage of the population had already gone before the transaction came to us, and we could not find out who the tenants were, they had no written contracts, and we did not know what compensation they were getting and that was a reason for the introduction of the Ordinance of 1929, so that we would be able to supervise their compensation to be settled by an organized body; a Board under the Ordinance. (i.e. the Ordinance of 1921). The Object of this Ordinance/was to retain the cultivator on the land but he had gone immediately the contract of sale and the purchase was made. He was getting a certain sum of money, and away he went, and when the transaction came to us we found no tenants in the village.’<sup>99</sup>

Clearly the British were entirely unwilling or incapable of enforcing their own regulations in regards to land. One of the difficulties that surely sparked this crisis was the desire to allow large landholders to sell their land (fulfilling the Mandate’s promise to the Zionists), while still nominally protecting the rights of the tenants of that land (fulfilling the obligation to the non-Jewish population). Even for a system as advanced as British imperial management, it is quite difficult to imagine a successful attempt to monitor all land transactions and ensure the well being and/or proper remuneration of the former tenants. As the Shaw Commission reveals, the Ordinances appeared to be operating on some form of self reporting. How else could these officials know nothing until ‘4, 5, or 6 months later when the transaction would come to the office’ about these land sales?

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<sup>99</sup> Martin Bunton “‘The Land Problem,’ in ‘Report of the Commission on the Palestine Disturbances of August 1929.’” *Land Legislation in Mandate Palestine*, pp 7-8

The British also provided the Zionists with an early draft of the Land Transfer Ordinance. This ordinance gave the Zionists great hope to access Mandate state lands. Additionally, “no evidence suggest that notables from the Arab community of Palestine were privy to the Draft Land Transfer Ordinance as the Zionists were.”<sup>100</sup> The Zionists had far more information regarding land in Palestine than the British ever possessed during the Mandate period. Decades of furthering their colonial project and buying land in Palestine had enabled the Zionists to build robust institutions and gather data. This data was put at the disposal of the British land agencies, for the predictable price of their continued support of colonization. As the far more able and willing collaborators, the Zionists were able to take advantage even of British policies intended to benefit the Palestinians. This recalls Robinson’s description of the utility of collaborators, connecting the imperial power with, ‘local interests and institutions.’ While the Zionist colonists were not ‘locals’ in the traditional sense, they certainly had more robust institutions which were of greater interest to the British. The next British attempt to benefit the Palestinians was a close examination of the issues of credit and debt.

High Commissioner for Palestine J. Chancellor wrote on the subject of credit and agricultural banking to Lord Passfield, Secretary of State for the Colonies, on January 11, 1930: “The question of establishing an Agricultural Bank in Palestine has been the subject of serious consideration by the successive Secretaries of State and High Commissioners since 1920. It is admitted by all who are acquainted with Palestine that the introduction of Capital is indispensable if Agriculture is to be developed; and that

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p. 43



credit facilities must be given to individual agriculturalists.”<sup>101</sup> This question had indeed loomed large in the minds of the colonial administrators since 1920. The former Ottoman Agricultural Bank was dissolved, obviously following the collapse of the Empire itself, and the peasantry of Palestine was mired in debt.

In her work, *Rural Indebtedness and Agricultural Credit Supplies in Palestine in the 1930s*, Rosa I.M. El-Eini explains the precarious position of the Palestinian Arab cultivator following the First World War. Not only did the war take a heavy toll in and of itself, but it also left the community uniquely vulnerable to Zionist colonization:

The problem of debts owed by the Arab cultivators to moneylenders became particularly acute after the First World War. During the war, the agricultural sector had prospered as food prices escalated because of shortages. Farmers were unable to adapt to the fall in prices at the end of the war, when Palestine's frontiers were opened up to other sources of foodstuffs. The fellaheen then increasingly turned to moneylenders who, partly because of the risk involved, charged usurious rates averaging 30 per cent. The fellaheen, therefore, found themselves back in the grip of the moneylenders. The whole issue of debt became politicized as the fellah sold his land to the Jews to pay off his debts. Because there was no cheap credit available, and land prices were high due to Jewish demand, the heavy indebtedness of the fellah became a major cause for the break up of his landholding.<sup>102</sup>

For the British Mandate government, this situation was untenable. Therefore in addition to the Land Transfer Ordinance, the debate over how, and if, to establish an agricultural bank in Palestine would have to be had.

“The call for the establishment of a mortgage bank was gathering momentum.

The government had been attacked by the Arabs for not replacing the Ottoman

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<sup>101</sup> J. Chancellor, “High Commissioner J. Chancellor to Lord Passfield 1930.” *Land Legislation in Mandate Palestine*, p. 321

<sup>102</sup> Roza El-Eini, “Rural Indebtedness and Agricultural Credit Supplies in Palestine in the 1930s,” *Middle Eastern Studies* p. 1

Agricultural Bank, and complained about this at the Shaw Commission, appointed to investigate the disturbances in Palestine in 1929. The government was accused of of deliberately failing to set up a new bank, and of the resultant lack of credit source choices being one of the means used for driving Arabs off the land and make them sell to the Jews.”<sup>103</sup> The establishment of a replacement agricultural bank by the British was not forthcoming. One of the key opponents of such a bank, and of the very idea of long term agricultural loans to the Arab peasantry (which would have gave them more capital with which to protect their land) was C.F. Strickland of the Indian Civil Services. He authored a lengthy report on the subject, after being brought in as an advisor on issues of land in Palestine.

Strickland’s opposition was colored by his outright antipathy to the Arab rural class, and doubt ultimately about its potential. He explained in his report that, “the difficulty will be the character of the Arab peasant. So long as his outlook on life is hopeless and his attitude towards his fellow villagers is one of suspicion, he will seldom be loyal to a marketing association, and without the intention of loyalty on his part it will be difficult to enforce any marketing contract which he may enter and break... Stability of character is a plant of slow growth, but without it there is no hope of freeing the peasantry from permanently from the debt which he has learned to regard as inevitable.”<sup>104</sup> This reveals not only Strickland’s distrust of the Arab peasant, but that its

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<sup>103</sup> Roza El-Eini, I.m. “The Agricultural Mortgage Bank in Palestine: the Controversy over Its Establishment.” *Middle Eastern Studies* p. 754

<sup>104</sup> C.F. Strickland, “Report by Mr. C.F. Strickland of the Indian Civil Service on the Possibility of Introducing a System of Agricultural Cooperation in Palestine.” *Land Legislation in Mandate Palestine* p. 6

origin is in Orientalist/paternalist conceptions common to imperial managers of local population.

Strickland shifted towards supporting the establishment of Agricultural Cooperation Societies in Palestine, in lieu of an agricultural bank. These 'cooperatives' would, rather than accepting state funds, as the Ottoman Agricultural Bank priorly offered, pool the capital of the farmers themselves, making it available for withdrawal by other local villagers. Strickland's general opinion regarding the Arab farmers is further elucidated in his support for these cooperatives. Strickland's report made the case that, it is essential for the Mandatory government to:

provide him [the Arab fallah] with current resources through a cooperative society (leaving the clearance of his major debt to a later time), to form his character slowly in touch with a society during a term of years, and to train him to watch his expenditure and submit it to the criticism of his fellow members, to be punctual in payment, and to be loyal to his society rather than to those creditors who are the cause of his afflictions. It *must* be realized that it will not be possible to achieve this result through an Agricultural Bank. In almost every village when I asked the fellahin to offer their own solution for their difficulties they replied with a demand for an Agricultural Bank. In many cases I am convinced, and a short cross-examination strengthened me in my opinion, that they have no idea what such a bank is. They were merely repeating the catch-word which they had heard from other people. Whatever be the merits of an Agricultural Bank for long-term loans, it is much less efficient than cooperative credit for the supply of current needs, and it makes no attempt at the building of character.<sup>105</sup>

Strickland was entirely unmoved by popular opposition to his plan, as he, the servant of the Empire, clearly knows best. The economic outcome did not seem to be Strickland's main concern, but rather the development of 'character' and some manner of discipline

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, p. 6-7

amongst the peasantry. He reinforces this point later on, as his work takes a distinctly social, and non-economic, view.

