PLANTING PALESTINE: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF OLIVE CULTURE IN THE 20TH-CENTURY GALILEE AND WEST BANK

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By

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PLANTING PALESTINE: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF OLIVE CULTURE IN THE 20\textsuperscript{TH}-CENTURY GALILEE AND WEST BANK

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ABSTRACT

The olive tree has become a central symbol of Palestinian nationalism, signifying sumud or steadfastness. Its importance to contemporary Palestinian society in the West Bank, both culturally and economically, is unparalleled. The significance of the olive tree and its commodities is a result of long-term trends over the course of the 20th century: above all, the Palestinian modernization of a deeper history of olive cultivation, and its nationalist politicization amidst the territorial reduction of historic Palestine.

Drawing on agricultural, forestry, development, economic, and other records located in archives and libraries in Israel, Jordan, and the West Bank, as well as American, British, and French diplomatic archives, this dissertation reconstructs the political economy of olives in the Galilee and the West Bank across the upheavals of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. In addition to utilizing previously unexamined governmental reports, correspondence, and statistics in Arabic, English, French, and Hebrew, as well as petitions, letters, and telegrams from ordinary Palestinians preserved in these archives, it also draws upon rare published primary sources in Arabic by technical experts (agronomists, agricultural engineers, and others) assessing the olive sector and its prospects.

The period of study begins before the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, encapsulates World War I and the end of the Ottoman Empire, extends through the British Mandate and the Nakba of 1948 to address the fate of Palestinians remaining in the Israeli Galilee, and concludes with analyses of West Bank olive culture under first Jordanian rule and then the Israeli occupation after 1967. Doing so allows for a comparative view of Palestinian society over time under these different governments, reframing state-society relations in the Ottoman, British, Jordanian, and Israeli periods. Throughout, the state and policymakers are decentered from the narrative of Palestinian history. This study questions deterministic understandings of hegemonic governmentality by focusing on how Palestinians responded to, resisted, shaped, supported, or disrupted state ambitions and policies, which paradoxically depend upon the indigenous knowledge of subalterns or subordinate groups. Continued development of the olive sector has resulted in growing costs and surplus production, which necessitated internal adaptations and external supports, but raise questions of sustainability.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Reema A. Ghazi and Sophie Amal Reger.
Olive production in Palestine is a family affair, and so are all of our lives. Our connections are a key component of who we are as individuals. In my case, this work could not have been done without the following people.

Sincere gratitude to my advisor, Judith E. Tucker, for training me as a historian and for being a truly exemplary mentor and an example to follow in teaching and scholarship; and to my committee: Osama Abi-Mershed, for making theory make sense; Rochelle Davis, for making sense of fieldwork in Palestine; and Salim Tamari, for making the field in the scholarly sense.

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I have at this point been fortunate to work in a number of archives around the world: in the United States, the Library of Congress and the National Archives and Records Administration. In Great Britain, the Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes; the Israel State Archives; and the Nablus Municipal Archives. All three are a testament to how public service can be courteous, helpful, and diligent employees. It is my privilege, however, to single out in particular the exceptional staffs of the Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes; the Israel State Archives; and the Nablus Municipal Archives. All three are a testament to how public service can be courteous, helpful,
and receptive — especially considering the visitor is not a native speaker of the country’s dominant language. I am eternally grateful to all of the people who make these institutions work.

I must give a special note of thanks to Mostafa Helal and his entire family. Who knew that the day I introduced myself (in what I am sure was the worst accented and the most absurdly formal foreign fusha way) in ‘Arabi Thani at Birzeit, and the entire class of 40 burst out laughing, would also give rise to some incredible friendships, his most of all. I literally cannot thank him enough for his and his family’s friendship, kindness, and hospitality. I only hope that one day I can reciprocate and host him as he and his family and friends hosted me multiple times in both Birzeit and Kefr Zeybad. Ramallah, Nablus, and Tulkarm are simply not the same without his or his relatives’ company.

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I would like to acknowledge and express my gratitude to those who have funded my research: the Georgetown University History Department, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, and Graduate School; the Mercatus Center of George Mason University; and the Palestinian-American Research Center. In particular, I would like to thank Penny Mitchell of PARC and Maria Snyder of the Georgetown Graduate School for their never-failing feedback on many iterations of this project as it has developed and come to fruition.

A note of appreciation as well for the encouragement of my former colleagues at the Charles F. Kettering Foundation, especially the dearly missed Harold H. Saunders.

Lastly, but most importantly, my family, whose sacrifices and support made this work possible.

Thanks to my parents (Audena Walter and Jeffrey Paul Reger), my brother (William Martin Reger), and my grandparents (Bonney Varney Reger, Barbara Nally Walter and Ronald Walter).

To my in laws, especially Amal Lilian Ghazi, and not only for her unfailing assistance with the most difficult-to-decipher Arabic handwriting (along with the aid of Alan Ghazi and sitna Artemis Freij). Sophie could not have a better Yaya.

To Sophie, light of my life. You are the greatest girl in the whole wide world, and I am so proud to be your papa.

To Reema, love of my life. Not only could this work not exist without you in innumerable ways, large and small, I don’t think I could either.

10 March 2018
Silver Spring MD
ABBREVIATIONS

The following correspond to some of the common abbreviations found in this dissertation.

CADN — Centre des archives diplomatiques de Nantes (France)
CO — Colonial Office (UK)
CZA — Central Zionist Archive (Jerusalem, Israel)
DNL — Department of the National Library (Amman, Jordan)
FAS — Foreign Agricultural Service (USA)
FCO — Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)
FO — Foreign Office (UK)
HH — Hashemite Hall of the University of Jordan Library (Amman, Jordan)
ISA — Israel State Archive (Jerusalem, Israel)
LOC — Library of Congress (Washington DC, USA)
NARA — National Archives and Records Administration (College Park MD, USA)
NLI — National Library of Israel (Givat Ram campus of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem)
NMA — Nablus Municipal Archive (Nablus, West Bank, Palestine)
MAE — Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, La Courneuve (Paris, France)
RRC — Rural Research Centre (an-Najah National University, Nablus, West Bank, Palestine)
TNA — The National Archives of the United Kingdom (Kew, London)
TRANSLITERATION

Names of individuals and places with common, established, or preferred renderings into the Roman alphabet have been preserved in most cases in order to avoid confusion.

Titles of foreign-language published works have typically been translated upon first citation, but are otherwise transliterated; elsewhere, for unpublished sources such as the subjects or topics of archival correspondence, the original language is indicated within brackets whenever translated by the author for maximum accessibility and readability.

For Arabic transliteration, I have used a modified, simplified version of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* system, generally omitting diacritical markings for emphatic consonants, but utilizing the symbol ‘ to indicate ‘ayn. I have also used “ah” to indicate taa marboutah, principally in order to avoid the conflicting pronunciations of Galilee (“i” or “e”) versus West Bank Palestinian colloquial accents (“eh”). For Hebrew, I have similarly followed the ALA-LC Romanization table, simplified again by omitting diacriticals. I use [sic] to indicate inconsistencies or typos in the original, cited texts wherever appropriate.
A NOTE ON THE DUNAM AND TON: UNITS OF MEASURE AND PROBLEMS OF COMPARABILITY

The term dunam throughout the dissertation refers to the metric dunam, imposed by the British in the early Mandate period in Palestine. The “new” dunam is equivalent to a decare or 1,000 square meters, or equal to a tenth of a hectare.

Prior to standardization, the dunam had been a customary measure based on the area that a team of oxen could plow in a day (roughly equivalent to the Medieval English acre and the Ancient Greek stremma). This predictably led to wide variability depending on the terrain, the oxen, and other factors across the empire.

Planting statistics for the late Ottoman Empire, which are highly speculative and should be considered unreliable, typically give the area planted under olives in terms of the number of individual olive trees in a given sanjak or mutasarrifyah. These figures, where appropriate, have been converted to dunams according to the average number of trees planted per dunam, which is typically around 10, give or take a tree.

Similarly, olive crops, olive oil yields, and olive oil soap production have been converted to metric tons wherever possible. Where not possible, they have not been converted, in order to avoid giving an impression of false certainty and false equivalency, as in the cases of customary units of weight and measure like the jarrah and the tabkhah. Similarly, units of monetary value are given in the prevailing currency of the time, and have not been converted or adjusted for inflation unless specifically noted.

Statistics are ideological abstractions. They are helpful for giving a sense of big-picture trends, and demonstrating change over time. Numbers are useful to make economic activity legible to technocratic experts in and out of government, but numbers can lie, and are often interpreted more credulously, given their sheen of pure mathematical objectivity. They should be treated as any other source, with rigor and awareness of weaknesses and biases.

Thus, while metric dunams and metric tons have been given wherever possible for the sake of comparability across the dissertation, statistics are heavily subject to distortion in the process of their production at nearly every stage, and direct comparison across periods of time and from different sources should be done only with the utmost of caution. Graphs and tables should typically be best read in series with equivalent statistics from the same source, in order to understand relative change, rather than assume their absolute truth.
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INTRODUCTION

“kul al-janayin janun wa-al-malek zaytoun”¹

“Gardens are maddening, and olives are the king.”²

“Qad tatamat’ bi-bayara burtiqal fi hayatak, wa-qad tatamat’ ibnak fi juz’ min hayathu bi-ha. Wa-lakanak tatamat’ alaan bi-ma tarakhu ajdakak lak wa-li-awladak wa-li-ahfad ahfadhum min al-zaytoun ila ma sha’ allah.”³

“You may enjoy an orange grove in your lifetime, and your son may enjoy it for part of his lifetime. But enjoy now what your forefathers left to you, and to your children, and to the descendents of their grandchildren — the olive tree — for as long as God wills.”


² See also Yusuf Ayyub Haddad, al-Mujtama’ wa-al-turath fi Filastin: qariyat al-Bassah (‘Akka: Dar al-Aswar, Mu’assasat al-Thaqafah al-Filastiniyah, 1987), 40. The quote is identical except this version drops the “kul” at the beginning.

³ All translations from Arabic, French, and Hebrew in the dissertation are the author’s. Literally, “all gardens are madness, and the king is olives;” modified to rhyme in English as the original does in Arabic.

³ al-Taher, Shajarat al-Zaytun, 66.
Figure 1. Landscape with olive trees near Tulkarm c. 1940. Photo from Israel State Archive [ISA] collection 137.5/12/12 D1-052, “Nof im etzai zayt shelyad Tul Karem.”

Figure 2. Olive trees along Jifna Road, Birzeit, 2013. The name of the town in Arabic (b’r zayt) literally means “a well of olive oil.” Photograph taken by author 13 June 2013, West Bank, Palestine. Note the stone terracing to retain soil parallel to the slope of the hill.
On 10 December 2014, a Palestinian minister named Ziad Abu Ein died after a confrontation with Israeli military and police forces guarding an Israeli settler outpost located on the land of the Palestinian village of Turmus‘ayyeh, near Ramallah. The primary intention behind the protest he led, along with European and Israeli solidarity activists, was to plant olive tree saplings, in support of Palestinian cultivators whose lands have been confiscated and whose olive trees have been cut down by the settlers. The last comment Abu Ein posted on his Facebook wall the night prior called out in Arabic to “all who love the land [ya kul man yu‘ashiq al-‘ard]” to participate, for a free Palestine. To defend the land, and to defend the local Palestinian farmers, the protesters had sought to plant olive saplings.

The olive tree has become a central symbol of Palestinian nationalism, signifying sumud or steadfastness. Its significance to contemporary Palestinian society, both culturally and economically, is unparalleled. Estimates of the planted area under olives in the last decade are around one million metric dunams. The olive tree is a dominant trope in Palestinian poetry and

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6 This is a conservative figure based on interviews with Palestinian agricultural officials and on the basis of the Palestinian Authority’s official statistics. See for example: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Agricultural Census 2010, Final Results* (Ramallah: Palestinian National Authority, 2012).

Development and activist statistics cited by journalists in more recent years put the figure closer to 1.1-1.2 million dunams. The first official PA agricultural censuses in the mid 2000s put the figure around 900,000 dunams, though the methodology was subsequently criticized and assumed to result in undercounting. For these earlier estimates, see Fares Fadl al-Jabi, *Shajarat al-zaytun* (Nablus: Zain, 2007), 238 for Ministry of Agriculture estimates from 1992-2006, showing an increase from around 750,000 to just over 900,000 dunams.
other forms of artistic expression. Economically, olives and olive oil are often the subject of
development programs, funded by international donors such as the European Union. Schools in
the West Bank give children time off to help their families with the annual olive harvest. The
central importance, materially and symbolically, of the olive and its products in relation to
Palestinians is so commonly understood that it is assumed to have always been this way. But my
research suggests only in very recent decades has this become the case, thanks to the
intensification of long-term trends over the course of the 20th century — the Palestinian
indigenous modernization of a deeper tradition of olive cultivation and its subsequent
politicization under Israeli occupation.

In the late Ottoman and early British Mandate periods, the products derived from the
Palestinian olive tree, especially olive oil and olive-oil soap, had become some of the most
lucrative goods for the fellahin or the peasants, especially those living in the hills of what is
today the West Bank. Olives and olive oil simultaneously remained key to peasant subsistence,
produced for one’s own consumption, offering a base of food security. The marketing of the
olive tree’s roughly biannual surplus as compact, durable, storable, and tradable goods represents
an adaptation to the unpredictability of olive culture.7 The Palestinian city of Nablus supplied
Egypt and the urban centers of Greater Syria, for example, with its highly regarded Nabulsi
olive-oil soap. These patterns of trade have been documented back millennia, and are particularly

7 Although Orientalists and colonial officials in the early 20th century blamed peasant
practices for the extreme variation in olive crops, agricultural engineers and botanists now
recognize the inherent, roughly biannual cycle of olive productivity. Linguistically, Palestinians
have long referred to this pattern in colloquial Arabic as masiyah versus shalatunah years (the
former for bumper crops, the latter for barren years of meager production). Weather patterns,
particularly the timing and intensity of seasonal winds and rainfall, impact production
substantially as well.
well attested in the accounts of Medieval Arab geographers and other travelers. Further back, the holy texts of the Abrahamic faiths contain numerous references to the olive tree and olive oil. By the late-Ottoman period, circa the 19th century, the vast majority of Palestinians were rural-dwelling, subsistence-level cultivators, living in the hills for safety — relying on the cash generated by surplus olive oil production to pay taxes, and on the nutritional value of olive oil in a largely meatless peasant diet.

At the end of World War II, British officials conservatively estimated that Palestine had over 600,000 dunams of planted olive trees — over six million trees, which had been planted at a rate of about 150,000 trees (or 15,000 dunams) a year throughout much of the period that the British had held the League of Nation’s Mandate of Palestine (1923-1948). As documented in the first chapter of this dissertation, my research shows that this meant the area planted under olives had more than tripled since World War I. Thus, by the end of the Mandate, the olive tree was the dominant fruit tree of Palestine by planted area.

Furthermore, since the Nakba (catastrophe) of 1948, Palestinian olive groves have roughly doubled again in planted area. While activists have rightly cited the real, growing threats of Israel settlements in the West Bank, continued Palestinian expansion of olive groves has more

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8 Guy Le Strange, trans. Palestine Under the Moslems: A Description of Syria and the Holy Land, from A.D. 650 to 1500, translated from the works of the Mediaeval Arab Geographers (1890), 16, for the 985 CE account of al-Muqaddasi; 87-88, for the account of Nasir-i-Khusraw in 1047 CE; and Shams al-Din al-Ansari al-Damashqi circa 1300 CE, 10; 513.

9 The surat al-nour in the Qur’an refers to the olive tree as “a blessed tree, its olives neither of the east nor of the west” (Qur’an 24:15). In the Hebrew Bible, see for example, Deuteronomy 8:8; 28:40; 32:13, among about 25 other references to the olive tree, and more than 160 references to olive oil, according to the Old Dominion University Bible Plants Study, <http://ww2.odu.edu/~lmusselm/plant/bible/>.

10 The area under olives in the mid-to-late 1940s was more than double, and nearly triple, the area planted with the better-known Jaffa orange, which owed much of its fame to being marketed abroad (and being turned into Jaffa cakes in England).
than compensated for these losses, even when taking into account tree uprootings and grove burnings, notable acts of violence that spiked in prominence during the First Intifada (1987-1993). Expansion in West Bank olive planting between 1948-1967 under Jordanian rule had previously helped to compensate for the gradual diminishment of the olive sector within the Arab-majority, Israeli-annexed Western Galilee. And the West Bank olive sector has only increased in significance since 1967.

The story of Palestinian planting is thus in many ways an exceptional success story, of the agency, resilience, and rootedness of olive cultivators in the West Bank in particular, with an almost too obvious symbolic parallel to the olive tree itself. It is essential to note that the continued growth of olives, as well as the accelerated adoption of high-tech olive oil presses in the 1980s and 1990s, was not the intended result of the policies of occupying authorities. The expansion of olive groves and the increasing economic importance of the olive sector is due primarily, if not solely, to Palestinians themselves.

While the post-1967 Israeli occupation differs in significant ways from the political and legal structures of earlier periods, there are strong continuities within Palestinian society and the

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11 Settlements have resulted in closures and the usurpation of land, and a tangle of related complications, which in recent decades have included “price-tag” acts of violence and vandalism, as well as the construction of the Security Barrier/Apartheid Wall, used in part for strategic border-drawing purposes across the Green Line within the West Bank. As far back as the early 1980s, Meron Benvenisti famously described the progress of de facto annexation at “five minutes to midnight,” in terms of the critical mass of settlers in the occupied territories, while he was heading a research effort called the West Bank Database Project housed at the American Enterprise Institute. For a summary, see Anthony Lewis, “5 Minutes to Midnight,” New York Times, 1 November 1982.