Strickland had a pamphlet produced to explain his societies in both English and Arabic. These were clearly targeted towards the peasantry, in order to generate support for his regimen and explain the details of it. However, while there were the expected societies (Rural Credit Societies, Societies for the Sale of Agricultural Products), there was also another category of ‘Societies for Social and Moral Purposes.’ While the other societies had designated economic goals, the moral and social societies were somewhat more ambiguous. They were established, to quote the pamphlet, “for the restraint of extravagance in marriage and other ceremonies, to prevent unnecessary expenditure in entertaining, to reduce the high rates of dowry required from bridegrooms, to limit unnecessary expenditure on litigation by providing for the settlement of disputes by arbitration, to put an end to such undesirable and harmful practices as the willful destruction of trees and other property as a result of village feuds.”<sup>106</sup>

The pamphlet offers no justification for these measures. While it is conceivable that the limits on expenditure in entertainment and the reductions in dowry could be economically minded, within the context of the greater pamphlet and Strickland’s views of the Arabs (he will later, when discussing the *musha’a*, refer to them as ‘Orientals’), it is apparent these were purely meant to regulate what was viewed as a wayward culture. Much of both Strickland’s thought, and that of other colonial administrators such as Ernest Dowson’s, focussed on ‘rationalizing’ Palestinian agriculture. Dowson was a

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<sup>106</sup> Co-operative Pamphlet 1: The Co-operative Organization of the Arab Population of Palestine.’ Issued by the Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Jerusalem, April 1933, English and Arabic [CO 733/233/6], *Land Legislation in Mandate Palestine* p. 84

former engineer for the Egyptian Delta Light Railways, before moving to the Survey of Egypt, and finally, gaining prominence as a land reform expert in Iraq and Palestine.<sup>107</sup> The goal of both Dowson and Strickland, “appears to have been the transformation of any given ‘native’ agricultural economy into what he perceived to be a healthy agricultural economy...The result would be the replacement of Palestine’s land system with one that was more in line with western concepts that Dowson regarded as evolutionarily superior.”<sup>108</sup>

Dowson’s experience as an imperial manager colored his perceptions of Palestine. “He [Dowson] regarded the intensive cultivation of a capitalist agricultural economy as superior to traditional communal forms of tribal and village landholdings, and western concepts of fixed-private land ownership as superior to communal arrangements based on land-use rights. Accordingly, he reserved harsh criticism for indigenous elements of Palestine’s land system that he regarded as especially inefficient, such as *Musha* land tenure...”<sup>109</sup> The shift to private land ownership was in line with Palestine’s larger integration into the capitalist world system.

This belief in the inferiority of indigenous Arab structures and of the Arabs themselves certainly worked its way into Mandate policy, particularly where this issue of agricultural credit is concerned. British officials do not seem to share this same distrust of the Jewish settlers, and this dichotomy is critical to understanding the uneven development of the two communities. Strickland himself points this out when

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<sup>107</sup> Jeremy Forman, “Settlement of the Title in the Galilee; Dowson's Colonial Guiding Principles.” *Israel Studies*, p. 62

<sup>108</sup>Ibid, p. 63

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p. 62

discussing the cooperative societies. The original idea was to produce collaborative societies that would include both Jews and Arabs of a given region in the society.

Strickland himself discovered the difficulty of this project:

I visited a Jewish society to which Arabs from several surrounding villages have been admitted, and found the Arab members unwilling to consider the idea of separate societies. But I did **not** feel that, whatever the goodwill of the Jewish organizers, the Arab members were regarded as being on a level with the other members of the society, nor was there any hope of the Jewish community admitting into their own society the large number of Arabs who separate societies in each village could embrace.<sup>110</sup>

That any credit based project would be vulnerable to settler influence had long been a fear of the Arab population. This fear accounts for desire to be included in the Jewish credit societies. Unfortunately, the Arabs' desire to be including in the societies was countered by the driving force of Zionism, ultimately denying them any inclusion in either the credit societies, or settler society writ large.

Dowson concurred with Strickland, and this represents a wider trend of western/imperial chauvinism: "As a lifetime servant of British colonial interests, the most prominent principle guiding Dowson's work in Palestine was a solid belief in the superiority of western culture in general, and western concepts of land tenure and land administration in particular. Like many servants of British (and other) colonial interests, Dowson identified a 'civilizing' element in his work, and regarded his efforts as not only serving the colonial government and settlers in question, but the indigenous population as well. In his eyes, it was 'the intention of the British Government and

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<sup>110</sup> C.F. Strickland, "Report by Mr. C.F. Strickland of the Indian Civil Service on the Possibility of Introducing a System of Agricultural Cooperation in Palestine", 1930" *Land Legislation in Mandate Palestine*

people, having set their hand to the plough as mandatories of the civilized world, to establish 'The Land of Three Faiths' as a stable and self-sufficing political entity."<sup>111</sup>

From the onset of their mandatory project, the British were aware of the inherent tensions in 'developing' Palestine, much of which had been inherited from the Ottomans. Anne Philips, in her *The Enigma of Colonialism*, helpfully elucidates the quagmire the British often found themselves in: "Even the limited work-force required by private capital meant recourse to political persuasion, and the colonial states came under frequent pressure from the companies for freedom to operate different systems of labor supply...The commitment to peasant production and communal tenure [this commitment stemming from British desires to maintain stability in West Africa] deprived them [the British] of control over the labour process, and hindered attempts to impose new techniques of production."<sup>112</sup> While in West Africa the British were torn between attempts to capitalize the economy and maintain stability, the struggle was significantly more complicated in Palestine, where the British dealt with a delicate balancing act: they were at once attempting to honor Balfour by facilitating Jewish immigration, and satisfy the Palestinian population so as to ensure order and productivity in their mandate.

This dichotomy is well illustrated by putting the views of the former mayor of Nablus Suleiman Touqan and Dr. Ruppin, considered the chief land agent of the Palestine Zionist Organization, in conversation. Dr. Ruppin insisted that the Zionist acquisition of land has had a negligible effect on the Palestinians. He stated that of all

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<sup>111</sup> Jeremy Forman, "Settlement of the Title in the Galilee; Dowson's Colonial Guiding Principles." *Israel Studies* pp. 62-62

<sup>112</sup> Anne Phillips, *The Enigma of Colonialism*, p. 157

the land purchased by Zionist agencies, “relatively small areas not exceeding in all 10% were acquired from peasants. The other areas have been acquired from the owners of large estates most of whom live outside Palestine.”<sup>113</sup> This may turn out to be the case. However, it is also irrelevant to the Palestinian peasantry, as though the owners of these large estates were the ones selling the land, the small farmers who worked the fields would be dispossessed just the same. The mayor of Nablus, Touqan, gives a far more complete version of the same story:

In the early days the Jews who came worked on his land and employed Arab labour. Since immigration commenced in great numbers these Jewish employers have turned away the Arab laborers and have employed Jews in their place thereby throwing out of work a large number of Arabs.....Great harm has been caused to the country by the sale to Jews of large estates — for instance the Sursock family in Beirut who owned large areas of land in Palestine and the Wadi el Hawareth — and this shows out of employment a large number of Arabs. I understand, as all Arabs understand, that the Zionist policy is to dispose of the Arabs in every possible way and to replace them with Jews.<sup>114</sup>

That the majority of the land acquired by Zionists was acquired via purchasing it from large landowners elides the critical question: did these purchases dispossess the peasantry? Given outspoken British concerns, and the variety of tactics they employed with the aim of preventing the emergence of a landless class, the answer is clearly yes.

#### **D. Zionist Influence on British Land Policy**

The deep involvement of Zionists such as Ruppin with the workings of the British land regime would prove to be a recurring motif. While initially Ruppin

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<sup>113</sup> John Hope Simpson “PALESTINE Report on Immigration, Land Settlement and Development.” *Land Legislation in Mandate Palestine*, edited by Martin Bunton p. 5

<sup>114</sup> Martin Bunton “‘The Land Problem,’ in ‘Report of the Commission on the Palestine Disturbances of August 1929.’” *Land Legislation in Mandate Palestine*, p. 3



maintained that Jewish immigration would pose no serious threat to the Palestinian peasantry, he spoke very differently in private. Ruppin questioned this obvious contradiction in his diary:

Is it impossible to provide the ever-growing number of Jews in Palestine with a field of activity without oppressing the Arabs? I see a particular difficulty in the limited amount of land. Before long, the time will probably come when no vacant ground will be available, and every Jew who settles will cause the removal of a fellah (except in the coastal region, where a fair amount of land suitable for plantations remains).<sup>115</sup>

The official Zionist line on land settlement had always been that it is entirely possible to bring in large amounts of immigrants without displacing the local population (with the exception of the more forthright thinkers such as Jabotinsky). Ruppin, however, was entirely aware that this was impossible as early as 1928 (when his diary was dated).