For a striking image and example of this solidarity activist strategy, see “800,000 olive trees uprooted, 33 Central Parks,” <http://visualizingpalestine.org/visuals/olive-harvest>. The figure cited is from a 2011 Oxfam olive harvest fact sheet. This figure would amount to about 80,000 dunams — roughly equivalent to a decade or less of planting at the typical rate since the Israeli occupation began in 1967.
political economy based on agriculture. The expansion of olive cultivation under both the Jordanian and the British Mandate periods was likewise due to the initiative of Palestinians themselves, and not to the governments. Under the Israeli period as well as previous periods of Jordanian, British, and even Ottoman rule, centralizing impulses were constantly checked by a variety of factors, leaving significant gaps for the agency of ordinary Palestinians and offering privileged roles for local intermediaries, whose indigenous knowledge was essential — and increasingly so — for the state as its ambitions expanded. While this dissertation, as a work of history, primarily relies upon the documents of state archives, I seek throughout to decenter the state and state policy from the narrative of modern Palestinian history in order to show how and why Palestinians acted and could shape economic structures.

Drawing on agricultural, forestry, and economic records and rare published primary sources in Arabic, English, French and Hebrew located in Israel, Jordan, and the West Bank, as well as the American, British, and French diplomatic archives, this dissertation analyses the changes and continuities in Palestinian society through the lens of the planting and the cultivation of the olive tree as well as the processing, consumption, and sale of olive-derived commodities — mainly olive oil and olive oil soap. In order to reinforce claims to the land, Palestinians have symbolically nationalized the olive’s cultivation and consumption. This was relatively easy to do, in contrast to alternative symbols like the Jaffa orange, in no small part because olive trees have long been closely identified with their Arab Palestinian fellahin
cultivators. By the end of the Mandate, some 99 percent of olive-planted land was owned by Arab Palestinians.\textsuperscript{12}

The choice of the olive tree and its products as predominant symbols of rootedness and steadfastness have also resulted in part from the nature of the olive tree itself, with its hardiness and ability to survive even in relatively adverse circumstances. This is epitomized by a well-known image (see Figure 3) from the First Intifada, circa 1990, in which a Palestinian woman clings to the trunk of a brutally cut olive tree, sobbing at its injury.\textsuperscript{13} The inscription in Arabic under the photograph, ascribed to Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, reads: “\textit{La‘araf al-zaytoun gharishu, l-sar al-zayt dam ‘an} [If the olive tree knew its planter, its olive oil would turn into tears].” Yet closer examination brings the potential for hope: a sprig, likely missed in the savage pruning, remains at the top of the broken trunk where other larger branches have been broken and splintered off. The woman remains physically attached to the tree, despite the looming presence of soldiers in the background. The photograph thus resonates on multiple levels, documenting not only the tragic injustice of the Israeli occupation, but also the passionate attachment of Palestinians to the land in response. It is a prime example of passive resistance, also known as \textit{sumud} or steadfastness.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{12} A Survey of Palestine: Prepared in December 1945 and January 1946 for the Information of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, vol. 1 (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1991), 314. By contrast, the Jaffa orange had been cultivated almost equally by Jewish Palestinians and Arab Palestinians alike; after 1948, most Arab-owned orange plantations were taken over, making the Jaffa orange an Israeli product — and an object of nostalgia for exiled Palestinians from the coastal areas like Ghassan Kanafani, as in the title of his \textit{‘Ard al-Burtugal al-Hazin [The land of the sad orange]} (Beirut: al-Itihad al-‘Amm li-Talabat Filastin, 1962).

\textsuperscript{13} The poster was originally produced by the Palestinian Peasants Union: “If the tree knew,” <https://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/if-the-tree-knew>. According to the research of the curator of the Palestine Poster Project Archive, the original Darwish poem used a different verb in the present tense (\textit{yudhkar}), which would change the meaning to “if the tree recalls.” See Figure 3 for an example of the poster.
\end{flushright}
Figure 3. “If the olive tree knew” poster, c. 1990. Photograph taken by author 19 May 2014 of a Palestinian Peasants Union poster hanging in the offices of the Tulkarm Agricultural Directorate (regional office of the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture), West Bank, Palestine.
Furthermore, the West Bank — long the heartland of olive cultivation — has slowly emerged as the self-declared State of Palestine. While the olive industry within Israel suffered severe setbacks owing to the events of 1948 and overt discrimination against Palestinian producers in the early years of the state, West Bank olive cultivation has continued to expand. In addition to planting, West Bank Palestinians have invested heavily in modernizing olive processing, building new presses and importing machinery. Economically, a good crop can contribute as much as a quarter of the value of the territory’s total agricultural production, and is routinely cited as the chief factor in the wild fluctuations of the West Bank’s GDP.

As a result of these developments, the olive tree in the Palestinian West Bank is by far the single-most dominant plant in terms of cultivated area. Yet there has been no historical analysis of the topic in English. This is also despite its economic weight and political symbolism, as a sigil of sumud or steadfastness, which is unparalleled in Palestinian nationalism.

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14 This recent development has so far excluded the Hamas-controlled and Israeli-besieged Gaza Strip, long assumed to be part of an autonomous Palestinian entity within the framework of a two-state solution. Gaza, which was administered by Egypt from 1948-1967, has been essentially severed from the West Bank since the Second Intifada (particularly with the Israeli unilateral withdrawal and evacuation of settlements under Ariel Sharon, and the 2006 electoral victory and 2007 coup by Hamas). Olive cultivation in the Gaza Strip has historically been marginal. The dominant crop before an overwhelming flood of refugees in 1948 was barley; after 1948, it was citrus. After 1967, Gaza citrus was reexported through Israel and the West Bank, until the industry withered under myriad restrictions and the loss of its primary external market, Iran, with the 1979 revolution.

Research questions

Palestinian history has too often been narrated without Palestinians and their voices, their agency minimized within academic histories told primarily from the perspectives of the more powerful colonizers and governments that have produced and managed archives and records. Conversely, other disciplines such as anthropology have focused predominantly on the experiences of the displaced, centered on the modes of humanitarian intervention and the rise of Palestinian nationalism in refugee camps. How have Palestinians who stayed in historic Palestine coped with the tribulations of the 20th century? How can we write Palestinian history from a rural perspective?

This dissertation uses the olive tree and its products in Israel/Palestine as a lens for writing social history, in order to understand the political, economic, and cultural changes of the 20th century. On the material side, this lens has enabled me to explore a number of crucial questions linked to political economy: How did agriculture — a rhetorically privileged sector upon which various governments based their legitimacy and the vast majority of the population historically made their livings — develop or decline under the different political entities of the Ottoman Empire, British Mandatory Palestine, the State of Israel, and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan? In particular, where, how, when, and why have Palestinians planted olive groves and established olive oil presses and olive oil soap factories?

Periodization and unit of analysis

In order to answer these questions, I needed to reconstruct the changing material conditions of olive cultivation in historic Palestine (today, Israel and the Palestinian territories)
across the 20th century, beginning in the late 19th century and concluding with the end of the First Intifada and the onset of the Oslo period in 1993. The major olive-producing areas in historic Palestine were and continue to be the Palestinian-inhabited Western Galilee and the north-central West Bank — hill country, where other crops often cannot be grown, at least not intensively. Although there has been some expansion farther south in recent decades under Israeli occupation, the traditional heartland of olive cultivation largely reflects average precipitation patterns, with olive trees concentrated where rainfall is sufficient for their needs. In the hills of the Galilee and the West Bank, most Palestinians were small farmers for whom the olive tree and its products constituted a central means of subsistence and revenue generation in times of surplus. Historically, the socioeconomic structures of the villages in these two regions had more in common with each other than they did with the coastal areas.16 Unlike the plains — which were better suited to consolidation under large landholders, as well as to agricultural mechanization, intensive irrigation, and the cultivation of field crops — the hills, for the most part, remained the domain of smallholder peasants who relied on patchwork parcels of land, densely planted with fruit trees (first and foremost the olive, with other crops often interplanted).

Bridging traditional political periodizations also allows us to reevaluate interpretations of the development of agriculture and forestry not only under the Ottomans and the British, but also under later Israeli and Jordanian rule. Furthermore, it is intended to shift the emphasis away from the role of the central government, instead focusing on the relationship between state and society, with the intention of restoring the agency of ordinary people.

16 The divide could be considered not only socioeconomic but also cultural, and it is aptly captured in the poetically titled Mountain against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture, by Salim Tamari (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).
Overall, the project’s periodization seeks to draw out the often-overlooked continuities in Palestinian society, rather than reinforce assumptions of immediate and total ruptures with changes in political administration. By taking olive-cultivating Palestinian families as my unit of analysis, I aim to restore ordinary Palestinians to their own history, neither as objects of colonial intervention nor as nationalist symbols, but as living agents attempting to deal with complex, challenging, and changing conditions.¹⁷

By bringing a comparative angle to my study, I sought to find benchmarks to assess the changes to society and to the particular agricultural subsector of my study across traditional ruptures. For example, too often either the Ottoman or the Jordanian periods of rule are condemned by those studying other periods (such as the Mandate or the Israeli period respectively) as eras of neglect, backwardness, and stagnation. Yet my research has shown that the growth in the Mandate rural economy (about which British colonial officials had boasted) was rooted in the late-Ottoman era. Without bridging the gaps of different periods, scholars risk taking such claims at face value, since they do not have the necessary points of comparison to

¹⁷ In doing so, I am following a significant number of anthropological studies that have documented the experiences of refugees after the events of 1948 until today, with a strong subfield examining refugee camps both inside historic Palestine (such as Bethlehem) or outside (such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria to varying extents). See the works of Rosemary Sayigh and Julie Peteet in particular. For a recent example specifically concerning everyday Palestinian agency in UNRWA camps in Lebanon, see Nadya Hajj, Protection amid chaos: the creation of property rights in Palestinian refugee camps (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017). In addition, Laura Robson, “Refugees and the Case for International Authority in the Middle East: The League of Nations and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East Compared,” International Journal of Middle East Studies 49:4 (November 2017), fn80, 644, helpfully lists examples of the relatively extensive anthropological literature on Palestinian refugee camps, predominantly in Lebanon.
assess their validity. The Jordanian period of rule over the West Bank in particular has been a major lacuna in the subfield of Palestinian studies in general, owing mainly to issues of source availability. After the West Bank was annexed by Israel in 1967, Palestinian agriculture boomed in the 1970s. A huge growth in olive production in particular was cited. Yet, olive trees take 10-15 years to begin bearing fruit. My research therefore indicates that some of the gains in the Israeli period must be attributed to late Jordanian policy, which provided the post-1967 administrative backbone. But even more importantly, the remainder of the gains should be attributed to West Bank Palestinians themselves. In other words, the Israeli occupational infrastructure depended almost entirely on the remnants of the Jordanian bureaucracy that in turn employed Palestinians and their local expertise. Thus the gains under Israeli occupation were largely the result of local Palestinian investment in the late Jordanian period.

**Broader significance**

Beyond bringing a comparative angle within the subfield of Palestinian studies by crossing traditional ruptures such as 1917, 1948, and 1967, this research can contribute to a reexamination of the larger question of state-society relations. Because scholars often use state archives to write their studies, there is always a risk of aggrandizing the role and the influence of the state, to the point that non-state actors seem to have no agency. By examining rural areas, where state influence was often sporadic at best, my dissertation seeks to highlight how ordinary individuals and families shaped state policy, rather than seeing policy as a diktat imposed from

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18 See chapter 5 for more on “imagined barrenness,” and see chapters 1 and 2 on the relationship between colonialist discourses and purported Ottoman-Arab failures to be good stewards of the land, particularly when it came to agriculture and forestry.
above. When state policy fails, this provides an opportunity to assess why. My research has shown that mundane, subtle, everyday resistance by non-state actors is often the reason.\textsuperscript{19} Governmentality, in particular under colonial arrangements, is typically more aspirational than hegemonic.\textsuperscript{20}

Furthermore, the more that the state seeks to survey, document, and control its subjects, a paradox arises, particularly in situations of colonial rule: the colonizer becomes ever-more dependent on subalterns and their indigenous knowledge. In addressing this relationship between foreign-born government officials and their locally born subordinates, I do not use the loaded label of collaboration. Instead, I propose a dynamic of resistance and cooperation within a field of unequal power relations. This applies to state-society relations in general as well, in that individual citizens, typically in consultation with their families, take decisions and cultivate relationships with the government when it suits their needs and interests.\textsuperscript{21}

In doing so, I am writing against what I would identify as an anti-modernist, anarchical mode of narrating the impact of modernity upon state-society relations.\textsuperscript{22} Critics of the modern developmentalist state rely on a combination of Foucauldian governmentality and Gramscian

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{21} On hegemony, see Antonio Gramsci and Joseph A. Buttigieg, \textit{Prison Notebooks} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).
  \item \textsuperscript{22} However, sometimes as in the case of the olive oil press microhistory in chapter 2, different families or even individuals within the same family try to use the state to intervene on their behalf and at the expense of others. In other words, state intervention can be manipulated or cajoled by non-state actors, or conversely the state can be avoided or ignored.
\end{itemize}}
hegemony to analyze how the state seeks to control its subjects or citizens. I worry that this mode, particularly when combined with the historian’s methods of writing based on the state archive, can force one into a Foucauldian trap in which one takes the state and its bureaucracies’ claims to hegemony at face value.\textsuperscript{23} I wish to instead emphasize state failures, rather than the inexorable domination of the rural periphery by the capital center.\textsuperscript{24} The modern state has frequently been more absent than present, which is why subjects must absorb the lessons of governmentality and learn to discipline themselves.\textsuperscript{25} But one need not discipline oneself only for the sake of the modern state, but for many other reasons, involving the individual and larger group units: namely, the family or the broader community, however defined. I also wish to point out the value judgments inherent in these modes of narrating the extension of state domination

\textsuperscript{23} I value the work of these theories immensely, and utilize them extensively throughout this dissertation whenever appropriate, but I believe it is important to point out their potential limitations and blind spots.

As one of the best-developed subfields within Middle East history, early modern and modern Egyptian history offers a number of examples of both the advantages and disadvantages of such an approach.


\textsuperscript{25} Michel Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish} (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).
over its people. Modernity can and should be criticized for its unintended consequences, but its benefits should not be lost sight of either. As with any change, there are tradeoffs.  

**Relationship to the literature**

In the early modern period, I found encouragement in Fernand Braudel’s *annales* school classic *Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Phillip II*, noting the olive as part of the trinity of crops marking the Mediterranean. Beyond the region, I found inspiration in the emphasis on material factors in social history and political economy. The following literature review first samples the literature relating to Palestinian olive culture specifically, then examines Palestinian historiography with respect to the urban/rural divide.

As I dug into archival documents, I began to see that the story of Palestinian olive cultivation in the 20th century remained untold and functioned in many ways as a synecdoche for the modern history of Palestinians as a whole, bridging work like Beshara Doumani’s on the early modern period — when, in a pre-monetary economy, commodities like olive oil were akin to liquid gold — to the present, when recent sociological and anthropological work has tended

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26 For example, the practice of quarantine has come in for extended criticism as an example of unjust tyranny. Yet prevention of the spread of plague and other epidemics is a prima facie good, even if it is wholly or entirely undermined by the early-modern state’s incompetent practices and the dilemmas and problems it created for the actors involved in shipping and ports in the Mediterranean.


to focus on the symbolism of particular types of trees in relation to Israeli and Palestinian nationalism.³⁰

Anthropologist Marisa Escribano titled her 1987 doctoral dissertation based on fieldwork in the West Bank, “The endurance of the olive tree,” which was completed circa the outbreak of the First Intifada.³¹ The intifada’s violent repression included the uprooting of olive trees, which brought international attention to Palestinian land defense strategies that relied on planting to prove continuous cultivation and offer legal protection from Israeli confiscation and settlement. By the time of the First Intifada, planting olive trees as a form of land defense had been common practice for over a decade, beginning with the politicization of planting in the 1970s.³² Legal historian Irus Braverman has gone so far as to term the Palestinian olive tree and the Israeli pine tree “planted flags” in the landscape.³³ In terms of the symbolic importance of the olive and its products, Carol Bardenstein has written comparative literary analyses of different types of trees and fruits to Israeli and Palestinian nationalism in poetry and literature.³⁴ Additionally, Anne

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³⁰ Palestinian studies, like the broader field of Middle East studies among others, has remained heavily influenced by the cultural turn begun in anthropology by Clifford Geertz among others, emphasizing how meaning is made. See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 2000). This is perhaps best exemplified in literary methods such as discourse analysis, popularized by Edward Said among others, whereby scholars examine the hidden politics and power relations embedded in texts. See Edward Said, *Orientalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).


³² On the shift from economic rationale to a nationalist calculus, or what I will call the politicization of planting, see chapter 6.


Meneley has analyzed the contemporary symbolism of Palestinian olive oil.\textsuperscript{35} Trees — especially the olive tree, whose associations with the Biblical and Israelite past have proved particularly alluring in the context of the Holy Land — are often both literally and symbolically at the root of national projects.\textsuperscript{36}

Palestinians themselves have published a good deal of material, particularly in the vein of folkloric studies to preserve traditional practices, sayings, and traditions related to disappearing agrarian modes of life.\textsuperscript{37} The olive tree in contemporary Palestinian society has many nicknames, often religiously inspired: \textit{al-shajarah al-mubarakah, shajarat al-nour, shajarat al-faqir} [blessed tree, tree of light, tree of the poor].\textsuperscript{38} Additionally, in recent decades, Palestinian agricultural cultural recall in the present,} Mieke Bal et al ed. (Hanover: Dartmouth College/University Press of New England, 1999).


\textsuperscript{36} This symbolism, of planting roots in the land, was clearly not lost on the early Zionists. On the fifth anniversary of Theodor Herzl’s death in 1909, for example, the Jewish National Fund made an appeal for donations to plant a “Herzl forest” of 100,000 olive trees. Central Zionist Archive [hereafter CZA], H1/3461. In no small part owing to the experience of World War I (which the Herzl forest of olive trees evidently did not survive), Zionist organizations quickly moved away from planting olive trees, in favor of faster-growing species like the pine, leaving the olive tree as the almost exclusive domain of Arab Palestinians. For an organizational history of the Jewish National Fund and its work in creating extensive forest plantations, see Alon Tal, \textit{All the Trees of the Forest: Israel’s Woodlands from the Bible to the Present} (Yale University Press, 2013). The JNF’s forestry efforts have resulted in extensive pine plantations, and to a lesser extent plantations of broadleaf trees. These new forests have often served to erase depopulated Palestinian villages and create “security” barriers, such as the greenbelt planted around Jerusalem after 1967. For more on the political purposes of Zionist and Israeli forestation, especially in the Jerusalem area, see Shaul Cohen, \textit{The Politics of Planting: Israeli-Palestinian Competition for Control of Land in the Jerusalem Periphery} (University of Chicago Press, 1993).

\textsuperscript{37} Nasser Soumi, \textit{L’olivier et la Palestine : une passion charnelle} (Actes Sud, 2010).

engineers and botanists have published technical and scientific studies of the olive tree in Arabic. However, there has been no archive-based historical study of the changing importance of the olive tree and its products over time. The olive in Israel and Palestine offers an unparalleled index of the changes to rural society — often marginalized politically, and by extension historically, owing to the disparity in sources for writing rural, as opposed to urban, histories.

While the history of Palestine may be exceptionally well represented in the broader field of Middle East history (largely thanks to popular interest in the post-1948 Arab-Israeli conflict and related elite political actors), historians of Palestine have to a certain extent focused more on the upper and middle urban classes at the expense of the study of peasants and the countryside, the latter of whom remained overwhelmingly important demographically even in the first half of the 20th century. Peasants are defined as rural-dwelling, settled, subsistence-level farmers deriving most of their income from agricultural production, whether as smallholders or tenant farmers or through other less formal arrangements. Despite constituting the vast majority of indigenous inhabitants, rural middle and lower classes in the modern period

have attracted less scholarly attention than their urban counterparts, such as the emerging urban merchant and working classes, who increasingly wrote and preserved sources in the forms of diaries and memoirs.\(^{43}\)

One important exception is the work of Ya’akov Firestone, who comprehensively documented the changing political economy of land tenancy across the late Ottoman and Mandate periods.\(^{44}\) His work on contracts and various forms of property sharing and coownership has been unjustly overlooked in recent scholarship.\(^{45}\)

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\(^{43}\) See for example the numerous primary sources edited by Salim Tamari that have also been abridged and translated into English, including the diaries and memoirs of Jerusalemites Ihsan Turjman and Wasif al-Jawhariyah, which are cited in full in chapter 1, as well as the diary of Hebronite Sami ‘Amr: Sami ‘Amr, Kimberly Katz, and Salim Tamari. *A young Palestinian’s diary, 1941-1945: the life of Sami ‘Amr* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).


\(^{45}\) This is perhaps owing to the timing and style of publication, as well as the exigencies of academia, but also in small part because he unfortunately preferred to refer to Jabal Nablus as “Northern Samaria,” a Biblically-derived term that has become identified with annexationist advocates of a Greater Israel that incorporates the land occupied after the 1967 conquests. For a reappraisal of his contributions, which received renewed attention after the publication of Ya’akov Firestone, “The land-equalizing musha’ village: a reassessment,” in *Notes on Ottoman Palestine 1800-1914: Studies in economic and social history*, Gad G. Gilbar ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 91-130, see Martha Mundy, “La propriété dite mushâ’ en Syrie : à propos des travaux de Ya’akov Firestone,” in *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée, N°79-80* (1996), 273-287.
But in general, if addressed in most histories, rural areas are dealt with as subordinate hinterlands of urban areas, whose wealth and hierarchies are derived from their relationships to the village peripheries. In the introduction to his 1995 reference work, *Aʿlam Filastin fi awakhir al-ʿahd al-ʿUthmani* [Notables of Palestine at the end of the Ottoman period, 1800-1918], which summarizes extensive research into *tabaqat* or short biographies of notables as well as local shariʿa court records, ʿAdel Mannaʿ acknowledged the difficulties of writing the history of the society as a whole using such sources.46 While perhaps 90 percent of Palestinians were rural dwellers, only 45 of the 216 notables (less than 21 percent) in the work were rural *sheikhs*.47 In response to criticisms regarding the lack of representativity, Mannaʿ argued in the book’s second edition that it was the intellectual and cultural urban elite that performed essential administrative and governing functions.48 In particular, he noted a handful of Jerusalem families that he painted as permanent fixtures in judicial and religious positions.49 Over half of the work is dedicated to

47 Ibid., 22.
48 Ibid., 19.
49 The court records consulted more heavily for his 2008 study, ʿAdel Mannaʿ, *Liwaʿ al-Quds fi awasit al-ʿahd al-ʿUthmani : al-idarah wa-al-mujtamaʿ, mundhu awasit al-qarn al-thamin ʿashar hatta hamlat Muhammad ʿAli Basha sanat 1831* [The District of Jerusalem in the Mid-Ottoman Period: Administration and Society, from the Mid-18th Century to the Campaign of Muhammad ʿAli Pasha in 1831] (Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyah, 2008), help to paint a more accurate picture of the rise and fall of various factions and families within the Jerusalemite nobility, which was as dynamic as the changing Nabulsi hierarchies documented by Doumani over a similar time period across the 18th and 19th centuries.
Jerusalemites. Recent scholarship has contributed to alternative urban localities, for both coastal and interior cities.

As elsewhere in the world, peasants tended to appear to the government (and thereafter in governmental records) either as anonymous statistics contributing to agricultural production, or as irrational rioters periodically perpetuating senseless violence. Even from a more sympathetic Palestinian nationalist perspective, the masses briefly (and ultimately tragically) mobilize during the Great Revolt of 1936-1939, but are criticized for lacking consciousness and leadership.

The growing romanticization of the olive tree and its products in recent decades by Palestinians is closely related to the nationalist tendency, critiqued by Ted Swedenburg, to idolize the fellah or peasant, who has been appropriated as a national symbol for purposes of mobilization and unification. The peasant as a reified symbol, created and claimed by educated urban elites with no relation to agriculture themselves, becomes the bearer of the nation and its

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50 Mannaʿ blames this as well, in part, on the loss of Islamic court records in the Nakba from the urban centers of the Galilee: Safad, Tiberias, Nazareth, and Acre. Mannaʿ, Aʿlam Filastin, 21.

51 On Nablus, see Doumani and Seikaly, op. cit. For Ramla and other major interior cities, see Judith E. Tucker, In the House of the Law: Gender and Islamic Law in Ottoman Syria and Palestine (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). On Jaffa and Haifa, see Iris Agmon, Family & Court: Legal Culture and Modernity in Late Ottoman Palestine (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2006); see also Mark LeVine, Overthrowing Geography: Jaffa, Tel Aviv, and the Struggle for Palestine, 1880-1948 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

52 Scott, Weapons of the Weak.


traditions. The romanticized vision of rural life, represented by the peasant, becomes a way to cope with the stresses of modern times. For anticolonial struggles in particular, seeking to produce a cohesive nationalism as a means of uniting and mobilizing a people, this agrarian romanticism becomes a way to paper over contradictions in society, erasing difference in favor of a homogenized vision of a national culture.

As a result of this continued ambivalence toward the fellahin, combined with the relative disparity in sources for writing urban as opposed to rural history, the vast majority of Palestinians throughout the 20th century have too often remained an undifferentiated mass. The late Mandate period in the wake of the revolt is exemplary of these tendencies, in treating the rural masses as objects of governmental policy. This is partly thanks to the accessibility of the seemingly meticulous records of the British bureaucracy, whose knowledge of Palestinian society became increasingly deep and widespread as time went on. As a result, the dominant modes for studying rural areas in Palestine center on British policy, with significant strands looking at rural education, rural political administration, and, above all, British rural

56 There is another strong parallel here to the way that women are made to bear the mantle of “tradition” in modernizing and urbanizing societies. See for example Frances Hasso, “Modernity and Gender in Arab Accounts of the 1948 and 1967 Defeats,” International Journal of Middle East Studies 32:4 (November 2000), 491-510; see also Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

57 As chapter 3 explains, the high watermark of British control was the second half of the Mandate, after the revolt of 1936-1939 was crushed through a brutal counterinsurgency campaign and in particular World War II, during which the government assumed special wartime powers that persisted in practice afterward to varying degrees.

58 Harold Boughton Allen, “Rural Education and Welfare in the Middle East,” (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1946); Abdul Latif Tibawi, Arab education in mandatory Palestine; a study of three decades of British administration (London, Luzac, 1956); Naomi Shepherd, Ploughing Sand: British Rule in Palestine 1917-1948 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999); Islah Jad, “Rereading the British Mandate in Palestine: Gender and the
economic and development policies,\textsuperscript{60} with special attention to the land question.\textsuperscript{61} While all have offered important insights in these respective areas, the ultimate conclusion of this work comes as no surprise to anyone familiar with colonial endeavors: British claims to munificence toward their wards do not stand up to scrutiny. In nearly every area of rural policy, lofty colonial rhetoric about British efforts to help develop and otherwise support the peasantry resulted in few if any gains — instead directly or indirectly leading to worsening conditions in the countryside.

\textbf{Methodology}

What is needed, therefore, is a new approach to the study of rural areas that moves beyond the extensively and repeatedly demonstrated failure of state policies. One possible answer is to shift the perspective away from a top-down state-centric view and attempt to write the history of this era from below, in which the \textit{fellahin} are actors with agency, rather than the mere objects of policymakers. I take inspiration from the moral economy approach first developed by E.P. Thompson and his school of Marxist humanist, new social historians,
particularly in its development outside Europe within the realm of peasant studies, and also from the Subaltern Studies school. Throughout the dissertation, I seek to reinterpret the state archive, to read it against the grain,\(^6^2\) in order to understand the motivations of previously denigrated actors, with a particular focus on a variety of forms of resistance, whether blatant or disguised. Such resistance demonstrates the agency of subaltern or subordinate-class actors, their determining roles in their own history, often out of sight of the state.

For Palestine in much of the 20\(^{th}\) century, the \textit{fellah} can serve as a figure akin to Thompson’s Luddite in the self-made English working class: derided for his backwardness and ignorance, traditionally cast as irrationally violent in the face of the modern and inevitable obsolescence as a result of technological innovation.\(^6^3\) Marxist humanists sought to reverse this traditional interpretation, and instead sympathize with groups that had been marginalized historically. Conservative histories cast the rabble, when roused, as a mob, characterizing moments of mass discontent as “riots.” The work of the new social historians, perhaps most enduringly in the form of E.P. Thompson’s conception of the “moral economy,” sought to understand moments of popular mobilization as articulations of legitimate grievances, rather than as irrational outbursts of violence.\(^6^4\)

Scholars studying areas outside of industrializing Europe quickly turned their attention to peasants.\(^6^5\) James C. Scott employed a moral economy framework in understanding peasant

\(^{6^2}\) In the parlance of Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the archival grain: Epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

\(^{6^3}\) Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*.

\(^{6^4}\) Thompson, “The Moral Economy,” 79.

\(^{6^5}\) Wolf, *Peasant Wars*, argued that peasants revolt in order to preserve the status quo, when threatened by new commercial or legal practices introduced by external forces like colonialism or a centralizing state. While peasants do not need outsiders (the demagogues
rebellions in relation to conditions of economic deprivation and hardship in Southeast Asia. In addition, the Subaltern Studies school that developed out of South Asia has much in common with English historians’ attempts to write history from below. Both schools are Marxist in inspiration, and owe a debt to Antontio Gramsci “in trying to move away from deterministic, Stalinist readings of Marx,” with the terms hegemony and subaltern themselves taken from Gramsci directly. Like the Marxist humanists, subaltern studies is concerned with rescuing socially subordinate groups “from the enormous condescension of posterity.” Finally, and perhaps most importantly, “[t]he declared aim of Subaltern Studies was to produce historical analyses in which the subaltern groups were viewed as the subjects of history.”

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Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant,* argued against scholars who sought to explain “unrest” in the region by appeal to culturalist explanations, instead positing that peasant rebellions were responses to reasonable economic grievances. The primary motivation for peasant action is not profit, but security. Therefore, most decision-making processes of farmers are governed by risk aversion. When local safety nets are dismantled by colonialism and the post-colonial state — through the imposition of instruments like fixed rents, coercive tax collection by agents of an impersonal state, a cash-based export-oriented economy — the resulting pressures can destroy the viability of agricultural communities. One result is migration to urban areas to seek wage labor. In particular, Scott notes, areas subject to highly variable harvests are most likely to produce revolts once fixed levels of taxes and rents have been imposed.


Ibid, 14.

Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class,* 12

Chakrabarty, 14.
In order to bypass some of the theoretical problems of both peasant studies and Subaltern Studies — owing to conceptual difficulties related to debates over peasant rationality for the former,\textsuperscript{71} and the dilemma of voicelessness and agency for the latter\textsuperscript{72} — I have chosen to emphasize the value of indigenous knowledge, which in the case of Palestinian agriculture and forestry is expressed in the persistence of traditional patterns of cultivation and the failure of

\textsuperscript{71} In response to Scott’s work in particular, Timothy Mitchell in “Everyday Metaphors of Power,” *Theory and Society* 19:5 (Oct. 1990), 545-577, highlighted the crucial flaw of the moral-economy approach to peasant studies, which is its reliance on the figure of the rational peasant, in the absence of evidence from the colonial archive. On the rational peasant see Samuel L. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). Mitchell emphasized the contingency of rationality, since what is “rational” for a given community is dependent on context and on hegemonic relations. Scott, particularly in using *Weapons of the Weak*, may have failed to note the more subtle ways in which hegemony shapes their decision-making and subsequent actions. I would argue in response that Mitchell may go too far in arguing for the totalizing impact of hegemony, especially in light of the peasantry’s distance from urban centers of control and from state institutions in general. Without access to education and without direct state control of religious institutions, how does the peasant learn to discipline himself in the way desired by the state? Mitchell does not explain how his hegemonic vision of governmentality extends to the peasant. Nor does his critique answer why the peasant nevertheless revolts from time to time.

\textsuperscript{72} I will use subaltern in this dissertation in its original technical sense as a subordinate indigenous cadre in the colonial apparatus. Its usage in the Subaltern Studies school raises the perilous question of who, precisely, can be called or characterized as subaltern, which is a debate that threatens to derail any analysis that uses the term as an organizing category of analysis. Gyan Prakash, writing on the “Impossibility of Subaltern History,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 1:2 (2000), 287-294, acknowledged that the subaltern history project may have been doomed from the start, owing to the inherent contradictions of the school’s framing (287). This dilemma is most famously captured by Gayatri Spivak’s rhetorical posing of the question, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg eds. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313, in which the definition of subalterity is ultimately tautological: no, the subaltern cannot speak, because a subaltern is one who cannot speak. Where then does this leave the scholar who attempts to give voice to the voiceless? Prakash argues this failure was recognized from the start: “subaltern” inherently connotes a “minor” position, which cannot simultaneously be characterized as a “full-blooded subject-agent” (287). In section three of chapter 2, I use class to attempt to differentiate between the relative power and agency of different groups of Palestinians, who are subaltern to varying degrees.
paternalistic colonial policy to disrupt these practices.\textsuperscript{73} The advantage to an approach emphasizing indigenous knowledge is that, rather than pointing to the figure of the rational peasant, one can point to documented practice. When it comes to indigenous knowledge, actions speak louder than words. Peasant practice, particularly in the form of olive tree planting, offers a concrete, tangible expression of Palestinian agency.

But, how can we reconstruct past practice? Anthropologists have typically turned to fieldwork, since ethnography and oral histories offer one avenue, as do village histories and folkloric studies.\textsuperscript{74} I have turned predominantly to technical studies of agricultural practices published in Arabic in the West Bank.\textsuperscript{75} I then use these sources to help reinterpret the state archives. Rather than merely speculating on the silences of the colonial archive, we can not only

\textsuperscript{73} Arun Agrawal in “Dismantling the Divide Between Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge.” Development and Change (1995), 413-439 and Environmentality: technologies of government and the making of subjects (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) defines indigenous knowledge as contextual and contingent, thus avoiding Mitchell’s critique of the moral economy approach’s dependence on the figure of the rational peasant. Agrawal emphasizes as well the hegemonic and communal nature of indigenous knowledge, which reflects the economic, social, cultural, ideological, and belief systems in which it is found.

\textsuperscript{74} On village histories, see Rochelle Davis, Palestinian village histories: geographies of the displaced (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011). See literature review above for examples of the other types of sources mentioned.

\textsuperscript{75} al-Taher, Farhat-Nasser, and al-Jabi op. cit. In addition to these three, previously cited, the work of Hisham Awartani is cited extensively in chapter 6, both his dissertation on rainfed agriculture in the occupied West Bank and the publications of the institute he founded at an-Najah National University in Nablus, the Rural Research Centre. Their biographies fittingly serve almost as capsule histories of the 20\textsuperscript{th}-century West Bank Palestinian experience. Ali Nasuh al-Taher, Sumayyeh Farhat-Nasser, and Hisham Awartani were trained in Europe, with al-Taher educated in France, Farhat-Nasser in Germany, and Awartani in the United Kingdom, while Fares Fadl al-Jabi studied at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem All four returned to the West Bank to serve in various capacities as agricultural experts in olive cultivation: al-Taher rose to prominence in the Mandate Palestine bureaucracy and ended his career as the Jordanian undersecretary of agriculture; Farhat-Nasser spent her career teaching at the newly established Birzeit University; Awartani at an-Najah and the RRC; and al-Jabi in the agricultural directorate of Tulkarm, later moving to the non-profit sector.
better identify these silencings with the help of non-governmental sources, but also then use these sources as a basis to read against the grain of the state archive. If peasants are only to be found in the archive as anonymous statistics, then these statistics deserve as much if not more scrutiny than narrative records, owing to their veneer of objectivity as hard data. Statistics frequently indicate a bureaucracy under pressure to justify its existence in the face of budgetary constraints, particularly in a colonial context. Statistics offer a seemingly objective demonstration of the government’s capacity to surveil its subjects. But statistics can often say more about the government and its priorities than they do about the society under surveillance. The works of Palestinian agricultural experts help to illustrate the gaps in governmental methodologies, and above all the dependence of the modern state on subalterns and their local expertise as a form of indigenous knowledge. Statistics on olive tree planting, annual crops, and on olive industrial processing and marketing can help to elucidate some of the most important developments in the 20th century when it comes to the rural Palestinian political economy, particularly in highlighting the gaps of governmental knowledge and control — wherein Palestinians could, and did, assert their agency.