Not only were prominent Zionists consulted by the mandate government, they were given extensive control over key departments within the mandate. Zionist and British interests aligned neatly where the landlessness problem was concerned. So neatly, in fact, that the British allowed the Jewish Agency to evaluate Palestinian claims of landlessness. Jewish Agency data and judges were employed when determining the veracity of Palestinian claims of landlessness (on a case by case basis). Having attained this advantage, the Jewish Agency quickly went about dismissing a massive number of cases. That, “899 claims (of several thousand submitted) were judged to fit the official definition, was an unvarnished Jewish Agency political victory.”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Charles Anderson, “The British Mandate and the Crisis of Palestinian Landlessness, 1929–1936.” *Middle Eastern Studies* p. 176

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, p. 187

At the behest of the Agency, mandate authorities appointed A.H. Webb, Nablus's former district court judge, as the Development Department's legal officer. The legal officer's responsibilities included evaluating the evidence presented at the hearings in these cases. Webb, however, was far from impartial:

Webb distrusted the peasants with whom he interacted and disregarded statements they made concerning the sizes of their holdings. What's more, he funneled the applications he received directly to the Jewish Agency for vetting, initially without even examining them first himself. With this arrangement in place, Arab claims of dispossession became subject to adjudication by the JA's Legal Department as much as by the Palestine administration and the former was able to winnow the tally down accordingly.<sup>117</sup>

Operating from within the mandate government, the Jewish Agency was able to invalidate Palestinian claims of landlessness. The British expressed a perfunctory concern over Palestinian landlessness, and were thus entirely incapable of admitting the scope of the peasantry's struggles. While various apparatchiks clearly saw the encroaching crisis, suppressing this data enabled the mandate authorities to maintain the illusion that landlessness would not present a problem, an illusion the Zionists (mainly through the Jewish Agency) were also keen on maintaining.

British-Zionist collaboration did not go unnoticed. As ties between the two communities increased, elements of the mandate government predicted that this favorable treatment of the Zionists would have potentially disastrous results. The Air Officer Commanding in Palestine warned that the, "universal depression among Arabs caused by increased sale of lands to Jews ... might be

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, p. 187

converted into active hostilities,” against the British Authorities. The High Commissioner agreed, believing that the “extreme depression of the Arabs as they see more and more of their lands being transferred to Jewish ownership” could prove problematic.<sup>118</sup> Obviously this did ultimately prove problematic, as discussed earlier, laying the groundwork for the Great Revolt in Palestine of 1936-39.

While the British clearly benefited from Zionist colonialism, and viewed the project as an asset to their empire, they were forced to fight a losing battle in protecting peasant rights. Their balancing act to preserve imperial stability while enabling colonization grew ever more tenuous over time. While facilitating immigration, the British also sought to ‘rationalize’ the land regime of what they viewed as an underdeveloped backwater: “If the Mandate system was an experiment in management, economics, and the calculability of basic needs, the case of Palestine shows just how incoherent and ill equipped this experiment was. The attempt to calculate Palestinian economy and make it legible was something British colonial officials did in spite of themselves.”<sup>119</sup>

### **E. The End of Collective Land: Privatizing the Musha’a**

One of the early targets of British enclosure and dispossession (in the form of land tenure reform) was the musha’ system. Ernest Dowson, the architect of British land policy in Palestine, targeted this system specifically. Having spent three days in

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p. 195-196

<sup>119</sup> Sherene Seikaly, *Men of Capital*, p. 100

Palestine, he felt more than capable of making a determination regarding the efficacy of the masha' system: "The periodic re-appointment of village lands, so widely practiced in accordance with the system known as mesha' [musha'] was a most serious handicap on the economic development of the country and the improvement of the position of the peasantry."<sup>120</sup> Further reports echoed this same sentiment, believing the masha' to be entirely incompatible with the British notion of 'development.' Buttressed by several government surveys, the Mandate regime seemed to have a clear path before them: dismantle the masha', and watch the peasantry flourish under a more sound system.

This, of course, did not come to pass. While the British did manage to undo the masha', the effects were not those (allegedly) intended. Communal masha'a land was to be partitioned. C.F. Strickland was again instrumental in the outcome. He advised the Mandate government to dispose of the masha' system: "The allotment of strips [of land, via the masha' system]...is a striking instance of the evil which result from following the wishes of the people." He went on to recommend a, "radical plan of re-allotment" and describe how, "The Land Settlement Ordinance gives the Settlement Officer considerable powers to reject a scheme put forward by the people, if unsatisfactory, and to insist on a better scheme of his own."<sup>121</sup> Strickland here is explicitly countering democratic will, and laying the groundwork for the abolishment of indigenous institutions, namely, the masha'.

British skepticism regarding the masha' even found its way into the Johnson-Crosbie Report. Much of what Dowson and Strickland believed about the system was

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid, p. 268

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p. 269

reproduced nearly word for word. Their greatest fear concerned the reallocation of land. In order to service crop rotation, ownership (or rather, stewardship) of the tracts of land would change every two years and, “Consequently, no one has any inducement to improve his land.... while it remains, it is useless to expect that land will be weeded or fertilised, that trees will be planted, or, in a word, that any development will take place.... no improvements can take place in something like half of the area of the country until the masha' system of tenure is abolished.”<sup>122</sup>

Strickland's radical plan was to break up these communal lands into separate individual plots. The idea here being that individual plots were far easier to manage, and property rights and deeds would be more simple to track. Thus, “the 1928 ordinance explicitly aimed at dissolving the masha'a by assigning title to specific pieces of land in individual ownership.”<sup>123</sup> His entire design was based on an orientalist conception of the Arab people: “Until the Arab has been placed in a position to help himself, he will, undoubtably, being an Oriental, an individual of strong passions and only a few years removed from ‘gun-rule,’ continue to indulge in murder and riot.”<sup>124</sup> Strickland, though he attempted to avoid rioting and bloodshed, led the British precisely to that course. Within the Palestinian community, the elimination of the masha' caused its own share of problems. Within a masha', heirs were guaranteed equal inheritances. The elimination of this system thus resulted in a predictable spike in familial feuds. “Paradoxically, the most significant effect of land settlement was the transfer of lands

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<sup>122</sup> Government of Palestine, *Report: Johnson-Crosbie*, 44-5, 55.

<sup>123</sup> Riyad Mousa, *The Dispossession of the Peasantry*, pp. 137-38

<sup>124</sup> C. F. Strickland, *The Struggle for Land in Palestine*, p. 49

from Arabs to Jews, an unexpected and destructive by-product of the reform. In short, the land-settlement program designed to assist the fellahin economy severely undermined it instead.”<sup>125</sup> This was by far the most pernicious effect of these reforms. Privatizing Palestinian collective land allowed the land to be purchased for Jewish immigrants, leading to greater riots and bloodshed than Strickland, and his fellow officers in the British imperial government, could have imagined.

Jewish land purchases amongst musha’ landlords provides an interesting case. Although musha’ land was held in common, it was still possible for Zionist colonial organizations to buy tracks of land within the collective musha’. The co-owners of the musha’ were, in many cases, unaware that they were in a collective shared with Zionists. This created an unavoidable trap for the British: “In the long run the musha’ was indeed a genuine obstacle to the expansion of Jewish colonization, but in the short run it was not always politically the opportune time to press for the partitioning of a community in which Zionist share purchases stood to be revealed.”<sup>126</sup>

Until recent years, much of the modern literature on land in Palestine and the Middle East more generally took the inefficiency of the musha’ for granted. Was this, however, truly the case? Tenders of musha’ plots regularly improved their lands, as this collectivization of land encouraged community and family solidarity. Obviously, these benefits were invisible to the British imperialists attempting to value the musha’. The benefits of the musha’ are varied:

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<sup>125</sup> Amos Nadan, *The Palestinian Peasant Economy Under the Mandate*, p. 290

<sup>126</sup> Ya’akov Firestone, “The Land-Equalizing Musha’ Village: a Reassessment .” *Ottoman Palestine: 1800-1914: Studies in Economic and Social History*, edited by Gad G. Gilbar, p. 126

“Although fundamentally an economic system of landholding, musha’ tenure was also a cultural system embedded in the communal impulses of agrarian village life...At the core of this village-based communal culture was the extended Palestinian family group or hamula, which provided economic and social support to family members when the need arose. Such needs included the collective building of homes, communal payment of the tax on village lands, and village assistance during the harvest.”<sup>127</sup>

Even economically, there was no discernible difference in the levels of cultivator investment in musha’ and non-musha’ lands. Amos Nadan in his work *Colonial Misunderstanding of an Efficient Peasant Institution: Land Settlement and Musha’ Tenure*, conducted a wide reaching study regarding the investments in both permanently settled, and unsettled (musha’) lands in Mandate Palestine. He concluded that, “new investment was insignificant on both settled and unsettled lands, and that these case studies show no change in the level of investment as between settled and unsettled villages. In sum, the massive investment intended to be brought about by land reform did not occur.”<sup>128</sup> In terms of investment, the critiques of the musha’ could not be more off base. Aside from the question of investment, there are several other important advantages to the musha’ system.

Nadan himself outlines several. Rather than centralizing farmland, maintaining a diffuse musha’ system allows for the spreading of risk across owners, in the event of natural disasters or pillaging. The system was also far more suited to the changing local environment. Summer and winter crops can be allocated efficiently, as a system of crop

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<sup>127</sup> Gary Fields, *Enclosure*, p. 187

<sup>128</sup> Amos Nadan “Colonial Misunderstanding of an Efficient Peasant Institution: Land Settlement and Mushā Tenure in Mandate Palestine, 1921-47.” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, p. 345

rotation is in place.<sup>129</sup> The musha' system was also far more suited to Palestinian social structures, and the impoverished status of the peasantry. Rosemary Sayigh's scholarship on the musha', collected by means of an oral history of the practice from the Palestinian refugees of Lebanon, confirms this point: "Communal tenure and equal inheritance are a way of coping with poverty, in which both resources and poverty are fairly equally distributed throughout a peasantry, which thereby is enabled to stay on the land."<sup>130</sup>

Given the ever present danger of drought and ensuring indebtedness, musha' was therefore critical to the peasantry maintaining not only their livelihoods, but their ability to remain on their land. The British attempts to break down the musha' therefore resulted not only in a less efficient system, but potentially opened the way for the dispossession of countless Palestinian small farmers. In territory that had once been farmed under musha', the Jewish Agency was able to take advantage of the trials of the fellahin and purchase large tracts of land through cooperative landlords, who were also the chief creditors of the fellahin. For a specific example of this dynamic, refer to Appendix I. A secret memorandum by the Secretary of State to the Colonies confirmed this problematic dynamic: "When the Jewish National Fund purchases land, not only the landlord is changed, but the tenants and all the wage-earning labourer class are compelled to move; for the Zionist policy is not only to acquire ownership, but also to ensure that all the work required on the land shall be carried out by Jews only. ... The result is the growth of a body of 'landless' Arabs."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, p. 335

<sup>130</sup> Rosemary Sayigh, *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* p. 33.

<sup>131</sup> PRO/CO/733/290/8, February 1933, Secret, Cabinet, "Policy in Palestine: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies" *Land Legislation in Mandate Palestine*



While the Palestinian peasants were certainly the ones being deprived of land, they were not the ones selling it. According to figures, “provided by none other than Avraham Granott, managing director from 1922-45 and later chairman of the board of the Jewish National Fund and perhaps the pre-eminent Zionist land expert... indicate that 52.6 percent of land sales from 1878-1936 were made by non-Palestinian absentee landlords; another 13.4 percent were made by the government and foreign companies and bodies.”<sup>132</sup> Given the difficulty of acquiring *musha’* land, and the peasants’ own reluctance to sell, the Zionists targeted large absentee landlords. They had two advantages: these landlords were not politically or historically tied to Palestine, and their land was largely registered by the British (and, to some extent, the Ottomans), placing it squarely in the private market.

Market forces were entirely hostile to the Palestinian peasantry, whose existence was almost completely disregarded. There was no avenue through which the Palestinians could effectively repulse British/Zionist land advances: “The fellahin naturally considered the land to be theirs, and often discovered that they had ceased to be the legal owners only when the land was sold to Jewish settlers by an absentee landlord who had acquired it in the decades following the implementation of the 1858 land law.”<sup>133</sup> Effectively, the Palestinians were unaware of just how tenuous their position was until it was far too late. They continued to practice *musha’*, under the

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<sup>132</sup> Rashid Khalidi. “A Question of Land Government and Society in Rural Palestine 1920-1948. Ylana Miller The Land Question in Palestine, 1917-1939. Kenneth Stein.” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, p. 148

<sup>133</sup> Rashid Khalidi. “Palestinian Peasant Resistance to Zionism before World War I.” *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question*, edited by Edward W. Said and Christopher Hitchens, p. 214

impression they owned the land they worked, though in actuality that land had long been claimed by large estate owners such as the Sursocks.

As Arab landowners had no intention of constructing a settler-colonial state, farmers could remain on their land after purchase. It was only after the same land was sold, by the estate owners, to the Zionists, that the Palestinians were driven from it. The colonists were unable, both legally in militarily, to take control of the land on their own, thus, “it was necessary for the [Zionist] purchasers to depend on the power of the state, whether the Ottoman Empire, or, later on, the British Mandatory authorities, to enable them to take control of the land.”<sup>134</sup> Figure 9 below shows the common pathways for musha’ land to end in the hands of the Zionist colonials. British policy aimed at privatizing the musha’ commons clearly set the stage for this massive transfer of land, and for the attending dispossession of the mass of the Palestinian agrarian population. Ironically enough this occurred at the same time that British commission and inquiries were repeatedly expressing concern over the growing landlessness of the Palestinian population.

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid, p. 217

# The Privatization of the Musha'

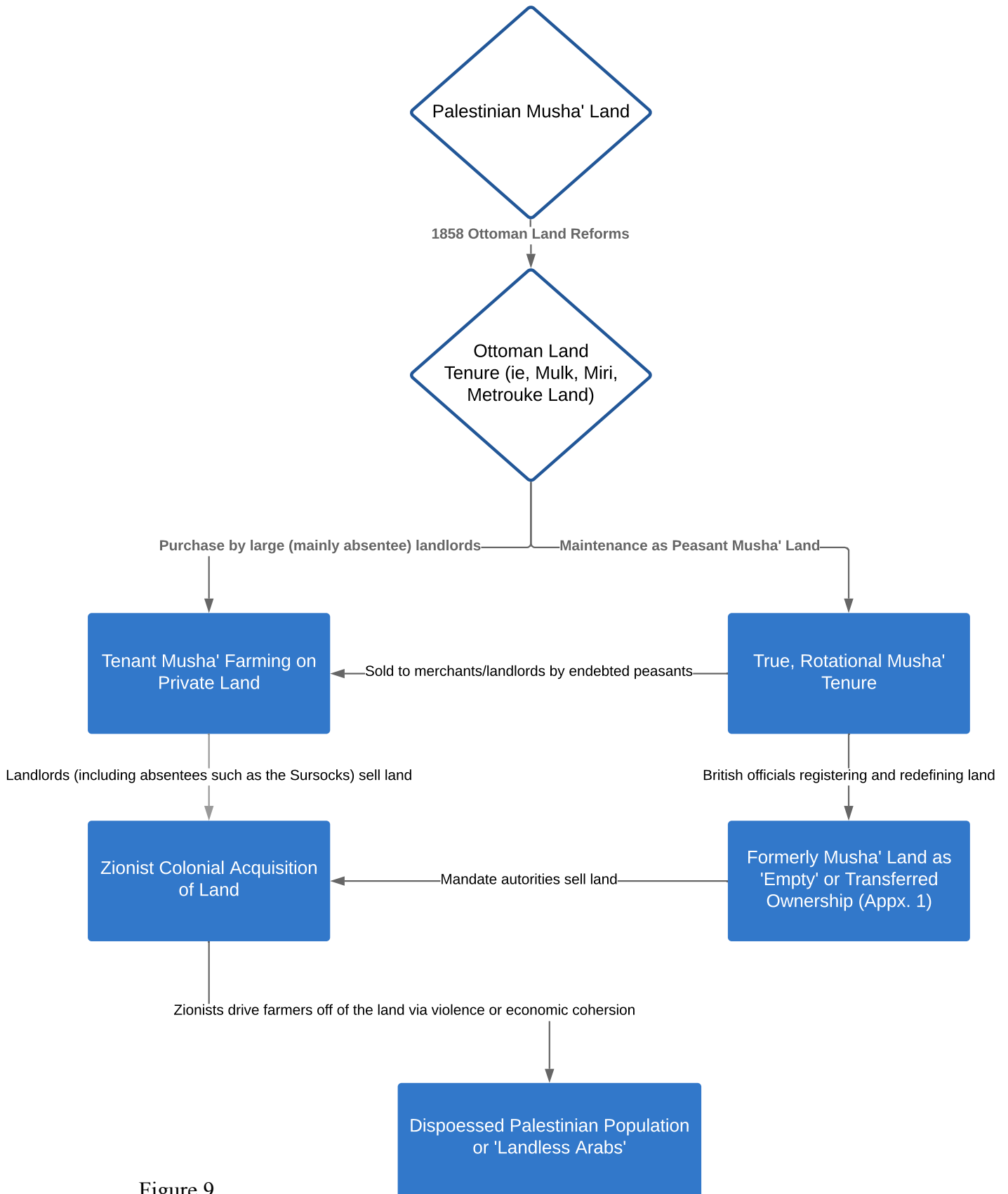


Figure 9

## **F. Britain Fails to Square the Circle: Colonial Contradictions**

Perhaps the clearest example of British floundering was the series of White Papers published from 1922 until 1939, of which there were eight in total (accompanying the commissions detailed in the Key Events, British Reports, and Commissions section). The majority of these proclamations concerned Jewish immigration. Specifically, the two published in 1930 attempted to assuage Arab fears regarding Jewish immigration. They placed various restrictions on Jewish immigration, both numerical and geographic. The two published in 1930 attempted to counter many of the ills described above, by limiting the ability of Jews to purchase land from Arabs. Having been published before the Great Revolt, again, it seems reasonable to point out that they failed in this mission.