In conclusion: Within the limited historiography of rural Palestine and its agricultural economy, the dominant unit of analysis has been state policy toward the peasantry and the


countryside, which has been deemed an abysmal failure. This dissertation seeks to show precisely why it failed in certain areas or succeeded in others, particularly in relation to the olive sector. After analyzing both the possible merits and the pitfalls of using either a moral economy or a subaltern framework to write the rural history of Palestine, this dissertation proposes an alternative approach that would reconstruct and reconsider the indigenous knowledge of the peasantry and aim to reinsert the Palestinian peasant into the center of this story as the central actor, rather than as the passive object of colonial policy. Such an approach suggests a range of unconventional published primary sources for reconstructing indigenous knowledge through studies of traditional peasant practices, which can in turn be used to interrogate state archives, in particular state statistics. In the course of my research, I examined governmental documents related to agriculture and forestry as well as petitions, letters, and telegrams from businesses and farmers preserved in the archives, wherever extant and accessible. In the absence of a Palestinian national archive, I located these documents in American, British, Israeli, French, Jordanian, and Palestinian archives and libraries located in the cities of Washington DC, London, Jerusalem, Paris, Nantes, Amman, Ramallah, Nablus and Tulkarm.78

**Dissertation structure, chapter summaries, and sources**

This dissertation is structured chronologically, beginning with the late Ottoman period. The first chapter, bridging the turn of the 19th into the 20th century and then documenting the

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78 The mixture of local and state archives located in the region helps to compensate for the lack of a centralized Palestinian archive, which would have its own silences and silencings. Foreign diplomatic archives are essential to covering the many gaps in the historical record that cannot be addressed using local and state archives in the region alone, particularly owing to the legacy of colonialism and the still-disparate power relations between former colonies and former colonizers.
decade surrounding the First World War, is based on personal papers found at the Library of Congress, local Ottoman-era municipal records in Arabic, diaries of Palestinians and foreign diplomats, and American, British, and French diplomatic records. It focuses on the transition

79 The question of pre-war conditions has remained unanswered in the literature, owing largely to the lack of late-Ottoman statistics for quantitative historians to compare to Mandate-era benchmarks. One Zionist source published at the end of the First World War estimated that in 1909-1910 there were some 3.6 million trees in the Jerusalem mutasarrafiah alone (so not including the sanjaks of Acre and Nablus). The author does not cite sources for this information, but the bibliography lists contemporary trade and consular reports from Western diplomats. Based on my research in chapter 1, using both local and consular sources from the late 18th and early 19th century, this is probably double the actual planted area for the Jerusalem governorate at the time. See Arthur Ruppin, Syria: an economic survey. Trans. Nellie Straus (New York: The Provisional Zionist Committee, 1918), 19. The work was originally published in German in Berlin in 1917.

The Ottoman statistics on agriculture circa 1910 that I have reviewed indicate that the central authorities did not record olive crops or yields for the areas composing Palestine by that point in time, likely reflecting the empire’s growing decentralization. There are much earlier tithing estimates in Wolf Dieter Hütteroth and Kamal Abdulfattah, Historical Geography of Palestine, Transjordan and Southern Syria in the Late 16th Century (Erlangen: Fränkische Geographische Ges, 1977).

Beginning in 1908, with the opening provided by the Committee of Union and Progress, historians have access to published sources in an array of European and regional languages. Diplomatic records prior to the Great War are typically focused on military assessments (such as troop levels), consular and administrative issues, and import/export commerce (with a primary focus on aiding firms from the nation they represent). On occasion, however, diplomats would turn their attention to local trade and the indigenous economy, if often only to assess possible inroads for their countrymen.

As Biblical studies continued to develop, particularly among American protestants, missionaries increasingly turned their attention to folk life around the turn of the 20th century, offering novel views of rural society — if often only to draw parallels to how the Holy Land had remained unchanged since the time of Jesus. Despite their flaws, these sources offer a proto-anthropological viewpoint of rural life in late Ottoman Palestine.

Municipal records in Arabic offer another potential view of life in the late 19th century, though they present their own weaknesses: the municipalities were largely concerned with enforcing administrative regulations, and as with some court records, often the causes for the cases must be assumed, and the outcomes and effectiveness of enforcement remain unclear. For example, fines against villages for failing to post ghaffirs (forest guards) in the Nablus district could either be interpreted as an expansion of municipal control over the rural hinterland, or conversely, as an example of the city’s lack of control over even nearby villages.
between Ottoman and British rule, from informal imperialism to formal direct European rule, and assesses the reality and the roots of colonialist discourses of deforestation that derive from this era, blaming Ottoman mismanagement during the watershed period of the Great War in particular.

The second and third chapters deal with the early and late periods of British rule under the League of Nations Mandate system respectively. The logic of the division is that British colonial knowledge and intervention in rural areas and in the economy nearly ceased completely with the revolt of 1936; however, the repression of the revolt marked a massive escalation in interest in rural areas. British colonial rule reached its high watermark during World War II, thanks in particular to wartime control measures such as rationing and provisioning. The second chapter, on the 1920s and early 1930s, is based primarily on the British Colonial Office files, complemented by selected records found in the American State Department records, French diplomatic records, and local administrative records inherited by the Israel State Archive in Jerusalem. The third chapter on the period of the revolt of 1936-1939 and the Second World War is based primarily on Israel State Archive records, as the main inheritor of the local administrative archives, complemented by central office files located in the British National

The personal papers of John D. Whiting housed at the Library of Congress offer an unparalleled view into life in the hills of Palestine around Jerusalem in the early decades of the 20th century. Whiting, an American, was born in Palestine and fluent in Arabic, two extremely uncommon traits for a Westerner in the Holy Land. He showed a deep interest in olive crops and the olive oil market, illustrating the relative sophistication of marketing and storage, funded in part by the remittances of recent Ramallah and Bireh Palestinian emigrants to America. His statistics, though estimates from unnamed local informants, are probably the best available for the period. Ottoman statistics based upon tithing estimates, if found for this late period, would be generally conservative and could bear questionable relation to actual harvests.
Archives at Kew Gardens and published primary sources in Arabic. Both chapters are organized thematically.

With the end of the British Mandate, the fourth and fifth chapters diverge geographically to deal with the period from 1948-1967, reflecting the division of the olive groves of historic Palestine between the Jordanian-controlled West Bank and the Israeli-ruled Galilee. While an array of pressures in Israel forced (or threatened to force) Palestinians to cease cultivation, the Jordanian government largely continued laissez-faire policies toward planting and agriculture.

The fourth chapter on the Israeli Galilee is predominantly based on Arabic and Hebrew sources from the Israel State Archive, which document a changing relationship between Palestinian olive cultivating communities and a variety of state authorities and institutions. The fifth chapter on the Jordanian West Bank is based on Jordanian documents in Arabic seized by the Israelis in 1967 and held in the Israel State Archive, official publications in Arabic from Jordanian ministries found in various archives in Amman and elsewhere, and foreign diplomatic archives.

While this period has been seen as one of a drain of Palestinian resources from the West Bank to

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80 The Jordanian Department of the National Library has begun digitizing intragovernmental correspondence, which has helped to expand our understanding of what the government was doing at the time. Formal, regular, and substantial ministerial reports from prior to 1967 remain sparsely extant, though I was able to locate some in other archival libraries in Amman, particularly the special collection at the University of Jordan Library’s Hashemite Hall and the archival library of the Ministry of Statistics. In addition, the Israel State Archive has (at researcher request) sporadically screened and declassified Jordanian documents captured in the 1967 war from the three West Bank district centers, which lend further depth to the relationship between the West Bank districts and the central government. In addition to these newly available Jordanian sources located in Amman and Jerusalem, Western diplomatic archives (American, British, and French in particular) have helped to contextualize and fill in the gaps, particularly the relative lacuna of the early 1950s. Prior to the Suez Crisis and resultant diplomatic rupture, the Jordanian government was heavily dependent on British advisers and funding to cope with the influx of refugees from the Nakba of 1948, and both the British and French governments reported extensively on the developments in what they began calling “Arab Palestine.”
strengthen the East Bank and the position of the Jordanian monarch in Amman, the story is more complex.

The sixth chapter looks at the West Bank from 1967 to circa 1993 to assess the Jordanian legacy and the impact of Israeli rule over the territory. This chapter is based mainly on rare published primary sources written in Arabic by West Bank Palestinians found in Israeli, Jordanian, and Palestinian archives and special collections in national and municipal libraries, as well as some secondary sources written in Arabic and Hebrew, complemented by the records of the American Foreign Agricultural Service as well as the British and French diplomatic services. The Arabic research reports that I located in the region reflect the creation of strong West Bank universities in the 1970s, supporting the efforts of researchers and research organizations in the 1980s in particular. This last body chapter is organized thematically.

By writing the social history of the political economy of Palestinian olive culture, this dissertation seeks to restore Palestinians to the center of their history, analyzing not only how others acted on them but how they themselves responded and acted independently. Thus, while I attempt to analyze state policies and their effects on the governed, I do so in order to highlight the myriad ungoverned spaces in which ordinary Palestinians could assert their agency and the

81 The American FAS records were unclassified and thus are not subject to the bottleneck of declassification laws that make source availability a serious obstacle for historians attempting to study more recent decades using government records. In addition, the French and to a lesser extent the British have more favorable laws and policies that have made more recent documents extensively and readily available, with declassification after 20 years for most documents in French archives and 25 years in British archives, with various exceptions, compared to the American 30-year rule (with important exceptions, such as national security closures, or conversely declassification via Freedom of Information Act or FOIA requests for more recent documents).
extent to which state hegemony depends on the cooperation and knowledge of the ruled, frequently through a variety of indigenous intermediaries and their connections.

I argue throughout that the olive has emerged as a central symbol of Palestinian nationalism primarily as a result of rural Palestinian agency, taking advantage of the openings offered by shifting political, economic, and social circumstances. To be more specific: across the 20th century, Palestinians in rural areas have become increasingly educated, which has resulted in a shift from farming to wage labor, typically involving temporary migration to urban areas or abroad. Palestinian agriculture has become less and less diverse as many sectors have become either too time consuming or uncompetitive without intensive cultivation and capital investment.

Paradoxically, as a result of the narrowing possibilities facing Palestinian farmers, the olive sector has only grown in its importance economically. So while simultaneously becoming a symbol of resilience, and of continued connection to the land through nonwage labor like the annual familial olive harvest, the centrality of olive cultivation to the West Bank represents a high-risk, high-reward move toward a monoculture that Palestine (unlike neighboring Egyptian cotton or Lebanese silk) had successfully avoided in the past. This lack of diversity means increased volatility in economic fortunes: greater profits, but also greater losses in hard times thanks to concentration risk. Opportunities to market abroad as a form of political solidarity are growing, but so are challenges to the Palestinian olive sector. Production costs have risen considerably along with investments in sophisticated technologies and the rise in the overall cost of living — all while the political, economic, demographic, and geographic future of the occupied territories remains deeply unsettled.
Introduction: colonial discourses and the question of deforestation during World War I

World War I has rightly become regarded as a watershed for the Middle East, a moment when everything changed and nothing could be the same as it was.¹ For Palestine and its geographical borders and its urban spaces, this was perhaps uniquely true out of the Arab provinces comprising bilad al-sham, as the British conquest united the sanjaks of ‘Akka and Nablus with the increasingly autonomous mutasarrafiyah of Jerusalem.² As a result, World War I has received an extraordinary amount of academic attention in recent years thanks in part to the coincidence of centennial anniversaries. For the Middle East, academic history has finally begun to move beyond the exploits of Orientalists and spies, instead writing the social history of the inhabitants of the region, in parallel with the increasingly detailed analysis of the home front and the impact on civilians in Europe.³

² Salim Tamari, The Great War and the remaking of Palestine (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017). Bilad al-Sham is typically rendered as either Greater Syria or the Levant.
³ In addition to the above, see the special November 2014 issue of the International Journal of Middle East Studies 46:4 (2014), especially Najwa al-Qattan, “When mothers ate their children: wartime memory and the language of food in Syria and Lebanon,” 719-736; and Melanie Tanielien, “Feeding the city: the Beirut municipality and the politics of food during World War I,” 737-758. See also Graham Auman Pitts, “Fallow Fields: Famine and the Making
All of the initial assessments of the war in bilad al-Sham or Greater Syria have been dire. The new scholarship has drawn upon, often for the first time, local sources in non-European languages, which has helped to throw the suffering of civilians of all kinds into stark relief. First-hand accounts from Palestine illustrate the deprivations and desperation in urban areas like Jerusalem.\(^4\) Ottoman provisioning systems were not equipped for the disruptions caused by the war;\(^5\) and in the course of the war, Ottoman officials committed to demographic engineering and genocide in many provinces.\(^6\) Animals and crops were confiscated by the Ottoman military, and fighting-aged men were dragooned; religious minorities (namely Christians and Jews) exempted from military conscription were mobilized as forced labor, perhaps most notoriously as garbage-collection battalions. Arab nationalist accounts later drew upon these diverse experiences of suffering in order to present their aspirations for independence, which would be frustrated by European imperial designs during the interwar period.\(^7\)

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As this literature of the war’s impact on broader Ottoman-era society in the Arab provinces has developed, a need for benchmarks has become more pressing. We cannot assess the extent to which Ottoman subjects and citizens suffered first under wartime and then under occupation, without a better understanding of what life was like for ordinary people, both before and immediately after the war.

As a result, the primary intervention of this chapter relates to the question of the impact of the war on the economy, environment, and society of Palestine — exemplified by colonial discourses surrounding deforestation. To this point, the discussion of the period of the late Ottoman empire circa (but especially after) the turn of the 19th into the 20th century has focused on political questions relating to the end of empire and ideologies like Ottomanism and nationalism, with a focus on the urban elites and emerging middle classes that increasingly left their own records, such as through the resurgent Arab press. The vibrant, diverse press in the constitutional periods is remarkable in its own right, and has often been filtered through the lens of the theory of Bendedict Anderson’s imagined communities, emphasizing the importance of

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print capitalism to the emergence of secular nationalism. This chapter seeks to shift the focus to the countryside where the vast majority lived, and examine the Ottoman Palestinian rural economy, with a focus on the critical question of deforestation. The resilience of olive culture in the countryside provided potential prosperity for the rural masses through the marketing of surplus olive oil production, as well as a stable, local base of nutrition and sustenance for families in times of political instability, of which the 20th century would have no shortage.

Anecdotally, World War I has been variously claimed by some Arab nationalists, Zionists, and British colonial officials to have been an environmental catastrophe, particularly with respect to deforestation. Scholars have uncritically repeated the British narratives that assume intentional and widespread Ottoman destruction of Syrian forests, particularly when assessing the impact of the subsequent British Mandate. In a book on Israeli forestry, Alon Tal used a picture of extensive terracing in the Jerusalem hills likely taken around 1939, misleadingly captioned as “The face of degradation: Palestine after the Ottoman empire.” Tal summed up Ottoman forestry policy as encouraging deforestation and the felling of trees through

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9 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism* (Verso, 2006). Outside of Palestine, for example, see Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), which puts a twist on Anderson’s print capitalism by focusing on more popular forms of colloquial culture, what Fahmy calls “media capitalism,” by incorporating popular music and plays in addition to literature and poetry.

10 See for example, the following from the introduction of an article on Mandate-era agricultural policy: “Centuries of over-exploitation and the abandonment of terracing caused the soils of Palestine to be much denuded. This had been made worse during the First World War when the Turks used up enormous quantities of timber for fuel and destroyed large areas of forests and protective tree-barriers.” Roza I. M. El-Eini, “The Implementation of British Agricultural Policy in Palestine in the 1930s,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 4 (1996): 211-250.

bad taxation policy, and cited secondhand British reports that some 60 percent of olive trees had been felled during the war. Such sweeping generalizations have their roots not in contemporaneous accounts, but in later British Mandate-era reports that focused on blaming the conduct of the Ottomans during the First World War for the conditions of the country. The 1937 Peel Commission Report declared, with respect to the forests of Palestine, the guilt of indigenous inhabitants and the Ottomans during the war for the area’s widespread deforestation: “[D]uring the [Great] War large quantities of trees were felled, including olives, which were one of the main sources of revenue.” These claims, as this chapter will illustrate, are at best an exaggeration.

There was, of course, some deforestation over the course of the war. Hasan Kayalı has correctly argued that military considerations, particularly to expand infrastructure like railroads, came at the expense of trees, particularly along the Hejaz railway, in cities like Haifa, Amman, and Ma’an (the latter two towns subsequently to be part of Transjordan). Kayalı wrote that “[m]uch woodland was denuded in the building of the railways and the use of fuel. Cemal Pasha allowed the cutting of 40 percent of all apricot, olive, and mulberry trees for use as fuel for the locomotives.” While this edict was applied unevenly in practice, it nevertheless appears to be the basis of exaggerated British claims of deforestation, with the help of a basic mathematical error. Elsewhere in Syria, an Austrian consul concerned with deforestation in the Damascus area

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12 Ibid., 22.  
13 Ibid., 26.  
reported on 2 March 1917 that 40 tons of wood, or 400 kilograms of wheat, were consumed to fuel the railway every day; as Linda Schilcher has rightly concluded, “the resulting deforestation in the region of Damascus and along the railways was devastating.”16 The questions remain, however, of which trees were culled: where, when, and above all how.

Although modern forestry tends to concern itself exclusively with hardwood forest plantations and natural-growth forests, the bulk of trees in Palestine at the time were fruit trees, principally the olive and the orange. Almost universally in forestry records of the subsequent British Mandate period, the term deforestation is applied not primarily to natural-growth forests, but to both Arab and Zionist-planted fruit-tree orchards and plantations, which foresters today would not typically include under the rubric of deforestation.

The largely unverifiable estimates of “deforestation” in the immediate aftermath of the war range from at least a tenth of fruit trees, based on Cemal Pasha’s first ruling (subsequently broadened in steps to encompass up to 40 percent of fruit trees, as Kayalı rightly noted above),17 to more than half of all trees — up to two-thirds of all trees in the entire country in the most extreme accounts — in American and British diplomatic reports from the immediate postwar period. It is essential to note that these reports had no statistical basis; the diplomats had no access to prewar benchmarks, and their assessments were based predominantly on hearsay.

17 Kayalı, 300.
The most likely estimate is that at most around one third of olive trees, along with other trees, within the close vicinity of the railroads were felled.\textsuperscript{18} While British officials during the Mandate period would claim that up to 60 percent of all olive trees had been chopped down, their key evidence for this claim was that orders were issued by the Ottoman authorities to the owners of olive groves to provide first 10 percent of their trees; then another 10 percent of the remainder; then finally 25 percent of what was left.\textsuperscript{19} Taking this math as the upper limit, that would have left slightly more than 60 percent of olive trees untouched — not 60 percent felled. It is also essential to note that the primary sources of wood in Palestine at the time were the scrub oak and to a lesser extent the olive tree, which are hardy and can regenerate relatively quickly from coppicing (severe pruning, nearly down to the ground).

Thus by the early 1920s, these early, extreme overestimates of deforestation were quickly revised downward by follow-up reports, typically after these American and English diplomats had established themselves in the country for a number of years; however, the initial impression of widespread devastation remained in the minds of colonial officials, which then became the basis of a widespread colonial discourse that was summoned to justify colonial policy. Scholars focused on later time periods have uncritically repeated the professed causes for the despoliation

\textsuperscript{18} The American consul in the immediate post-war period corroborates an assessment of somewhere around a third of the olive trees felled. In 1920 he asserted that it would likely only a decade to recover, as about one-third of all trees within a 10-mile radius of the railway lines had been severely pruned. Consul Oscar S. Heiser for Jerusalem, Palestine “Olive Crop in Palestine,” 24 November 1920, National Archives and Records Administration [henceforth NARA] RG 166 170/71/28/01-07, Box 424. This revised an initial assessment the year prior in 1919, which had been apocalyptic: he claimed it would take 50 years for the olive oil industry to recover, claiming half of all the olive trees in Palestine had been destroyed. Consul for Jerusalem, Palestine, “Vegetable Oils in Palestine,” 16 November 1919, NARA RG 166 170/71/28/01-07, Box 424.

\textsuperscript{19} “Agricultural situation in Palestine: Review by the Director of the Department of Agriculture,” 15 June 1923. The National Archives of the UK [henceforth TNA] CO 733/46, 18 [item 39].
of the country, perhaps best encapsulated in the report of the 1937 Peel Commission, which can be paraphrased as the following: Ottoman despotism, which had no concern for the land’s past, present, or future, led to rapacious and exploitative practices, leaving the landscape desolate and ruined. In this narrative, official policy was further exacerbated by Arab ignorance. These discourses had been percolating for two decades by the time that the Peel commission enshrined them in a command paper.

From this perspective, bad policy led directly and rather mechanistically to bad practices, above all that punitive tax levies on trees led ignorant peasants to cut down their own trees to avoid financial ruin, leaving environmental destruction as the consequence. This particular trope, of fellahin felling trees in times of crisis, arises again and again in the reports and accounts of Western travelers and officials, and cannot entirely be dismissed, but neither can it be asserted as simple fact. Ottoman policy was complex and certainly could have unintended and negative consequences, particularly under the stress of war; however, tax relief in times of crisis (such as droughts) was a well-used tool in the empire, meaning that the authorities could certainly be flexible and responsive to local conditions.

Regardless, what this narrative of Ottoman despoliation and environmental degradation entirely omits, however, is the impact of the Entente blockade of the Eastern Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{20} The blockade forced substitutions for imports. This was a particularly cruel twist, coming on the heels of a century of European inroads into the Ottoman Empire, whose balance of trade increasingly depended on the importation of European commodities, consumer goods, and fossil

fuels. European powers had increasingly sought throughout the 19th century to control the balance of trade in their favor. This has been an unremarked-upon aspect of the blockade. Its effectiveness was built upon the patterns of trade previously imposed by European countries.

Before the war, the Ottoman Empire had become dependent in particular on imports for its fuel regime. In the age before the discovery and widespread use of oil-based petroleum, Ottomans needed kerosene for domestic fuel, and the railroads needed coal to run steam engines. Neither fuel source was plentiful within the empire’s borders. Locally sourced fuels in the forms of firewood and firewood-based charcoal had become increasingly scarce and expensive to obtain. To move its troops and to move food to feed its troops, the Ottoman military requisitioned the railroads in Palestine and any available trees to fuel the engines once local stockpiles of coal were exhausted.

The narrative of deforestation therefore has been missing at least two dimensions: the impact of the blockade, and the local nature of fuel requisitioning. To claim that half of all trees in Palestine were culled for these purposes seems highly unlikely. Instead, one must look at the maps of the railroads themselves, especially where tracks were built to certain areas explicitly to obtain firewood. The farther removed from the tracks, the less likely the areas were impacted.

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21 One exception was the coalfields of Zonguldak in northern Anatolia on the Black Sea, used primarily for steamships. Donald Quataert, *Miners and the State in the Ottoman Empire: The Zonguldak Coalfield, 1822-1920* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006). Zonguldak’s coal would have had little chance of reaching Palestine in wartime, especially with the Entente Blockade in place, embargoing the Eastern Mediterranean.

Figure 4. Railway map of Palestine, c. 1922

The railways ran predominantly along the coast, and via the plains to Syria, largely avoiding the hills of the Galilee and the hills of what is today the West Bank — the hills which constituted the center of the Palestinian population at the time, and the heartland of Palestinian olive cultivation. The spur to Acre was explicitly built to facilitate the collection of firewood, and pine forests in the area were all but certainly impacted. The trees of the villages surrounding the stations at Tulkarm and Nablus were quite likely subjected to considerable culling. Traveling through the area toward the end of the war, a Spanish diplomat posted to Jerusalem explicitly blamed “the Turks” for devastation inflicted on the “beautiful olive trees” of Nablus. However, the villages of the Western Galilee (east of Acre) were likely spared. So were villages south of Nablus and north of Jerusalem, as well as those south of Jerusalem and north of Bethlehem. Thus much of the central spine of Palestine was likely untouched by the railroads’ demands for firewood.

The one partial exception may have been in the hills surrounding Ramallah, and other collateral damage caused by the British military campaign. When the Entente began to push back the Ottomans and their German allies from Palestine in 1917, military administrators prioritized first and foremost the establishment of order. Yet documents from the Arab Bureau (the British military spy rings of Lawrence of Arabia fame) as well as from the military administrators of the Occupied-Enemy Territory Administration (or OETA, as the military government over Entente-occupied territory was known), illustrate that the occupation was not without its own destructive effects. The British-led Egyptian army pillaged as it went, incurring significant distrust and fear.

in the south in particular.\textsuperscript{25} The town of Gaza was almost completely destroyed and would not be rebuilt for a decade.\textsuperscript{26}

More broadly, Palestinian civilians, particularly in rural areas, were largely left to their own devices to pick up the pieces, since the occupation was almost exclusively focused on maintaining law and order. Provisioning and policing were the writ of the military authorities, while the civilian authorities debated the future of the Arab provinces in Paris and Versailles, relying largely on the reports of Zionist missions to Palestine to understand local conditions.\textsuperscript{27} Even these relatively hostile assessments, which were persistently dismissive of indigenous agricultural practices, acknowledged and encouraged traditional patterns of olive and other fruit tree cultivation in the hills. These reports show that the political economy surrounding olives survived the war largely intact.

On the basis of estimates of olive oil yields in the early period of civilian administration, I calculate that close to two million olive trees remained after the war — far more than was initially thought in the apocalyptic initial assessments (which contended that only a million trees remained after, purportedly, more than half had been culled for fuel during the war). These ideologically distorted mathematical mistakes allowed proponents of colonialism to blame the Ottoman yoke for environmental devastation, and then give themselves credit for a seemingly miraculous expansion in olive production under the subsequent British Mandate.

\textsuperscript{25} See section four of this chapter for full citations. 
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
This chapter proceeds in chronological order through World War I and its aftermath. The first section begins in the 19th century to establish the larger macroeconomic trends in Palestine and particularly to illustrate the centrality of Palestinian olive culture in the late Ottoman era to the broader agrarian economy of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It moves from trade-based consular records to highly localized and detailed assessments of peasant practices — what could be called proto-ethnography in some cases — illustrating the growing sophistication of late-Ottoman olive economics in Palestine. The second section examines Ottoman interventions into forestry and trade in the pre-war years, particularly relating to the fuel regime. The third section touches on some of the major developments relating to economic conditions, fuel supplies and deforestation during the war itself. The fourth and final section deals with British military occupation and civilian administration prior to the official establishment of the League of Nations Mandate in 1923, particularly through the lens of post-war assessments by Zionists and Western diplomats that would prove to have long afterlives in colonialist discourse.

Throughout the 19th century, the patterns of local commerce had been increasingly impacted by informal imperial inroads and international trade via the sea. Olive-derived goods became increasingly important to Palestine’s export trade, such as when surplus edible oils were in demand by Marseilles soapmakers in the latter half of the 1800s. Yet olives remained key to peasant subsistence, as a base of food security. Periodic surpluses remained largely marketed

along traditional lines, meaning that the olive sector was still predominantly oriented toward local Nabulsi soap production, which was then exported overland to neighboring Arab provinces: principally Egypt and what would become Syria. Palestinian olive oil, despite being regarded as distasteful by foreign travelers, held critical importance in the meatless diet of settled rural dwellers, who prized its taste. As a commodity, however, the high acidity of most Palestinian olive oil meant that any surplus beyond familial needs for consumption was best suited for industrial purposes. Olive oil could be used as fuel for lamps, particularly at holy sites, or as a substitute for imported kerosene (when it became scarce) for cooking stoves that had also been imported and adopted in urban homes late in the 19th century. But according to my estimates, at least half of locally produced olive oil was used to make highly regarded Nabulsi olive oil soap, which had retained traditional markets in neighboring major cities like Cairo and Damascus for centuries. In addition, byproducts of olive cultivation, such as carved olive wood branches (which had to be pruned annually), were sold as tourist souvenirs in Bethlehem and Jerusalem or used as firewood in rural areas. Jiift, the remnants of crushed olives after pressing, was used as fuel in town bakeries to generate the intense heat needed for baking urbanites’ bread. Of course, dietary needs of the olive oil’s peasant producers came first and foremost.

The multiple, highly localized uses of olive products and byproducts in Palestine meant that when foreign overseas trade was severed by the Entente blockade, Palestinians would not have faced the economic devastation and famine that the residents of Mount Lebanon did — silk cocoons being inedible and bound almost exclusively for export trade. 29 It also meant that the

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29 As subsistence-level cultivators, rural Palestinians were not dependent on foreign trade and on the import of basic foodstuffs, in contrast to Mount Lebanon, where sericulture and the silk trade had made many peasants wealthy in good times but exposed them to serious economic
inclination of Palestinians to wholly destroy their olive trees as fuel, and perhaps also to avoid
taxes, was diminished in comparison to the mulberry tree. Furthermore, olive trees can
regenerate from even the most vigorous pruning, known as coppicing (cutting down nearly to the
ground). This meant that culling branches and even trunks for firewood did not necessarily mean
the death or uprooting of most trees affected. Thus anecdotal accounts of environmental
degradation centered on the “deforestation” of olive groves were possibly just a gross
exaggeration of short-term damage. Meanwhile, the very nature of the political economy of
Palestinian olive culture — shaped gradually over the preceding century — helps in part to
explain the resiliency of Palestinian society, even at times of dire crisis, such as in the darkest
days of World War I.

1. Late Ottoman Palestine: changing economy, continued centrality of olive oil soap

Palestinian olive cultivation before the 20th century was primarily oriented toward the
olive-oil soap industry, centered in Nablus. The number of soap factories in Nablus remained
roughly around a couple dozen over the course of a century, varying between 15-35, from the
mid 1800s until the late 20th century. These factories were and remain today highly artisanal

and social dislocations and hardships when global trade patterns were disrupted. See Akram
Khater, Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920

Nablus Municipal Archive [hereafter NMA], Sundouq 264: Hussam Aboud al-Sharif,
San’at al-Sabun al-Nabulsi [Making Nablus Soap], n.d. circa 1990 (self-published history of the
Nablus soap industry), page 42. al-Sharif estimates the number of factories in 1842 as 15; in
1900, 30; 1928, 23; 1929, 22; 1944, 35; 1964, 25; 1989, 29 factories. The volume duplicates a
number of photocopies of original primary sources, the earliest of which is an Ottoman
document from 1258 hijri (corresponding to 1842 CE) regarding Nablus soap production, with
the number of bakes and the names of factory owners with their logos, notably al-Hadi, page 65.
and highly specialized in terms of the division of labor.\textsuperscript{31} At its peak, Nablus could produce 6,000 tons of pure olive oil soap a year, though when olives were scarce and the price of olive oil skyrocketed as a result, it could fall to 400 tons. A terrible olive harvest could be only a tenth of a stellar one. 2,000 tons a year seems to be a good average for typical annual production.\textsuperscript{32} While the olive oil was supplied by contract, the acidic component (al-qli or alkali) was supplied by the Bedouin of ‘Arab al-Belqa’ (now a Jordanian governorate).\textsuperscript{33} In 1877, raw materials for a tabkhah or “bake,” would cost around 18,260 qirsh in total,\textsuperscript{34} while the value of each tabkah (a typical factory would bake around 25-30 times a year) could be as high as 27,000 qirsh.\textsuperscript{35} Converted roughly, each tabkhah turned 4-5 tons of olive oil into 5-6 tons of olive oil soap. Miri tax would add another 800 in expenses, and wages to the various overseers and laborers were estimated around 1,000 qirsh, for a total production cost of 20,000 qirsh. A 7,000 profit times 27 bakes for the factory in question would yield an annual operating profit of 189,000 qirsh. To put this in context, an upper-class “dower [mahr al-ʿarus] totaled (more or less) in those days no more than 1,500 qirsh, that is 15 gold lira.” At the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, a bake of soap was

\textsuperscript{31} For a recent ethnography of contemporary practices in Nabulsi soap factories, see Véronique Bontemps, Ville et patrimoine en Palestine : une ethnographie des savonneries de Naplouse (Paris: Karthala et IISMM, 2012).

\textsuperscript{32} al-Sharif, Sanʿat al-Sabun al-Nabulsi [Making Nablus Soap], NMA S/264, 42.

\textsuperscript{33} al-Sharif cites Nablus shariʿa court records sijilat no. 21 page 18 for the quantities and typical prices in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century of the main components for the soap. Ibid., 16-17.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 18-19, citing sijilat of Nabulsharʿia court records no. 9, page 95 and no. 21, page 19.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 19, citing shariʿa court records no. 21 page 18 for the soap factory Shahin for the year 1877: 27 bakes that year, with each bake worth 27,000 qirsh. A tabkhah or bake would total 250 waznah, or 2,000 rotel (a customary unit of measure that could range from half a kilogram to nearly three kilograms); each rotel could be sold for as much as 15 qirsh. The soap was 82\% olive oil, so working backwards al-Sharif estimates that each bake used 200 jarrah [jar, a customary measure later formalized around 21 kilograms], with each jarrah costing 84 qirsh, as well 8 qantars of al-qeli/alkali at 2,200 qirsh according to shariʿa court records no. 21 page 19.
valued at 225 gold lira, with a profit of 50 gold lira.\textsuperscript{36} Even if this math is fuzzy, the larger point is that the artisanal industry was based upon locally sourced, renewable, relatively cheap raw materials, while the product would then sell for a premium abroad. The soap was exported regionally, primarily to Egypt and Syria.

By the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, profits had declined in the face of growing commercial pressures, both from cheaper imported European soaps (which many in the region distrusted as possibly tainted with animal fat), and more importantly from emerging local soap industries, especially in Egypt. To compensate for declining profits, the factories switched from local al-qeli (alkali) to imported caustic sodas, which also led to faster drying times of the finished bars. The profit per tabkhah in 1912 dropped to 800 qirsh; however, the number of bakes at least doubled, yielding an average income of 130,400 qirsh a year, still an enormous amount. As a result, the factories functioned as banks for the quarters of the old city of Nablus.\textsuperscript{37} The economic importance of the soap factories peaked in the 1920s then declined rapidly in the early 1930s, which will be addressed in the next chapter. In the late Ottoman period, however, the factory owners were representative of the elite families of the city, and exhibited a basic level of cooperation among the owners locally while competing for business abroad.\textsuperscript{38} Patterns of local

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 19-20. al-Sharif derived the costs from the work of Ihsan al-Nimr, historian of Nablus, citing page 317 of Nimr’s 1961 work.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 20. al-Sharif disputes accounts of exorbitant lending with interest, citing an account given to him by his grandfather, al-Hajj Hamdi al-Sharif that soap factory owners like Sheikh ʿAbdullah Qemhiya were righteous, giving loans without interest. He also quotes ʿulama as condemning and denying the practice, while admitting that excesses were possible: “Perhaps there were some very few among them who did this in secret.”

\textsuperscript{38} For the elite individuals and family names involved, see Ibid., 28-29. Documents from as early as 1838 and 1842 document the committee members of the local Jamaʿi al-Musabenah (“Large Soap Factories Group”), citing shariʿa court records no. 9, page 935, and a private document duplicated on page 65 of al-Sharif’s work from Khalil ʿAbd al-Hadi.
commerce were increasingly impacted by changes in the international trade regime, particularly as Palestine (like the broader Ottoman Empire) was gradually integrated into the global market economy in the late 19th century.

The Palestinian economy in the late Ottoman period: Views from the European consulates

In studying the 19th century, scholars of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire have traditionally depended on snapshots from European sources — such as either consular officials, who were interested primarily in the balance of trade (with the aim of augmenting their home nation’s commerce); or other visitors to the region, such as missionaries and travelers, who frequently carried their own ideological baggage. One of the gradual but profound shifts in Palestine during this period of study is from a primarily agricultural society on the subsistence level, where wealth in rural areas could be measured in olive oil, to an increasingly coastal and urban-driven economy, where wealth would be measured on a monetary basis.