The publication of the 1930 White Paper in particular was the cause of much consternation within the World Zionist organization. Again, the government moved to lessen these fears, and in so doing, helped crystalize their policy in Palestine. The British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, sent an extended letter to Dr. Chaim Weizmann, former head of the World Zionist Organization, on February 13, 1931. This letter was also placed before the House of Commons. The Prime Minister defended his government: “the obligation to facilitate Jewish immigration and to encourage close settlement by the Jews on the Land remains a positive obligation of the mandate and it can be fulfilled without prejudice to the rights and position of other sections of the population of Palestine.”<sup>135</sup> While other mention of ‘Arabs’ in Palestine was made

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<sup>135</sup> Ramsay MacDonald, “British Policy in Palestine (Text of the Prime Minister’s Statement)”, *Current History*, p. 50

throughout the letter, the government mostly appeared to refer to them using vagaries, the main dichotomy appearing to be between Jewish immigrants, for whom the mandate was constructed, and a nameless mass of others, the ‘other sections of the population of Palestine.’

MacDonald was seriously undercutting prior efforts of the Mandate government, particularly their attempts to convince the Arab rural populations that they were, and would continue to be, treated fairly. His letter to Weizmann complicated British attempts to fulfill both their obligations under the Balfour Declaration, and to the ‘non Jewish’ populations of Palestine. Mandate officials operating on the ground were perplexed, and attempted to defend their policies in the face of rebuke at the highest level. From a memorandum discussing MacDonald’s letter: “the whole object of the High Commissioner’s proposals is merely to prevent the complete extinction of the small owner-occupier class of cultivator by making it impossible from him to sell a minimum subsistence area. If he is the owner of more than such an area it should be possible for him to sell the surplus and, on Mr. Shertok’s [of the Jewish Agency] own argument to use the proceeds for improving the cultivation of his subsistence area.”<sup>136</sup> This defense is neither surprising nor persuasive, as even the meager policies put forward by the Mandate government proved utterly incapable of protecting the rights of the Arab peasantry. Even these paltry offerings were, however, too much for London to swallow.

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<sup>136</sup> Martin Bunton, editor, ‘Memorandum regarding Mr. Ramsay MacDonald’s letter to Dr. Weizmann of the 13th February 1931, with special reference to its bearing upon the proposals recently approved in principle for restricting the sale of land in certain areas of Palestine’ with appendices [CO 733/290/8] *Land Legislation in Mandate Palestine* p. 421

British triangulation here can not merely be seen as an attempt to reconcile their land policy with its results, but to reconcile the internal inconsistencies within the text of the Mandate itself. The Empire proved itself entirely incapable of respecting the rights of Arab farmers and ensuring their economic well-being and encouraging Jewish immigration and land acquisition simultaneously. That these two tasks were by definition incompatible was never discussed. This stems from a greater insolubility: building a settler-colonial national home, and establishing democratic governance structures for the indigenous population. The British were trying to at once both sing songs of Araby, and tales of Judea.



ARTHUR CŒUR-DE-ZION.

LORD BALFOUR. "I'LL SING THEE SONGS OF ARABY,  
AND TALES OF FAIR JUDÆA."

Figure 10

Partridge, Bernard. "Arthur Coeur-de-Zion." *Inter War Cartoons 1919-1936*, Punch Magazine, 1925.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION: THE NAKBA, DISPOSSESSION, AND IMPERIAL ACCUMULATION

#### **A. Accumulation by Dispossession, Palestine, and Imperialism**

Though the term ‘privatization,’ (key to Harvey’s work) has only recently come into public usage, it certainly seems to apply to British land tenure reform in Palestine in the interwar period. Land was broken up and parceled, and sold to the highest bidder. In this instance, thanks to Balfour and the overarching goals of the British Empire (securing the Suez, finding collaborators, and expanding their influence in the region), those bidders were Zionist colonists. Biased colonial officials like Dowson and Strickland did their work well in targeting indigenous institutions. Picking up where the Ottomans left off, the two men (as well as other British imperial apparatchiks) British enacted a program which Harvey would recognize, and which set the scene for the almost complete expropriation of the Palestinian peasantry in 1948.

Viewed through the framework of accumulation by dispossession, much of the British logic in expropriating the *musha*’ commons makes a great deal more sense. The sweeping, disruptive force of British land policy reworked the local relations of production in Palestine. Assaults on the indigenous *musha*’ system created a crisis of ‘landless Arabs’ which the Mandate itself recognized. This was swiftly followed by an influx in foreign (Zionist) capital and immigrants, all under the auspices of the British Empire. Faced with privatized and enclosed land, and ever shrinking credit and capital, the Palestinian population was overwhelmed by the settlers. By weakening the



Palestinian peasantry, and allowing this land/population transfer to take place, the British were ensuring the development of a loyal and effective collaborator class which Migdal could be proud of. However, Migdal's framework thoroughly fails to explain much of the dynamics examined in this paper. The British do not construct collaborators in a vacuum. At every turn, where the Zionists gained, the Palestinians lost.

Patrick Wolfe's "The Settler Complex" succeeds where Migdal fails. Veering far from Migdal's internal view, we return to Wolfe's earlier statement: "Land is settler colonialism's irreducible essence in ways that go well beyond real estate. Its seizure is not merely a change of ownership but a genesis, the onset of a whole new way of being—for both parties. Settlers are not born. They are made in the dispossessing, a ceaseless obligation that has to be maintained across the generations if the Natives are not to come back."<sup>137</sup> Native Americans created the modern United States in their dispossession, and Palestinians created the modern state of Israel in there's. This dispossession continued throughout the interwar period, with increasing amounts of Palestinian land being, over time, thrown into the vagaries of the market.

The interwar period was my focus due to that fact that some, such as Joel Migdal, can become singularly focused on the Nakba, or the Great Revolt, as the fundamental root of Palestinian dispossession. While these massive events were surely revolutionary, the groundwork for Palestinian dispossession lay in the British Empire's policies. However, this is not to minimize the role played by those events. In many ways, the Great Revolt was the culmination of all the factors discussed in this paper.

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<sup>137</sup> Patrick Wolfe, "The Settler Complex," *American Indian Culture and Research* p. 1

Also, the revolt itself lead directly to the Nakba, and therefore the founding of the modern state of Israel. These two events are deeply linked to Mandate's policies. To that end, this work would be incomplete without briefly examining both the Great Revolt and the Nakba, as well as looking forward to how accumulation by dispossession is playing out in modern Palestine.

Much like Marx viewed primitive accumulation as the 'original sin' of capitalism, the Nakba is considered the original sin of the Israeli state, lying at the heart of Palestinian dispossession. What Bunton's documents, and other official records of the British Mandate, show, is that even the Nakba itself was not even the beginning of this process. British systems of land tenure set the stage for the Nakba, and their policies led to ever increasing waves of dispossession before the first shot was even fired. Zionists were only in a dramatically advantageous position (so dramatic, in fact, that, "land and property were seized with a speed and on a scale that no settlers had ever before achieved in colonial history...By the end of 1950, they had appropriated 92 percent of land within the new state"<sup>138</sup>) due to British land policy. Without the extensive scaffolding afforded by the British, it's doubtful that Zionist uneven development could have proceeded so swiftly.