This section analyzes the changing production and usage of olive trees and olive oil, and the impact of changing power relations locally, regionally, and globally. The very presence of consular officials of European countries is proof to a certain extent of the waxing of European

39 There is one important exception: a number of scholars — like al-Sharif above, as well as ‘Adel Manna, Judith Tucker, and others cited in the introduction — have extensively consulted shari’a court records for social history in the Ottoman period. In local records from the 19th century, Beshara Doumani identified the centrality of olive oil and its importance in the local economy of Nablus, particularly in the form of soap making. The soap-making factories, which stored massive quantities of olive oil, are best understood as both proto-industries and as the banks of the time for the newly enriched and empowered Nablus elite. Doumani argues that this period sees the emergence of classes based on changing patterns of land ownership, particularly through consolidation of smallholdings into larger estates, as local elites benefited from their accumulated capital through money-lending practices. See Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
economic hegemony and the waning of Ottoman sovereignty. Similarly, the ability of European (and to a lesser extent American) missionaries to travel and subject the locals to scientific inquiry again serves to illustrate the ascendance of European power.

The indigenous population is inevitably described as backwards and criticized for a perceived reluctance to modernize. One common trope in these accounts is to criticize the poor quality of Palestinian olives and olives oil, which is ascribed to the bruising of the olives through traditional methods of cultivation, such as shaking or hitting the tree, rather than adopting “modern” techniques and technology. Furthermore, peasant practices such as beating the trees to harvest olives was specifically blamed for the roughly biannual cycle of bearing and non-bearing, which was not understood to be natural and inherent to the olive tree at the time. No allowance was made for local indigenous knowledge, nor was there an acknowledgment of the precariousness of subsistence agriculture, which would not encourage trying untested methods of cultivation after seasons of practice. More sympathetic accounts do at least mention that market conditions, particularly the wild variations in olive crop yields from year to year, did not encourage the adoption of unproven and expensive new technologies.

The details of the export trade and local practices help to illustrate both the peculiarity of the Palestinian example in this period, and its commonalities with other nearby areas in the Ottoman period. Unlike Egypt and Lebanon, which both became dependent on single crops (cotton for the former and silk for the latter), Palestine avoided the creation of a vulnerable monoculture in the mid-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{40} Some scholars have ascribed this particularity to

the Egyptian occupation of Palestine in the 1830s, when Ibrahim Pasha demanded the planting of more olive trees, along with vines and mulberry trees.\textsuperscript{41}

A British commercial trade report from 1840 provides a flawed if telling benchmark for later developments.\textsuperscript{42} John Bowring’s report on commerce in Syria begins with typical Orientalist comments about agriculture that stress its general backwardness, that the farmers still rely on the “Roman plough,” among other examples.\textsuperscript{43} Bowring criticized the locals’ choice to prioritize safety in the hills over farming the fertile plains.\textsuperscript{44} No allowance is given to strategies of survival and structural factors like the dangers of disease such as malaria on the coastal plains,\textsuperscript{45} in addition to the threat of other humans, particularly transhumant populations such as unsettled Bedouin tribes. The continuing preference of the Palestinian peasantry for the safety of the hills became a common criticism in the writings of Western Orientalists. This critique, which unfavorably compares the lower fertility of terraced rural mountains such as Jabal (Mount) Nablus and Jabal al-Khalil (Hebron) to the greater fertility of the plains, additionally ignores the ubiquity of the olive tree in the hill country, and the importance of olives as sources of cash for peasants to pay the Ottoman tax collectors.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{41} Roger Owen, \textit{The Middle East in the world economy 1800-1914} (I.B. Taurus, 1993), 79.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 9
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} James Reilly, “The Peasantry of Late Ottoman Palestine” \textit{Journal of Palestine Studies} 10:4 (Summer 1981), 84.
In his discussion of the production and consumption of olive oil in Greater Syria, Bowring focused primarily on estimating the soap production of various Syrian cities, a logical economic adaptation to deal with the highly unpredictable variation in the yields of olive crops.\footnote{Bowring, 18.} According to his figures, Palestinian cities dominated the production of soap, particularly Jerusalem, Lydda, Gaza, Nablus, and Ramallah.\footnote{Ibid.} For the sake of comparison, with the caveat that Bowring’s estimates are impossible to verify and likely hearsay, he reports that each Palestinian city produced 500 coppers annually, while the highest producing Syrian city of Aleppo produced less than 400 coppers.\footnote{The measurement “copper” is presumably Bowring’s translation of tabkah, based on the material of the commercial pot used for each bake, with variations in size making it of questionable comparability. If a copper is equivalent to a tabkah, it seems these estimates are probably double al-Sharif’s average for the latter half of the 19th century.} Particularly well reputed was Nabulsi soap, which Bowring remarked upon as “highly esteemed in the Levant.” Bowring’s report claims that there were no exports of soap at all at this time — the soap being used entirely in the localities where it was produced, though he likely meant no overseas trade, since Egypt and other parts of Syria were traditional markets for Palestinian olive oil soap.\footnote{Ibid., 19.} In sum, Bowring’s reporting gives an image of Greater Syria as one composed of distinct urban centers, with trade confined essentially to the city and its surrounding villages, with a few exceptions for particularly well-reputed goods like soap from Nablus or silk from Mount Lebanon.

By the mid-19th century, according to commercial reports from European consulates in Jaffa, Palestine’s two most valuable export crops had become sesame seeds and olive oil. In
1850, exports from Jaffa port totaled 32,000 tons of goods worth over 4,139,800 francs. The vast majority of goods, 81 percent, were grains, with oil seeds (sesame and olive in particular) totaling 18.4 percent, with all other types of good constituting just over half a percent. Nearly half of the exports went to France, 45 percent, while 15 percent went to the English, 14 percent to Greece and just 7 percent to the rest of the Ottoman Empire by sea. Nearly half the tonnage, 47 percent, was barley, a famous product of Gaza and the other coastal plains in the 19th century; wheat was 24 percent of the tonnage. Despite constituting nearly three quarters of shipping tonnage, both combined for only a third of the total value of exports. Sesame, at 28 percent of total export value, went almost exclusively toward France (supplying the oil and soap industry in Marseilles). Olive oil constituted just 0.64 percent of the total tonnage yet 26 percent of export value, of which 83 percent went to France, the remainder split almost evenly among other countries. At the time, oranges and other citrus were special luxury goods “reserved” for Constantinople, and thus were not captured in consular trade statistics, since they were not freely traded abroad.

Historian Roger Owen confirmed a continuation of the dominant pattern of local use: olives were grown in the hill villages, the resultant oil consumed locally as food or processed further into soap by the factories of Nablus, Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Jaffa. While for the most part olives continued to be used locally for food or as an input for soap production, increasing

51 Jerusalem to Direction Commercial, “Commerce de Jaffa,” page 3. CADN 294PO/B/40, Dossier 1850.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 3-4.
54 Ibid., 4.
55 Ibid., 5.
56 Ibid.
57 Owen, 175-177.
amounts were sold abroad as the 19th century went on — particularly in the early 1860s and mid 1870s, when prices rose significantly.

To analyze Palestine’s economic trends between 1856 and 1882, Alexander Scholch relied on commercial reports from English, German, Austrian, and French consuls in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa, and Acre. Scholch was careful to note a need for cautiousness in using these numbers as very rough estimates. He nevertheless concludes that, during his period of study, Palestine produced a relatively large agricultural surplus, exporting primarily to neighboring countries like Egypt or Lebanon, but also increasingly to Europe, often through European consular agents — hence arguing for the relative reliability of his sources. While there were fluctuations in quantity and prices of all goods, olive oil is often present or even dominant in these records. Lack of rain and locusts decimated olive crops with some frequency. Scholch argued that at the time, as a general rule, only about one in every three years would there be a crop good enough to permit significant exports of olive oil and soap. Olive oil exports from Jaffa increased in this period, though the increase was relatively less than other products. Scholch pointed to two causes for the growing quantity of exports: externally, owing to increased demand from Europe, but also internally, through more favorable security conditions achieved by repressing or coopting the Bedouin. According to Scholch’s statistics, grain was the most important crop in the 1850s, while cotton was most important in the 1860s. Both periods were

59 Ibid., 36.
60 Ibid., 46.
61 Ibid., 47-48.
62 Ibid., 47-49.
boom times for these crops on the world market, which Scholch argued benefitted society from
the fellah up through the governmental treasury — though to unequal degrees.\textsuperscript{63}

In summary, from these sources we can conclude that as the overall Ottoman balance of
trade with Europe became more unfavorable as the century progressed, Palestine was somewhat
of an exception, as exports increased through the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{64} Furthermore, this period
saw extensive agricultural diversification, thus helping Palestine to avoid the problem of
dependence on a monoculture. Despite these positive aspects of the Palestinian economic
situation in the latter half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, only the soap industry developed significantly
alongside the agrarian sector, which itself became dependent on external markets. Therefore this
period also saw Palestinian agricultural production become “geared to the needs of external
markets,” becoming in Scholch’s terms a “peripheral economy,” shaped by the demands of
European industrial capitalism.\textsuperscript{65}

In a study of the subsequent period from 1885 to 1914, Marwan Buheiry used records
from the British Foreign Office to study and quantify the agricultural exports of “southern
Palestine” in this thirty-year period before World War I.\textsuperscript{66} Like Scholch, Buheiry similarly
argued that this period illustrated the increasing economic dependency of the Ottoman Empire on
the British throughout this period, enabled by the capitulations.\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 57-58.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{66} Marwan R. Buheiry, “The Agricultural Exports of Southern Palestine, 1885-1914”
Journal of Palestine Studies 10:4 (Summer 1981), 61-81. His area of analysis is roughly defined
by the Ottoman sanjak or province of Jerusalem, and he primarily depended on the British
Jerusalem consulate’s “Annual and Miscellaneous Series of Reports on Trade and Commerce.”
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 62.
In looking to agriculture, Buheiry argued that the Jaffa orange came to replace the sesame seed and its oil (which had previously been key inputs in the Marseilles oil and soap industries) as Palestine’s chief agricultural products for export in this period, along with high-quality barley from Gaza.\textsuperscript{68} The olive, however, retained its importance alongside the orange. Buheiry extensively detailed the fluctuations in the production of olive oil and its derived products, calling it the cash crop of the Jerusalem \textit{sanjaq}, along with the orange.\textsuperscript{69} Over the 21-year period from 1885 to 1905, the value of oil and soap exports from Jaffa exceeded the value of orange exports.\textsuperscript{70} Therefore we can conclude with some confidence, despite the inherent flaws of the underlying data (British consular records that only captured exports), that the olive had become one of the most valuable Palestinian crops at the turn of the century.

French consular records confirm Buheiry’s analysis based on British consular records: By 1890, olive-oil soap had joined olive oil and sesame seeds as by far the most valuable of Palestine’s exports (see Graph 1).\textsuperscript{71}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 68.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 73.
\item \textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 67; 80-81.
\item \textsuperscript{71} The overall balance of trade, however, was not favorable. As in the rest of the Ottoman Empire, Palestine had become dependent on imports for textiles, especially clothing. The population had also acquired a taste for rice-based dishes.
\end{itemize}
While the principal products in terms of volume remained wheat, barley, maize, and sesame, the tree “par excellence” was considered the olive, ahead of the emerging citrus industry. A French consular official in noting that olive oil production was one of the principal sources of wealth for the country, estimated the annual production of olive oil as 70,000-80,000 quintaux, which converts roughly to between 3,500-4,000 metric tons. A small amount would be consumed by local demand, such as fuel for lamps in holy places, with the bulk used in soap-making shops and

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74 Ibid., 13-14. The French quintal was 100 livres, or 48.95 kilograms, yielding a range of 3,426,500 to 3,916,000 kilograms, which I converted to metric tons for readability.
factories in Lydda, Ramleh, Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Haifa (the analysis appears to exclude both olive oil’s domestic use as a cooking staple for the rural peasantry, and omitted the most significant center of production in Nablus, since the consulates were essentially only concerned with sea-borne import/export trade). These 40 or so factories — again, excluding Nablus — consumed nearly half of the olive crop (around 1,500 metric tons) per year. Europeans considered the quality of Palestine olive oil poor; however, it did not need to be edible or even have low acidity, since surplus olive oil production at the time was geared almost entirely toward industrial uses.

In years of surplus, such as the excellent 4,000-ton 1890 crop, nearly half could be exported abroad to England, France, and Egypt in that order (as industrial olive oil could also be used in the textile industry, such as for processing raw materials). Despite Ottoman taxation on individual trees, the French consular official noted the continual development of olive plantations, particularly through interplanting with field grains. Egypt received the bulk of the exports of olive oil soap; however, the recent establishment of many soap factories in Egypt had begun to limit the Palestinian export trade to its primary external market. In the short term, the impact of the fledgling Egyptian soap industry was limited, as in 1895 Palestine exported 4,440 quintaux.

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75 Ibid., 14.
76 Ibid., 23.
77 Ibid., 15.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid., 24. To give an illustration of the impact of Egyptian competition: In 1888, Palestine exported 16,000 quintaux valued at 824,000 francs to Egypt; in 1889, just 9,500 quintaux worth 241,000 francs. More significant than the drop in quantity was the drop in price: 51.5 francs per quintal in 1888, versus 25.4 francs per quintal in 1889.
tons of soap worth an incredible 2.3 million francs.\textsuperscript{80} A consular report in 1907 declared the soap sector in Jaffa and Gaza to have become “stationary” for a number of years, exporting around 7,000 tons, mainly to Egypt, at a price of 0.80 francs per kilogram.\textsuperscript{81}

The patterns of olive oil soap production reflected the typical fluctuations of the olive crop, which tends to alternate good years and bad years (a phenomenon known as biennial or alternate bearing, which is typical of many fruit trees) owing to a number of factors, above all climatic and weather patterns. While in the 1890s, consular officials estimated the value of the annual olive oil production above 4 million francs a year,\textsuperscript{82} by the first decade of the twentieth century, oranges had overtaken olive-oil soap as Palestine’s most valuable export, while exports of olive oil and sesame seeds collapsed as European manufacturers turned to cheaper inputs (see Graph 2).\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{80} Ledouix to Ministre des affaires étrangères, direction des consulats et des affaires commercial, sous-direction des affaires commerciales, “Mouvement général du commerce de la Palestine pour l’année 1894,” dated 3 mai 1895. CADN 294PO/B/40, subdossier 1895.

\textsuperscript{81} “Situation générale du marché de Jérusalem : rapport et aperçu sur les régions agricoles productrices de la Palestine (1907) », page 5. CADN 294PO/B/40.

\textsuperscript{82} Mouvement général du commerce de la Palestine en 1892, page 1, CADN 294PO/B/40, Subdossier 1892. The value was 4.2 million francs for 1892, according to “rendement des récoltes de la Palestine 1892” and 4.4 million francs in 1893, according to “rendement des récoltes de la Palestine 1893.” If production had remained constant around 4,000 tons, that would equal a franc per kilogram of olive oil.

\textsuperscript{83} Le courrier de la presse « Progress in Palestine », CADN 294PO/B/40, Correspondance générale et coupures de presse classées par année (1890 à 1905), subdossier 1904-1905. Total Palestinian trade amounted to £762,110 for 1903 versus £608,940 in 1902, driven by the value of exports increasing by £118,945 to £322,335, which was caused mainly by increases in exports of “oranges, olive oil, and soap.”
Despite an exceptional 1905-1906 crop of sesame and olives,\(^8^5\) the foreign market for raw oils had declined in relative significance by the turn of the century. Olive-oil soap exports between 1903 and 1907 hovered around 3,000 tons annually, the vast majority sold to Egypt at the same price it had decades prior, around 0.8 francs per kilogram.\(^8^6\) Olive oil sold for

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\(^8^4\) Consul General of France in Jerusalem Outrey forwarding report by Jaffa Vice Consul Durieux to Ministre des affaires étrangeres, direction des affaires politiques et commerciales “La Palestine économique en 1908: Rapport sur la Palestine écomimique, tableux récapitulatifs des marchandises,” 1 February 1908, folio 149. CADN 294PO/B/40. According to pages 24-25, the soap went mainly to Egypt, while the small amounts of olive oil went to North Africa, namely Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. If the latter is true, it would be quite surprising, considering Tunisia’s well-developed olive industry, as well as Algeria’s to a lesser extent.

\(^8^5\) Ibid., folio 11.

\(^8^6\) Ibid., folio 22. According to folio 25, sesame exports (mainly to England and France) fluctuated from 2,160 tons in 1903, down to 420 in 1907, and spiked up again to 3,312 tons in 1908.
approximately the same price in years of relative scarcity. Because of the alternating years of olive production, in years of abundance prices could drop to between 55-60 francs per 100 kilos. On average, it was estimated that the olive crop for the central and south of Palestine totaled 5,000 metric tons; thus the combined production of Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Lydda, Ramla, Jaffa, and Hebron totaled around 1,000 tons of olive oil, based on an estimated yield of 20 percent at the press. While peasant families would often use a water-based method to extract

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87 Ibid., folio 23. The price circa 1908, despite a great crop, was 16 francs per jarrah of 7 rotals, customary measures varying locally in the neighborhood of 20 kilograms, thus yielding an average price of 80 francs per 100 kilograms.

88 Ibid. Durieux noted that olive oil had almost entirely supplanted sesame oil. He gives estimates of local production that seem unlikely: 3,000 tons for the Jerusalem-area villages and 3,000 tons for the coastal villages around Lydda, Ramla, and Jaffa, plus 300 tons from the Hebron area. Of that total, he asserts 5,000 tons would pressed for oil while the rest would be locally consumed. He also argues that “this product would be much more considerable if the peasants did not continuously cut down the olive trees to sell the wood. They deforest the country to escape fiscal exigencies that burden the olive trees with three taxes, payable simultaneously. The peasant must pay a tax for the terrain planted with olives, a second tax on the number of olive trees, and a third tax on the olives themselves. The peasant prefers to extract an immediate profit by cutting down the trees rather than pay a tax that often exceeds the value of the yield of the fruits [my translation].” He contrasts this with the new Jewish colonies that had begun planting olives in plantations, however, noting that the trees require at least 10 years to begin producing, after which a tree could provide a cultivator of 10-15 francs of revenue, depending on the age of the tree. This early experiment in Zionist olive cultivation would not survive the war.