In fact, by 1947, on the eve of the Nakba, Zionist and British sources considered more than 70% of Palestine's land to not be owned by the Arabs who lived there.<sup>139</sup> This is why the land tenure discussion above is so central to Palestinian dispossession. The various forms of indigenous land organizations were deemed illogical (read: non-

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<sup>138</sup> Perry Anderson, *Scurrying Towards Bethlehem*, p. 12

<sup>139</sup> Lorenzo Kamel, "Whose Land? Land Tenure in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Palestine" *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* p. 230

Western) by colonial officials, and therefore not perceived as being owned by the Palestinians working the land. Thus the Palestinians were legally dispossessed even before they were pushed off their land in campaigns of ethnic cleansing. British efforts to 'reform' or 'rationalize' Palestinian land tenure appears to have been the main culprit behind the dispossession of the Palestinians, with the Nakba representing more of a coup de grâce. Despite the scale of dispossession under the Mandate, British policy alone was not enough to create a Jewish ethnic state in Palestine. Accumulation by dispossession, as well as Marx's original concept, still entails acts of violence to fully dispossess its victims. Major violence broke out at the twilight of the Mandate, during the Great Revolt, and after the full retreat of the British in 1948.

## **B. The Empire Picks Sides: Britain and the Great Revolt**

These changes in land tenure were untenable to the Palestinians, and they culminated in the Great Revolt of 1936-39. British favoritism towards the Zionist settlers became even more intense during the revolt. Their interdependence was so great that the British authorities became nearly indistinguishable from their colonial pawns: "The Jews helped to direct British operations, as counterinsurgency demanded good intelligence and the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine) had the upper hand here, as its intelligence on the Palestinians was so good. Jews also dressed in army uniforms on operations with the British, and British soldiers dressed as Jews in civilian

clothes.”<sup>140</sup> Clearly, this goes beyond ‘promoting uneven development,’ which is easy to establish. From the onset of British mandatory rule, Zionist militias never wanted for weaponry or training, despite their often tenuous relationship with some British officers.

With the outbreak of the Great Revolt, the British would bring their alliance with the Zionists to new heights. Great Britain, “for at least two decades had faithfully carried out its mandatory responsibilities to build up the Jewish national home, these institutions included, notably, a completely formed government bureaucracy and representative institutions, together with the core of a modern European style regular army.”<sup>141</sup> The Special Night Squads represent an illustrative example of British support. Beginning in 1938, a British army officer by the name of Orde Wingate founded and commanded the Special Night Squads, a unique set of squadrons comprised of both British and Jewish fighters. These squads, as their names indicates, entered Palestinian villages by cover of darkness in order to conduct a campaign of irregular warfare and murder. Their brutality was notably even amongst colonial occupation forces. Richard Catling, a police officer in the British Mandate, came upon several mass graves which he believes were the work of the SNSs (Special Night Squads): “I was still in Jaffa at the time. Certainly, on two occasions we picked up the bodies of dead Arabs that had been killed by these,

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<sup>140</sup> Matthew Hughes, “Terror in Galilee: British-Jewish Collaboration and the Special Night Squads in Palestine during the Arab Revolt, 1938–39.” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* p. 593

<sup>141</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p.21

this special unit . . . . In the rural area surrounding Jaffa.”<sup>142</sup> His description of their methods is reminiscent of not only the French in Algeria, but American backed militias across Latin America.

So legendary were the SNS’s tactics, that even Mandate officers began to worry about their ‘counterinsurgency’ campaign:

One army intelligence officer recalled how a district commissioner (DC)—obviously Hugh Foot, the future Lord Caradon, who went on to become governor of Cyprus—warned a Palestinian village of a forthcoming army raid, and so a senior officer ‘took the D.C. by the throat and shook him and called him a ‘bloody traitor’ . . . Foot saw at first-hand the effects of Wingate’s work, as the latter [in Hugh Foot’s words] ‘wiped out opposition gangs by killing them all. He was taking sides. It was a dirty war of assassination and counter-assassination. I don’t think we should have got mixed up in that.’<sup>143</sup>

The district commissioner’s commentary aside, the British most certainly were ‘mixed up in that.’

The brutality displayed by British Forces during the revolt had a lasting effect on the Palestinian community, and the future of the Mandate. Palestinian civil society was largely shattered by British repression during the revolt. Rashid Khalidi describes, in detail, the damage done by the British:

The repression of the revolt had an impact not only on the populace, but also on the Palestinians’ ability to fight thereafter, and on the already fractured capabilities of their national leadership. A high proportion of the Arab casualties included the most experienced military cadres and enterprising fighters. By the end of the revolt, most of the top Arab political leaders and thousands of other cadres, militants, and fighters were imprisoned, interned by the British in the Seychelles, in exile, or dead. The British also confiscated large quantities of arms and ammunition from the Arabs during the revolt, and continued to do so

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, p. 595

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, p. 594

during later years. By the end of the revolt, existing political divisions within the Palestinian polity had become envenomed, leading to profound rifts between the majority supporting the revolt and a minority that had become alienated from the leadership: the consequence was assassinations, infighting, and further weakening of the Palestinian position. The impact of the revolt on the Palestinian economy was also severe, although some of that damage was self-inflicted, as a boycott of British and Jewish goods and of the mandatory government during the strike and the revolt simply opened up opportunities for the already larger Jewish-controlled sector of the economy of Palestine to expand further.<sup>144</sup>

The extent of this destruction, though keenly felt by the Palestinians at the time, truly became apparent at the onset of the 1948 War, referred to by the Palestinians as the Nakba. Jewish forces swept through Palestine, enacting a campaign of ethnic cleansing. The Palestinians were, after the Great Revolt, in no position to resist them.

### **C. The Nakba: Neither Beginning Nor End**

The Nakba was a cataclysmic event in Palestinian history. Even after the proceeding rounds of dispossession, on the eve of the 1948 War 1.4 million Palestinians still resided within what are now the internationally recognized borders of Israel. While estimates differ, between 600,000 and almost 800,000 of these Palestinians became refugees. This constitutes anywhere between 65 to 85 percent of the total population of the Palestinians living in Palestine.<sup>145</sup> Clearly the war resulted in a massive demographic shift. Palestinians were no longer a majority within the territory of the nascent Jewish state, regardless of their land-holding status, and this was accomplished

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<sup>144</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, p. 108

<sup>145</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, p. 1.

in a remarkably short amount of time. “Population transfer” was a term often used by the Jewish paramilitaries, and later the Israeli Defense Force, to describe their actions during the war. David Ben-Gurion, commonly regarded as the father of the Jewish state (and its first prime minister), proclaimed, “I’m for compulsory transfer; I do not see anything immoral in it.”<sup>146</sup>

If British land policy was not necessarily crafted to dispossess the maximum number of Palestinians, the Haganah (the Jewish paramilitaries originally trained and equipped by the British authorities) formed a plan that was. Plan Dalet, as it was called by the Haganah, was ostensibly a rear guard action. Its intent was, explicitly, to police villages in Jewish controlled areas to ensure they could not be used to harass the Yishuv’s military arm. Within less than a month after Plan Dalet’s commencement, nearly 250,000 Arabs were driven off of their land. Ilan Pappé, and Israeli ‘new’ historian (a group of Israeli historians who question Israel’s founding myths), describes in detail the methodology used in implementing the cleansing, citing the operational orders of Plan Dalet, distributed on March 10, 1948: “These operations can be carried out in the following manner: either by destroying villages (by setting fire to them, by blowing them up, and by planting mines in their debris)...In case of resistance, the armed forces must be wiped out and the population expelled outside the borders of the state.”<sup>147</sup> These orders were carried out across Palestine, and over 500 villages would ultimately be destroyed during the war.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, p. xi.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, pp. 38-45

In addition to destroying villages, Jewish forces also massacred multitudes of Palestinian non-combatants. Over the course of the 1948 War, there were at the very least twenty-four document instances of Jewish forces slaughtering unarmed civilians. The number killed in each of these attacks ranges from only four or five, to numbers as high as seventy, or even in the hundreds. These numbers are reported by Israeli historian Benny Morris, another member of the “new historians.” He goes as far as to say that during the War, specifically Operation Hiram, “there was an unusually high concentration of executions of people against a wall or next to a well in an orderly fashion,” he then concludes, “That can’t be chance. It’s a pattern.”<sup>149</sup> Ben Gurion, according to Morris, covered up for those who perpetrated these massacres. Not a single officer involved was ever punished or even brought to trial.