89 Ibid., folio 24. This, of course, excludes the oil-producing north: the triangle between Nablus, Jenin, and Tulkarm, as well as the Galilee villages east of Acre and Haifa. The overall statistical reliability of this report is highly questionable. For example, it claims that Beit Jala (near Bethlehem) produced the largest part of the olive oil made in Palestine at the time; however, it counts the number of olive trees in the surrounding vast plain as 30,000-40,000, which would only be about 3,000-4,000 dunams on average. By way of comparison, Palestinians throughout most of the Mandate and Jordanian periods planted an average of 150,000 trees or 15,000 dunams annually.
oil from small quantities, each village was said to have 2-3 animal or human-driven presses, with just 3-4 modern or “perfected” presses.\(^90\)

**Graph 3. Value of olive oil soap exports just before the First World War**

Selected exports of Palestine via Jaffa, 1910-1913, valued in millions of francs\(^91\)

\(^{90}\) Ibid. « On compte 3 à 4 presses perfectionnées dans le pays, une à Mar Elias près de Jérusalem, une autre à Jaffa importée par un français M. Portalis et actuellement mise en vente avec tout l’outillage, une troisième à Ein Sima dans les limites de Naplous [sic] ; et une autre à Calonia près de Jérusalem est encore en installation. Une société française du Thabor vient de se former pour l’exploitation de toutes les industries se rattachant aux olives et aux huiles ; elle poursuit ce double but en encouragement la plantation de cet arbre si prospère dans le pays et qui réussit très bien dans les régions et les endroits montagneux impropres à toute autre culture. »

\(^{91}\) Data for 1910-1912: Henri Frigère, Conseiller du commerce exterieur de la France à Jérusalem to MAE, « Rapport commercial du Sandjak de Jérusalem, Année 1912, » folio 15. CADN 294PO/B/40 Affaires économiques et commerciales (suite) 1890-1913. Data for barley from 1910 and 1911 not available. Oranges, soap, barley, and alcoholic beverages were the four most valuable for those years. Olive oil and sesame were combined for the 1912 dated report, and therefore are not included here. They were broken apart for the following report, dated 1914, which also provides data for 1913: Le conseiller du commerce extérieur de la France Henri Frigère, Jérusalem, to MAE, “Sandjak de Jérusalem : Rapport Commercial pour l’année 1913,” dated 10 Juillet 1914, page 16-17. CADN 294PO/B/40.

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Trends in the years preceding World War I continued as they had the decade prior: the orange export market continued its rapid growth, while soap (primarily made from olive oil) remained Palestine’s second-most valuable export.\textsuperscript{92} The small amounts exported of olive and sesame oils went, like soap, almost exclusively to Egypt.\textsuperscript{93} Thus Palestinian surplus olive oil production remained primarily geared toward the domestic soap industry on the eve of the war. As the next subsection will show, it is difficult to estimate domestic consumption, but my best guess is that typically somewhere around half of all olive oil was turned into soap, while close to half of all olives was consumed as food by its producers (a small remainder being used as fuel, such as for lamps at holy sites).\textsuperscript{94}

With respect to grains, the other key staple of the Palestinian diet at the time, caravans of wheat and flour were commonly sent from Kerak, Salt and the Hauran to the Jerusalem market.\textsuperscript{95} All other small towns, like Gaza, Ramla, Hebron, and Jericho almost without exception consumed locally produced flour; Jaffa and to a lesser extent Jerusalem consumed some

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{92} Frigère to MAE, “Rapport commercial … année 1912,” page 15. The fourth-most valuable export, wine and alcoholic spirits, reflects the growth of relatively recently established Jewish colonies and the entrepreneurship of Christian Palestinians. Viticulture in the Hebron area has particularly deep roots.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{94} Taking the French consulate’s estimates, for example, we see roughly 3,500 tons of olive oil produced a year in Palestine circa the turn of the century; average annual olive oil soap production was around 2,000 tons. Olive oil soap was 85 percent olive oil, meaning the soap industry consumed about half of the figure (roughly 1,700 tons). There is no sense in the consular reports of how much of the olive crop was pickled at the time, so these figures are just the roughest of guidelines.
\end{flushright}
imported flour, though in very limited quantities. Domestic trade occurred largely in kind, with customary measures of olive oil standing in as currency. If hard currency was required, as in the case of foreign trade, it was largely conducted using French francs, with the Napoléon d’Or (equivalent to 20 francs) as the standard; or the currency of the foreign trading partner would be used, with Ottoman currency a rarity (especially distrusted print bills) that would never be used for foreign exchange.

French weights and measures were also used in cities, while the peasantry used widely variable customary measures (like the rotel) that could change from village to village. The urban usage of French currency, and of the French system of weights and measures, suggests more than a degree of European economic influence, at least over certain areas. This likely arose out of the practicalities of trade and the growing European economic presence in Palestine. Furthermore, it suggests that governmental hegemony did not extend far beyond the urban centers. Regardless of whether the adoption of this specific system was a centralized decision from above, or an adoption of merchants from below, it is important to note here that the Palestinian peasantry remained largely outside governmental control — apart, essentially, from periodic conscription and taxation. From a state-centric perspective, it is a marker of state sovereignty, or rather the inability of the central government to assert its regulatory will over the entirety of its professed holdings.

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96 Ibid.
97 Henri Frigère, Conseiller du commerce exteriure de la France à Jérusalem to MAE, « Rapport commercial du Sandjak de Jérusalem, Année 1912, » page 1. CADN 294PO/B/40 Affaires économiques et commerciales (suite) 1890-1913. Thanks to Steven Serels for his insights into the topics relating to currency usage in this period.
98 Elihu Grant, The Peasantry of Palestine: the Life, manners, and customs of the village (The Pilgrim Press, 1907), 147.
In sum, complementing the work of scholars like Buheiry and Scholch, French consular records from the late 19th and early 20th centuries confirm the growing European penetration and control of Ottoman markets through indirect means, in addition to direct political and financial control through a variety of concessions. The Palestinian agricultural economy nevertheless remained relatively resilient and diversified in terms of both products and markets, particularly compared to its neighbors like Egypt and Mount Lebanon.

The Palestinian peasant in the late Ottoman period: Views from Biblical scholars and missionaries

While consular sources offer a sense of broad patterns of foreign trade, particularly exports, it is much more difficult to assess domestic consumption, and to identify how patterns of daily life, such as diet, changed over time. An American consul in Jerusalem provided one estimate of the “standard of living” in Palestine circa 1884 by reporting that the average family of a fellah could be fed for 28 cents a day, the peasant family’s diet depending on bread, olives and olive oil, accompanied by cheese, yogurt, and vegetables, with meat being a rarity. With the exception of rare mentions like this one, the obvious problem with an analysis of agricultural production based on export estimates from foreign consulates is that it completely misses anything not exported overseas — that is, either domestically consumed or traded locally or regionally overland. Owing to the nature of consular statistics (namely who gathered them and

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99 Dispatch from Selah Merrill, American Consul in Jerusalem, 5 July 1884. NARA M5, cited in Reilly, 88 fn 25. This is likely an overestimation, based on the prices the American consul pays in the city, as a foreigner in Jerusalem. For example, almost no Palestinian at the time purchased baked bread, instead making it at home; villagers typically baked their own bread at home or in communal village ovens, and urban dwellers would take their homemade dough to town bakeries.
why), effectively no attention was paid to local consumption, and only minimal attention was paid to regional trade (that is, within the confines of the Ottoman polity).

This is a general problem of trade-based economic history, which emphasizes trade with other political entities, that which crosses borders, while neglecting the domestic. Ottoman sources unfortunately do not offer a substantial documentary base, as the capital was concerned predominantly with political and military issues, as well as defensive development through foreign concessions in order to introduce modern inventions like electricity and railways.\(^{100}\) Another way to get at these questions of local practice is to look to travelers who were interested in the inhabitants of the land at the time, in order to provide an alternate view of economic changes in this period.

The British society known as the Palestine Exploration Fund was established in 1865, its works marking both the growing European presence in the Ottoman Empire and reflecting broader trends toward making more “scientific” sense of the “Holy Land.”\(^{101}\) In practice, this meant funding expeditions for mapping and excavations, the society’s interests lying predominantly in the topography of Ottoman Palestine (identifying, for example, the locations of sites mentioned in the Bible), while paying lip service to studying the peasantry and present practices as a kind of proto-ethnography. As with much Orientalist research of this vintage, the

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\(^{100}\) Thanks to Chris Gratien for sharing copies of late-Ottoman era agricultural statistics with me, which unfortunately did not capture the olive crops for Palestine: see *Zara’i Istatistiqa* 1323 hijri, and *Sanai’ Istatistik* 1329 ve 1331 hijri, İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi digitization project İSTKA/2012/BIL/233.

society’s remarks on the present inhabitants tended toward the disparaging, its expeditions sending back reports on the need to save and modernize the Near East.

By the early 20th century, Biblical scholars had begun to turn their attention to the peasants of Palestine, a topic they proclaimed to be understudied. One such traveler was the Reverend C.T. Wilson, an English vicar and missionary, who published a book specifically devoted to the topic of *Peasant Life in the Holy Land*.\(^{102}\) Wilson pointed to the olive tree as a characteristic feature of Palestine — citing the Bible to show the familiarity of Israelites with the tree. Wilson declared that the tree has a certain charm, though quickly added the caveat that to “the Western eye,” its gnarled branches inspired in him feelings of stiffness and monotony.\(^{103}\) Nevertheless, Wilson remarked: “Of fruit-bearing trees the olive is *facile princeps* in value and importance. Indeed, the olive crop is, at least at the present day, of more real importance than either of the grain crops, wheat and barley.” The olive and its derivative products, according to his observations, were essential for taxes and other expenses requiring cash.\(^{104}\) Wilson detailed the practices of olive tree cultivation, its key environmental and social conditions, and the processes for producing olive oil, which in turn could be used in both cooking and soap making.\(^{105}\) Wilson noted the impact of integration into market economies, which he argued had affected the price of olive oil: “Its price varies greatly from year to year, according to the quantity in the market; but taking it altogether, it is by far the most valuable product of the

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\(^{103}\) Ibid., 226.

\(^{104}\) Ibid.

\(^{105}\) Ibid., 227-232.
Wilson thus again confirms the central importance of the olive tree and its products, as well as the impact of market integration, resulting in wildly fluctuating prices of the key cash crop for the Arab inhabitants of Palestine at the beginning of the 20th century.

Another scholar named Elihu Grant, an associate professor of Biblical literature at Smith College, lived in Ramallah for three years between 1901 and 1904, an experience he recounted in his 1907 book *The Peasantry of Palestine: the life, manners, and customs of the village*. Like Wilson, Grant confirms the importance of the olive tree, noting the myriad uses of the olive, which he similarly notes is likely the most valuable of the fruit trees in the land. Again, like Wilson, he was critical of the shape of the olive tree itself, noting in particular its uselessness for shade. Furthermore, he stated that the olives and the oil produced were quite disagreeable to the European palate, though the brined olives were commonly eaten and cheap olive oil comprised a cheap, essential foodstuff for the peasants: “The purest grade may be purchased as low as the rate of six cents a pound when bought by the jar (seven *ruts* [sic], or about forty-four pounds [20 kilograms], of oil).” In assessing the poor quality of the olive tree’s products, he blamed the inefficient harvest practices of the peasants, such as beating the olive tree so the olives fall to the ground before they reach full maturity, which would remain a common trope for criticizing the backwardness of the Palestinian peasantry through the Mandate period. Alongside his critique of traditional harvesting practices, Grant noted the primitiveness of pressing methods — another source of “inefficiency,” the peasantry persisting in “backwards”

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106 Ibid., 232.
109 Ibid., 80-81.
110 Ibid., 40
practices — reconfirming Orientalist visions of a land fundamentally unchanged since Biblical times. Grant further detailed the poor practices of olive-oil makers, who failed to clean their vats thoroughly (if at all) and negligently mixed different grades of oil together. Again, similar critiques would be echoed throughout the Mandate period in British official assessments.

Grant noted that occasionally peasants would cut down their olive trees to sell the wood to makers of “olive-wood articles,” which he stated were prized by tourists. Olive wood devotional items like rosaries had become souvenir staples of the Christian pilgrimage trade in Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Considering the olive tree’s longevity, and the many years required before an olive tree begins producing productively, such a weighty decision requires further analysis than Grant’s comment in passing. Perhaps the souvenir carvers were supplied with enough wood from annual pruning. But in Grant’s telling, in order to provide enough wood to sell olive-wood crucifixes and boxes to the waves of Western pilgrims, peasants were chopping down productive olive trees — a short-sighted decision to be sure, if true. Most likely, if this was occurring to any significant extent on occasion, this economic calculus involved the tax policies of Ottoman rulers, who subjected the lucrative olive tree to additional taxation on the tree itself, beyond taxes on the land and tithes on the crop. Considering the impact of year-to-year fluctuations in the price of the olive tree’s products, as well as the potential for a poor harvest and the general need for firewood as an energy source, it is therefore not surprising that peasants

111 Ibid., 140.
112 Ibid., 80-81.
113 Ibid., 40.
114 Bowring, 21, in the early 19th century had made special note of olivewood rosaries sold to tourists in Palestine, a trade monopolized at that time by the local monks.
would occasionally choose to chop down their trees in the face of a potentially devastating tax burden. More research into the specific application of Ottoman tax collection in this period is required to assert definitively that it resulted in permanent damage to olive trees as a form of tax evasion, particularly considering that tithes were often waived in the wake of drought.

Pre-war benchmarks for Palestinian olive crops and olive oil prices

John D. Whiting, the first child born at the American Colony in Jerusalem, a Christian utopian community founded in 1881, was fluent in Arabic and spent nearly his entire life as a resident there. Among numerous lines of work, he served as deputy United States consul for Jerusalem from about 1908 to 1915. Whiting was asked repeatedly by his superiors to compile reports on the olive crop and olive oil prices, allowing us for the first time to reconstruct the conditions of agricultural production in the late Ottoman period, at least for the Jerusalem/Ramallah area. Whiting and his superiors placed such an emphasis on the olive crop because it functioned, in their view, as an index for the conditions of the peasantry. When the

116 He was a business manager of Fr. Vester and Co., also known as the American Colony Store in Jerusalem, whose sales of souvenirs and artifacts supported the colony; he served as a guide for pilgrims and archaeologists to various ancient sites in the region; he was a photographers and writer who published articles on the Holy Land in National Geographic; he also briefly served as an undercover military intelligence officer in 1918 for the British Army. For more biographical information see Laura J. Kells, John D. Whiting: A Register of His Papers in the Library of Congress. (Washington, DC: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, 2006).

One interesting inconsistency in Whiting’s early diplomatic reports is the location of the dateline: Jerusalem is sometimes located in Palestine, sometimes Syria, and sometimes Whiting refers to living in “Turkey.” This is consistent with recent research on the fluidity and overlapping identities of the period, contra earlier nationalist writers. One limitation of this source base is its focus on the Jerusalem mutassarifiyah, where he lived and was posted, which thus excludes the northern olive-growing areas, particularly the Triangle (between Jenin, Tulkarm, and Nablus, renowned for its agricultural fertility) and farther north through the Galilee. Nevertheless, many of his observations are generalizable for the broader area of southern Syria.
olive crop was good, as in 1911, the peasants in the olive-growing districts quite obviously prospered, while in 1910, when the crop was poor, they suffered. The fortunes of peasants were linked inextricably to the olive crop, from year to year. Overall, Whiting reported that the price of olive oil had been steadily rising in the last few years of the decade of 1900, and he highlighted a diminishing difference in the prices of oil between good and bad years just before the First World War, suggesting the immediate pre-war period was one of relative economic stability for the peasantry.

Another marker of the olive’s significance was its standing as the customary standard of liquid measurements, which was based upon olive oil containers (jarrah). In a table of comparative weights and measures from 1911, Whiting noted that in Jerusalem and the vicinity, “a vessel made to contain 75 dirhims weight of medium quality olive oil is considered a liquid okiye. The jarra varies in each village.” While the jarrah, a large clay pot, would be of slightly different sizes depending on the specific village, nevertheless olive oil, stored in jarrahs or other containers, determined the system of liquid measurement in Palestine in this period.

Besides the fellahin, the second key group involved in the production and trade of this commodity was speculators and investors in olive oil markets. One reason for American consular interest in the Palestinian olive oil market at the time was because of Palestinian emigration to America, particularly of Christians from the Jerusalem area, especially the northern subdistrict of Ramallah and al-Bireh. In a December 1910 report, Whiting noted, “of late the many emigrants in the United States from the Christian villages of Ramallah, Beer Zeit [Birzeit], Jifna and

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118 “Table of comparative weights and measures,” 8 April 1911, 16/5, Whiting Papers, MD LOC, 103-104. As noted elsewhere, on average the jarrah converts to roughly 20 kilograms.
environs, which are right in the olive district of this Mutsaarifyet [sic], have been sending back considerable capital, which, for the lack of other sources of investment are being used with which to speculate in oil. The oil is purchased in the year of plenty, stored in specially constructed cisterns, and kept over till the poor year.”

Whiting thus made two key observations: first, the natural alternating year pattern of olive bearing, which earlier missionaries and later colonial officials would erroneously attribute to detrimental local harvesting methods; second, the recognition of this pattern by local Palestinians, and investment in what amounts to an olive oil futures market.

While olive oil could have been imported from Greece if local prices rose too much (despite it being considered inferior according to local taste preferences), this olive oil futures market acted as a price stabilizer for local markets: raising the price of oil in a good year (by withholding some oil from the market to await better prices in the year of a poor crop) and lowering prices in the bad year by releasing the olive oil stores. Of course, the system relied on the actual physical storage of the olive oil, rather than contemporary practices involving paper certificates and complex exchanges of a variety of contracts, options, and other financial derivatives. Whiting estimated that 20,000 to 25,000 jars of oil (about 400-500 tons) in the area of Ramallah, Birzeit, and Jifna were stored and awaiting sale at the time.