Evident in these massacres is a degree of calculation. Their planned nature testifies to the overall coordination of the Haganah’s ethnic cleansing campaign. David Ben-Gurion, future prime minister of the state of Israel, met with another of Israel’s future leaders, Yitzhak Rabin, on July 12, 1948. At this meeting Ben-Gurion signaled that the Arabs of the city of Lydda were to be expelled. Soon after, an order stating, “The inhabitants of Lydda must be expelled quickly without attention to age,” was issued to the Yiftah Brigade, signed by Yitzhak Rabin.<sup>150</sup> Lydda was not even allocated by the U.N. Partition Plan to the Jewish state, but that fact did not dissuade the Jewish paramilitaries. They set forth to conquer the city.

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<sup>149</sup> Ari Shavit, “Survival of the Fittest,” *Haaretz*, January, 2004.

<sup>150</sup> Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, p. 429.



Ben-Gurion's advocacy for transfer was not private nor was it personal, his policy of "transferism" or ethnic cleansing was being implemented on the ground. Other cities that were to be part of the new Arab state of Palestine also fell under the sword of the Haganah. The former crusader city of Acre was one such city. It was shelled daily, yet did not fall for weeks. Eventually, however, typhoid fever roared through the city. Doctors of the Red Cross came to the conclusion that the outbreak was the result of a tainted aqueduct, and not of overcrowded or unsanitary conditions. They later alleged that the Kabri springs aqueduct, which was under the control of the forces of the Haganah, had been injected with typhoid by the Jewish forces in order to expedite the ongoing siege. Once the city had fallen, the men of the Haganah destroyed the property of the expelled Arab inhabitants, discouraging them from returning to their homes.<sup>151</sup>

If the Nakba cannot be considered the event to mark the beginning of Palestinian landlessness and dispossession, it also cannot be considered its conclusion. Since its founding, the Israeli state has continued down the path of displacement, and accumulation by dispossession. In 1950 the Israeli Knesset (parliament) passed the Absentee Property Law, which stated that, "every right an absentee had in any property shall pass automatically to the Custodian at the time of the vesting of the property; and the status of the Custodian shall be the same as was the owner of the property."<sup>152</sup>

Accompanying the Absentee Property Law was the Land Acquisition Law. The 'custodian' of seized land was a state entity. This law concerned the land now owned by

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<sup>151</sup> Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, p. 100-102.

<sup>152</sup> Husayn Abu Husayn and Fiona McKa, *Access Denied: Palestinian Land Rights in Israel*, p. 98.

the Custodian, and, “promptly redistributed it into Jewish hands.”<sup>153</sup> The Custodian was now empowered to sell the land it confiscated. Vast tracks of Custodian land were quickly purchased by Jewish Israelis, effectively solidifying the transfer of land from Arabs to Jews. While the measure was opposed vehemently by Palestinians and segments of Israeli society, it passed swiftly and without delay through the Knesset. The law was an economic boon to Israel, as it allowed for the conquest of Jaffa’s valuable citrus groves, once again the capital for the nascent state of Israel was accumulated through pushing out the indigenous Palestinians.

#### **D. A Coda: Occupied Palestine and Continued Accumulation by Dispossession**

One of the major distinctions between the modern Israeli project of dispossession, and that of the British during the Mandate (as well as the practitioners Harvey’s ‘New Imperialism’), is that modern Israel is not seeking to drive the indigenous population, the Palestinians, from their farms and into the labor market. Rather, given the specific ethno-nationalist nature of the Zionist project, the goal was to drive the Palestinians not just from the farms, but from the entirety of the country. During the British Mandate period, Palestinians were in fact ‘proletarianized.’ It was during the Nakba, as the sun finally set on the British Empire, that the settlers (now newly christened Israelis) were fully freed to enact their campaign of ethnic cleansing. Though the British built their institutions and policies methodically throughout their three decade rule, they left Palestine just as abruptly as they entered. In the smoke and

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<sup>153</sup> Max Blumenthal, *Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel*. p. 45.

ruin left by the British, the very militias they equipped, no longer constrained by that ‘enigma of colonialism,’ strode forth to carry out Plan Dalet.

Looking forward to the modern day, the Israeli state has continued to aggressively claim Palestinian land. Unfortunately, it would require a much longer discussion to examine every avenue via which the Israeli government seizes land and property, and thus it lies largely beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is worthwhile to briefly review the intersection between modern Israeli colonialism and accumulation by dispossession. Much of the infrastructure and scaffolding for the developing Israeli regime was laid by the British, not only in terms of legal and ideological structures, but physical ones as well. Zionist militias, both through force of arms and purchase, took control of every British military base (mostly along the coast, but also inland). These bases would form the core of the IDF apparatus, and eventually some, in the West Bank, would develop into the illegal settlements still plaguing the region to this day.

These settlements can certainly be understood most easily in the context of accumulation by dispossession. Again, a classical reading of Marx’s primitive accumulation would dictate that those dispossessed are pushed into the labor market. Harvey, luckily, in his elaboration on the concept, allows us to imagine other results. Privatization and land appropriation go hand in hand for Harvey, under his definition of accumulation by dispossession. They also need not necessarily lead to ‘proletarianization,’ as many countries where these forces are most powerful have already been ‘proletarianized,’ so to speak. Illegal settlements encircle Palestinian East Jerusalem, and these provide a striking example of accumulation by dispossession in the

city. Much like the justifications for British and Zionist intervention in Palestine, the religious arguments quickly fall by the wayside: “Whatever the Biblical echoes of the land in Jerusalem, it is not taken over merely out of religious or tribal zeal. Land is expropriated here and by other settler-colonial enterprises largely because it is valuable. This is a classic case of primitive accumulation, a process in which capital addresses its unending need for new markets to exploit by forcefully taking and privatizing resources.”<sup>154</sup>

These resources are not limited strictly to land and wealth, but, critically, include water as well. Israeli settlers use vastly more water than the Palestinians. In settlements surrounded by water-poor villages, settlers construct massive swimming pools and water their lawns. Settlements accumulate this land, partially, through means which would be very familiar to Marxist readings of primitive accumulation. Having based his theory of primitive accumulation on England’s development, Marx specifically referred to the enclosure of the English countryside. The Israelis operate within largely the same framework, constructing a massive series of walls and checkpoints throughout the occupied West Bank. Within the West Bank there are over 600 manned checkpoints that Palestinian residents must pass through on a daily basis. Only six of these checkpoints actually lie on the Green Line divided Israel from the West Bank, the rest bifurcate Palestinian communities.<sup>155</sup>

In addition to the separation wall, an expansive system of Israeli-only roads has been set up in the West Bank. This system is primarily intended for use by the settler

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<sup>154</sup> Greg Shupak, “What’s Behind the Unrest in Jerusalem?” *Jacobin*, 2014.

<sup>155</sup> *Roadmap to Apartheid*. Dir. Eron Davidson and Ana Nogueira. Perf. Alice Walker. Journeyman Pictures, 2012. Download.

population, who are issued yellow license plates to distinguish them from Palestinian drivers. As of 2008, there were over 200 kilometers of Israeli only roads.<sup>156</sup> Avnei Hefetz is an Israeli settlement in the northern West Bank that is serviced by these roads. Residents there are pleased that their drive to cities such as Jerusalem and Tel Aviv have been made more convenient. In the same region, the Palestinians of the village of Shufa cannot use this road system. Israeli authorities have erected dirt roadblocks to deny Palestinians access to the roads. Effectively, this created a stranglehold on Shufa. Since the construction of these ‘settler only’ roads (often referred to as ‘sterile roads’) one out of every four villagers has left Shufa.<sup>157</sup> The dispossession of the people of Shufa was by no means exceptional, villages across the West Bank continue to be emptied: “On display here is a reservation-style settler capitalism wherein those members of the indigenous population who cannot be driven out are squeezed into the smallest possible space, a process similar to that which has been taking place in the Gaza Strip since Israel removed its settlers from there.”<sup>158</sup>

Israeli accumulation and land acquisition in Gaza is slightly more complicated than in the West Bank. As stated above, Israel did remove all settlers from Gaza (in 2005). However, by no means did this diminish their influence in the Gaza Strip. Not only does Israel control all of Gaza’s border crossings, but they restrict access to Gaza for aid workers and block vital building resources. Ron J. Smith and Martin Isleem’s *Farming the Front Line: Gaza’s Activist Farmers in the No Go Zones* focuses on the so

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid

<sup>157</sup> Ibid

<sup>158</sup> Greg Shupak, “What’s Behind the Unrest in Jerusalem?” *Jacobin*, 2014.

called ‘no go zones’ surrounding Gaza. These are the areas of Gaza that abut the Israeli border wall, which are often arable land. The Israelis regularly shoot farmers in these zones, maintaining a buffer around their wall. Smith and Isleem explain the key distinction between Israel’s projects in the West Bank and Gaza:

The primary mode of land expropriation utilized by Israelis is the settlement, which directly removes Palestinians from their homes and farms (Shupak 2014). As of 2005, there are no Israeli civilian settlements in the Gaza Strip, and Israel denies its role as occupier of the Strip (Israel MFA 2014). There are a number of other modes that the Israelis employ to facilitate land takings and accumulation. Israel unilaterally designates large sections of the land in the West Bank and Gaza as ‘closed military zones’ (Yehezkel and Weizman 2002). While in the West Bank, Israeli settlers are allowed to farm these zones, in Gaza, the No Go Zones are off limits to Palestinians, and there are no settlers within the borders of the Strip to take advantage of the takings.<sup>159</sup>

At first glance, it’s not entirely clear what benefits the Israelis in this instance, as they are not able to actively take control of these zones.

This raises the question, what economic/imperial benefit does Israel derive from these no go zones, and from the current situation in Gaza generally? That Gazan resistance has thus far prevented any Israeli encroachment (look no further than the Israeli invasion of Gaza in 2014), and makes any Israeli incursion into the Gaza Strip quite costly, further complicates the question. Smith and Isleem answer this question convincingly, arguing that these zones are, “perhaps best understood as an example of de-development, the prevention of any form of independent economic development through military and other means...designed to create political dissonance that will

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<sup>159</sup> Ron J. Smith, and Martin Isleem. “Farming the Front Line: Gaza's Activist Farmers in the No Go Zones.” *City*, p. 451

eventuate the toppling of the elected government.”<sup>160</sup> Viewed in this light, the Israelis accept the financial, and colonial, loss of withdrawing their settlers and abandoning these ‘zones’ in order to play a longer game, destabilizing Gaza and eventually toppling the government (which, clearly, would allow for greater land seizures and settlement in the future).

Although Israeli strategy in Gaza is largely centered around the long term goal of dislodging Hamas, there are also more basic goals of accumulation: “Instead of providing labor and consuming goods, Gazans are a captive population for the Israeli market, and the purchasing power is not provided through exploitation of Gazan labor, rather through humanitarian aid.”<sup>161</sup> The Israelis (with the witting and unwitting assistance of much of the international community) have constructed a complex system of international aid, rationing, and control. Journalists at the Israeli publication Haaretz revealed a military document entitled *Red Lines* in 2009. This document detailed the lowest possible amount of calories capable of sustaining Gaza’s population. The Israeli government then used this information to, in the words of Dov Weisglass, adviser to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, “put the Palestinians on a diet, but not to make them die of hunger.”<sup>162</sup>

Importantly, these calories would (obviously) not come from the Israelis, nor, largely, the Gaza’s themselves. Enforcing this diet requires that no other food sources enter Gaza. Therefore the fishers and farmers of Gaza, as well as the tunnel makers,

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid

<sup>161</sup> Ibid

<sup>162</sup> Eyal Weizman, *The Least of All Possible Evils*, p. 76

find themselves on the front line of the siege. Israel cracked down not only on the farmers in the 'no go zones,' but on those digging the trenches, and fishermen who ventured too far from shore. Israel's 'diet' logic dictates that any form of independent Gazan food production, and, in the case of illicit building supplies, economic activity of almost any sort, must be stopped. Israel's tactics are extremely reminiscent of Marx's theory: "This primitive accumulation is a means of de-developing Gazan society, by denying Gazans the ability to develop independent means of sustenance (Roy 1995). By denying access to these areas, Gazans' lives are made ever more precarious, forcing reliance on humanitarian aid. The effects of these policies are not purely economic, however, and the violence of the siege is also designed to challenge *sumud* [steadfastness], and to remove Palestinians from any connection to their lands."<sup>163</sup>

Much like the British before them, the Israelis are dismantling Palestinian land structures at a rapid rate. Without the roadmap, both literal, in the case of military bases, and ideological, as relates to land, laid forth by the British, the Israeli project could have advanced entirely differently. Modern accumulation by dispossession in Palestine has been discussed on several levels (as shown through the above pieces on both Gaza and the West Bank settlements), yet the British seem largely to evade this examination. Hopefully future studies continue to elaborate on the British's role in Palestinian dispossession, particularly via Harvey's theory. Further study could also surely be made in the case of Iraq, as there would be a certain symmetry in applying

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<sup>163</sup> Ron J. Smith, and Martin Isleem. "Farming the Front Line: Gaza's Activist Farmers in the No Go Zones." *City*, p. 450



Harvey's theory, developed in the context of the modern American occupation of Iraq, to the policies and actions of the British Mandate for Iraq.

Clearly, these questions of empire and imperial logics, as opaque as they may become, still matter today. While its effects (the destruction of Iraq and the occupation of Palestine) may seem clear, its causes are less so. It is therefore worthwhile to end with a warning regarding the New Empire, which picked up the British baton, from Daniel Immerwahr's work, *How to Hide an Empire*:

Empire lives on, too, in the overseas bases that dot the globe. It's easy to think of foreign policy as an affair of the negotiating table: sovereign nation-states sit down to threaten, bargain, or cooperate. But U.S. foreign policy, nearly uniquely, has a territorial component. Britain and France have some thirteen overseas bases between them, Russia has nine, and various other countries have one—in all, there are probably thirty overseas bases owned by non-U.S. countries. The United States, by contrast, has roughly eight hundred, plus agreements granting it access to still other foreign sites. Dozens of countries host U.S. bases. Those that refuse are nevertheless surrounded by them. The Greater United States, in other words, is in everyone's backyard... Territory still matters today. Colonialism hovers in the background of politics at the highest level. McCain, Palin, Obama, and Trump have all been touched by it. That may seem like an odd and surprising fact. But we should get over our surprise. The history of the United States is the history of empire.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: a History of the Greater United States*, p. 400-401

## APPENDIX I

### **An Example in Zor al-Zarqa: Land Disputes and “Justice” in the Colonial Legal System**

Zor al-Zarqa, known also as Kabbara, was a territory in Palestine which consisted of 13,000 dunams of land. The land was home to the ‘Arab al-Ghawarneh, and the ‘Arab Kabbara, both communities of farmers. Interestingly enough, the British (once again, Bentwich) drew upon not only their own mandatory law in expropriating land, but made use of the precedent set by the prior land codes of the former Ottoman Empire as well:

According to Articles 91-110 of the Ottoman Land Code of 1858, Matruka was land designated for a variety of public or community uses, including grazing. ‘Arab al-Ghawarneh’s claim to Zor al-Zarqa was based on records that stated that the area had “been left ... Mash’a [communal] amongst the Ghawarneh Arabs for the grazing of their cattle.” Legally, Matruka could not be held in exclusive possession with a title deed, and the government’s capacity to expropriate it was thus questionable. However, Bentwich focused on the fact that Matruka was customarily defined in relation to a specified locality. As he did not consider tent encampments a village, he concluded that the land in question was not Matruka.<sup>165</sup>

The British appear to reference the Ottoman land codes, seemingly, in order to swiftly dispense with them.

Following Strickland’s view of the Arab people, the British Mandate government believed it to be their ‘burden’ to modernize Zor al-Zarqa. Specifically, the colonials governors sought to drain the region’s marshlands. Though clearly this land was inhabited, the colonial authorities did not deem ‘tents’ sufficient to understanding the area as residential. “In the view of Mandate authorities, the marshland of Zor al-

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<sup>165</sup> Jeremy Forman, *Colonialism, Colonization and Land Law in Mandate Palestine*, p. 520

Zarqa needed draining and the inefficiently used sand dunes of Barrat Qisarya would expand if left unchecked. The Jewish Colonization Association regarded the land as waste and state land designated for Jewish settlement according to the Mandate Charter.”<sup>166</sup> The Jewish Colonization Association’s interpretation of the mandate was of course the one adopted by the mandate authorities. While this understanding put full eviction on the table, it was ultimately not pursued as an option. Instead, it was used as a cudgel, threatening families to sell their land to the JCA, or see it seized anyway. Outright expropriating the land, in a clear and direct fashion, was not in British interests. Though they attempted to facilitate Jewish land gains, the British still feared backlash from the Arab farmers. Given the horrors of the Great Revolt, which the British suppressed brutally, and the thorough ethnic cleansing of the Nakba, it is fair to say they failed utterly in avoiding conflict.

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid, p. 511

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