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119 “The Olive Oil Crop for 1910,” 12 December 1910, 16/5, Whiting Papers, MD LOC, 72.
120 Increased demand for olive oil soap from Egypt and Syria spurred year-round soap production and necessitated occasional olive oil imports from “Metylene [sic; Whiting meant Mytilene, Lesbos, Greece] cheaper than the local product can be had, but the latter never is fully dispensed with since the imported oil is of an inferior quality, and has, in order to be used at all, to be mixed with the Syrian product.” Ibid.
121 It is possible, though not attested in Whiting’s reports, that Palestinians originating in the Ramallah/Bireh area settling in the Midwest were influenced by the examples of the Chicago
This emigrant-remittance-dependent futures market is one key factor in the stabilization of olive oil prices in the pre-war years, moderating the wild fluctuations of the late 19th century. The crops could still fluctuate broadly from year to year.\textsuperscript{123} The following table of olive oil purchases, derived from Whiting’s consular reports, illustrates the relative stability of olive oil prices in the Jerusalem district in the late Ottoman era, prior to the First World War:

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\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 73.

\textsuperscript{123} For example, Whiting estimated the entire crop of 1910 as being just 10 percent of the yield from 1909, owing to crop failure almost everywhere. The exception was some mountain districts where comparatively good meant between 25 to 50 percent of the yield of the previous year. 8 April 1911, 16/5, Whiting Papers, MD LOC, 102.

As explained previously, the pattern of a good crop alternating with a bad crop is inherent to the olive tree, which depends on a wide array of environmental factors to bear fully. A good example of the interaction of these factors is provided by 1911, which was expected to be quite good barring the extreme heat of the periodic sirocco. 30 May 1911, 16/5, Whiting Papers, MD LOC, 107.

Some trees at certain altitudes were damaged by a hot spell that happened to coincide with when the trees blossomed (which occurs at different times at three distinct elevations: the plains, versus low hills, versus higher hills). 29 July 1911, 16/5, Whiting Papers, MD LOC, 128.

Nevertheless, the olive crop was still estimated to be a fairly good one. Whiting’s benchmark in 1911 remained the 1909 crop. Although varying by location, depending that season on the altitude of the groves, the area’s yield was estimated at two-thirds to three-fourths the quantity of the 1909 crop, considered to be exceptionally good — so much so that the quantity of oil still stored from two years prior was so large that local dealers in Jerusalem were unsure if they would be able to dispose of the old oil before the new oil arrived. “The Olive Crop,” 8 September 1911, 16/6, Whiting Papers, MD LOC, 130.
Table 1. Pre-war olive oil prices according to Whiting consular reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month/year</th>
<th>Low price</th>
<th>High price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 1909</td>
<td>95 piasters</td>
<td>104 piasters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1910</td>
<td>111 prs</td>
<td>118 prs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1911</td>
<td>120 prs</td>
<td>125 prs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1911</td>
<td>120 prs</td>
<td>125 prs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1911</td>
<td>108 prs</td>
<td>110 prs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1911</td>
<td>101 prs</td>
<td>112 prs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1911</td>
<td>100 prs</td>
<td>103 prs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1912</td>
<td>85 prs</td>
<td>95 prs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1912</td>
<td>100 prs</td>
<td>105 prs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The prices represent bulk purchases on the wholesale market. Small merchants would buy oil in the villages where it was stored, and then sell to the soap-making shops in Jerusalem or other cities. So while there was very little crop in 1910, and the 1911 olive crop was quite good, the amount of oil in storage went down, but not perhaps as much as would be expected, owing to the ability to store the surplus. The pattern then repeated: 1912 was expected to yield an olive crop

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124 “The Olive Oil Crop for 1910,” 12 December 1910, 16/5, 73. One local piaster (the English translation for qirsh in Arabic, the Ottoman kurus) was worth 3 ½ cents United States’ money at the time according to Whiting. One jar of oil equaled about 22 ¼ kilos (or 46.4 quarts). Accounting for inflation, a piaster equaled about 85 cents in 2012-2013, so the value of a jarrah would fluctuate between $80-$100 when adjusted for a century’s worth of inflation.
125 Ibid.
126 “The Oil Market” 27 January 1911,16/5, Whiting Papers, MD LOC, 97.
127 8 April 1911, 16/5, Whiting Papers, MD LOC, 101. Whiting gives the quantity of a jarrah here as 52.5 quarts.
128 30 May 1911, 16/5, Whiting Papers, MD LOC, 107.
129 29 July 1911, 16/5, Whiting Papers, MD LOC, 128.
130 “The Olive Crop,” 8 September 1911,16/5, Whiting Papers, MD LOC, 130.
132 “The Oil Market,” 22 July 22 1912, 16/6, Whiting Papers, MD LOC,147.
133 “The Oil Market” 27 January 1911, 16/5, Whiting Papers, MD LOC, 97.
of almost nothing as “shalatoney” or an off year. Whiting reported that the price of olive oil had been steadily rising in the last few years of the decade of 1900, and pointed to a diminishing difference in the prices of oil between good and bad years, illustrated in the table above.

In addition to the olive oil futures system, Whiting also attributed the increasing stability in prices of oil to external demand for Palestinian soap. Previously, soap factories made soap for three months of the year, using up all of their oil, then spending the rest of the year drying and then selling it. Whiting described increased regional demand, possibly the reinforcement of preexisting trade patterns in reaction to growing European domination of consumer goods:

Syrian made olive oil soap (Nablous) having become celebrated for this product, from the Mohamedanne [sic] of Egypt and Turkey who object to using soaps that possibly may have been made of fat of “unclean” animals, has obliged the factories to work nearly, or all the year around, [as] an easy market is now found for soap not fully dry.

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135 Whiting was not immune to the discourses of the time blaming peasant practices for the inherent biannual cycle of olive bearing. In 1912, Whiting rightly attributed the crop failure to storms, see “The Oil Market,” 22 July 22 1912, 16/6, Whiting Papers, MD LOC, 148. However, in previous years, such as in a report from 12 December 1910, Whiting blamed the method of peasants beating the trees for also shaking off blossoms, thus leading to a poor crop the following year: “The natives seem to expect but one crop every two years and believe that the olive will not bear every year as other trees do. The fact is that in collecting the olives the natives use sticks to beat the crop off which destroys the buds already started for the next year’s crop. Actual tests have shown that when the olives are plucked by hand and not beaten, that trees yield a fairly good crop the off year, if no climate obstacles arise.” In the 8 April 1911 report, Whiting reiterated this in assessing the 1911 crop: “the young buds have not suffered from the severe process of beating” since the 1910 crop, a poor one, did not need to be harvested. The indigenous expectation of alternate bearing was in fact accurate.

136 “The Olive Oil Crop for 1910,” 12 December 1910, 16/5, Whiting Papers, MD LOC, 71.

137 Ibid.

138 Ibid., 72.
Imported soaps possessed less appeal to the Muslims of Egypt and Syria, according to Whiting, though it may have had more to do with the centuries-long-established excellent reputation of Nabulsi soap, for which European soaps were no substitute in Egyptian and Syrian markets. An issue of the Damascus newspaper *al-Qabas* from 30 September 1913 illustrated that European soap manufacturers believed much the same as Whiting in a form of culturalist religious solidarity: the last page contained an advertisement for a British-made *al-Hilal* or “Crescent” soap. This rather crass attempt to cash in on “Islamic”-themed soap is belied both by the advertising copy, which described its use by British royalty, and its illustrations, depicting the crescent moon over a British seal, illustrating its dual sources of quality: both British and allegedly “Islamic.”

Whiting’s uniquely detailed consular reports, owing to his personal roots in the area, extensively illustrate multiple developments in the local markets: the impact of emigration, the creation of a proto-olive oil futures market, and above all the central importance of olive oil, not only as a commodity, but also as a unit of measure. In contrast to postwar discourses regarding the Ottoman degradation of Palestine, Whiting’s papers offer a portrait of a predominantly rural, agrarian economy enjoying relative stability and deriving profits from its lucrative olive-derived commodities. This image contradicts the traditional portrait of late Ottoman decline, commonly invoked in colonial discourses in particular.

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139 *al-Qabas*, 30 September 1913, page 4. Unlike other advertisers, the advertisement does not reappear in subsequent issues, perhaps bespeaking a lack of success in its appeal, or owing to the later outbreak of war and the imposition of the British embargo on Syria.
2. Late-Ottoman mechanisms of control: forestry, fuel, and trade

The conventional view of Ottoman forestry is one of corruption and rapacious, short-sighted practices abetted by a lax, decentralized bureaucracy. In one of the earliest Mandate-era reports regarding forestry and conservation, a review submitted to the Colonial Office by the first director of the department of agriculture in 1923, E.R. Sawer noted that the Sublime Porte circa the turn of the 20th century had asked French foresters to prepare a law to protect the empire’s forests: “From all accounts, to which the present day conditions bear testimony, this legislation remained a dead letter, or, rather, only served as an instrument for the extortion of additional revenues.”140 While a strong law in theory, Sawer quoted a 1903 consular report citing its failures in practice, blaming in particular the “ill-will of shepherds and woodcutters,” as well as “the indiscriminate felling of timber by villagers.”141 Sawer noted in addition that while the law provided for punishment of forest fires, convictions on such charges were rare. Ultimately, Sawer concluded, the Ottoman authorities provided no real encouragement of young plantations, instead encouraging charcoal production at the expense of trees — particularly as revenue generation via the issuance of permits for small sums became a priority, which further exacerbated and accelerated established local practices.142 Upon the establishment of the Mandate, British colonial officials would later claim that Ottoman corruption in its final years led to the widespread granting of licenses to produce charcoal in order to generate fees, describing the resulting “fuel famines” in Jerusalem over the winters of 1920 and 1921, and

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141 Ibid., 19. Sawer’s account appears to be derived from a legal corpus, George Young’s *Corps de droit Ottoman*, published in French in Oxford in seven volumes from 1905-1906.
142 Ibid.
decrying at length “[t]he unhappy fate of the Village of Umm El Fahm (“mother of charcoal”) that epitomises the havoc wrought by the Turk. The inhabitants of this village which once flourished, as its name signifies, as a purveyor of charcoal to the neighbourhood, now scour the neighbourhood to buy it.”

While legislative and judicial records are often more guidelines or recommendations than enforced prescriptions put into practice, in the wake of the 1908 Committee of Union and Progress revolution the Nablus municipality preserved a number of firmans under the rubric of forestry, with the express intention of protecting olive trees. The municipality documented the appointment of guards to certain villages where revenge for familial grievances was expressed through attacks on private property, with evidence that the larger imperial trends toward forest protection were — contrary to European conclusions at the time — actually being put into effect, with prosecution of a few for such acts of vandalism. In addition, the legislation intended to prevent the overgrazing of animals, which has long been seen as one of the causes of environmental degradation in the broader Mediterranean hills. In short, the local authorities clearly cared about implementing these broader imperial policies about local renewable resources like forests and water. After 1908, the Nablus municipality enforced the forestry law in order to protect olive trees in particular, as a type of local conservation, through the appointment of village guards.

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143 Ibid., 18.
144 Please see the following pages for full citations from the records (sijillat, in Arabic) of the Nablus municipal council held by the NMA.
In fact, forestry guards in the Nablus area were tasked not only with protecting trees, but also plantings (mazruʿat) more broadly. A 1908 pronouncement declared that the municipal council would take measures to stop “the phenomenon of burning olive trees” for purposes of revenge.\textsuperscript{146} Declaring such practices of burning olive trees or qashar (peeling or debarking with the intent of killing a tree), to be not only the custom of “the ignorant,” but also a “sinful habit contrary to the law of the countryside,” the district administrative council made it obligatory for the village leaders (mukhatir and ikhtariyah) to select a watchman (natour) or watchmen (naturin or nawatir) according to the village’s relative size. The watchmen, the announcement stipulated, would be paid a monthly salary of 150 qirsh by the local landowners, in order to perform a number of functions: stop anyone caught in the act; immediately inform the mukhtar and the village elders, who should then assist the watchman; and then lastly, hand the perpetrators over to the district officer.

These laws were actually put into effect, as subsequent documents suggest local enforcement was substantial. Once the watchmen had been elected, their names and stamps were registered with the baladiyah (municipality). Ten villages in the Nablus area appointed guards, also known as conservators of trees and plantings.\textsuperscript{147} Furthermore, one additional village was fined for failing to appoint a watchman.\textsuperscript{148}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[146] NMA, Department of Historical Documents (\textit{wathaʾiq tarikhiyah}), sijillat [records] volume 4 (of 27), page 274, decision no. 769, 1908: “Announcement of the decision of the district managing council of taking measures to stop the phenomenon of burning olive trees with the intent of revenge.”
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Additionally, in the villages where watchmen were appointed, the municipality recorded a number of incidents where perpetrators were caught and punished with fines. A decision recorded that a local notable of Sebastiyah had reported three individuals who violated the council’s edict by bringing their livestock among the olive trees to graze. Each of the three was to be punished with an individual fine of a *riyal majidi*, to be deposited with the municipal treasury (*sundouq al-baladiyah*), for their violation of the municipality’s declarations. In subsequent years, the municipality appears to have taken less interest in intervening directly in village agriculture and forestry, with a handful of exceptions: appointing a worker to maintain trees along the roads in al-Shawitrah locality in 1911; and appointing conservators of crop production in Tmun village in 1912. But the follow-through and enforcement circa 1908 belies the later harsh judgments of Ottoman forestry by British foresters, influenced by colonial discourses concerning deforestation, which centered on the abuse of trees as firewood.

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149 NMA sijillat volume 6, page 23, decision no. 725, 1909: “Decision to fine persons from Sebastiyah for bringing their animals down [to graze] among the olive trees.”

150 NMA sijillat volume 7, page 12, decision no. 58, 1911: “Decision to appoint worker to maintain trees along roads in al-Shwitrah locality”; NMA sijillat volume 8, page 53, decision no. 261, 1912: “Decision to appoint conservators of outputs of crops, village Tmun.”
Pre-war fuel regime: Ottoman governmental interventions through trade controls and export bans

As the example of local forest guards appointed by the Nablus Municipality shows, the Ottoman government was in many ways quite dependent on local intermediaries, particularly urban and rural notables, for enforcement and execution of legislation. However, Istanbul would attempt to assert control directly at one of the chokepoints where states have the most capacity to intervene: ports of trade, closely supervised by customs authorities and foreign consuls. Owing to the severe winter of 1910-1911, for example, the Ottoman authorities banned the export of firewood and charcoal derived from wood as of 15 March 1912, in order to ensure a supply for local needs aggravated by the weather patterns.151 Similarly, in August of 1911, “local needs” led to the interdiction of the exportations of draft animals, specifically horses and mules.152 Similar bans had been enacted in the 19th century.153 The British authorities would later continue this pattern and impose extensive trade controls during World War II. In fact, one of the very first actions made by the new British civilian administration of Palestine in October 1920 (three years prior to the official establishment of the Mandate) was to maintain an export ban on olive oil imposed sometime during the three prior years of military occupation.154 In lacking mechanisms

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151 Le charge d’affaires de France à Consantinople to Consulat Général de France à Jérusalem, 18 mars 1911. CADN 294PO/B/5, Dossier taxes et impôts 1847-1911, subdossier importations-exportations 1908-1911.
153 al-Quds al-Sharif Mutassarifiyah, no. 92, municipal order banning export of “bêtes de somme [beasts of burden],” received by Consulate General of France 31 octobre 1885. CADN 294PO/B/5, Dossier taxes et impôts.
154 H. Harari, Minutes of the first meeting of the advisory council to Palestine civilian administration, “Mr. H. Harari reporting on the conditions of principal food stuffs and embargo of olive oil and olive exports,” 6 October 1920. TNA CO 814/6-0001, 11.
to intervene in markets directly, a chokepoint of trade like a port continued to be a low-cost mechanism of state control over the economy.

Governmental attempts to intervene at ports of trade and impose export controls on fuel supplies had increasingly significant impact owing to the changing fuel regime, since both Palestine and the broader Ottoman Empire had become dependent on imported types of fuel. In a report dating from early October 1913, the American Consul for Jerusalem Whiting noted that while the stoves of city dwellers had formerly burned charcoal, these medany (urbanites) had recently switched to imported kerosene.¹⁵⁵ Rural dwellers, according to Whiting, continued to rely upon brushwood and thistles as their main fuels, with Bedouin using predominantly animal manure.

Charcoal was derived from wood. The increasing scarcity of scrub oak, from which charcoal was predominantly made, along with the increasing availability of imported kerosene had likely driven the change in fuel regime for city dwellers in the early 1900s. According to Whiting, the “native women” had held onto the use of their “primitive charcoal stove,” which was still generally preferred, until around 1910. Economic considerations drove the change, rather than the desire or felt need to imitate “better” foreign methods or those of local European families, who used wood and coal ranges.¹⁵⁶ Whiting described the switch along the following lines: “The scarcity caused by constantly uprooting the scrub oak has so raised the price of charcoal, and the constant competition for trade has, on the other hand, so lessened the price of

¹⁵⁵ “Cooking Stoves and Fuel as Used in the Jerusalem Consular District,” 4 October 1913, MD LOC 16/6, 149.
¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 150.
kerosene oil, that the latter is fast becoming the fuel of Palestine.”\[^{157}\] The switch to kerosene stoves in the early 1900s among city dwellers would have enormous implications during the course of the war, since the joint British-French blockade on all imports to the coast of Syria would prevent nearly any kerosene from reaching the area.

To conclude, Ottoman interventions in forestry and fuel were limited but significant, illustrating some of the patterns that the British would maintain in the Mandate period: dependence on local intermediaries for enforcement; a general inability to intervene in domestic markets, particularly as Palestine became informally integrated into imperial, global trade networks; and an emphasis on ports of trade as chokepoints where restrictions on exports could be successfully enacted, particularly in lieu of direct interventions in the countryside where governmental hegemony remained more aspirational than actual.

3. First World War: conditions in the early stages

The disruptions of the Great War were foreshadowed on a smaller scale by the Italian invasion of Libya, which Whiting noted in 1912 had disrupted tourism and trade.\[^{158}\] By the late summer of 1914, just prior to the outbreak of war in Europe, Whiting described bright prospects for the coming tourist season. Yet with the start of war in August, the banks, which were all run by European companies, suspended payments and so caused the start of a “severe business depression.”\[^{159}\] The outbreak of war caused a brief spike in prices of imported foodstuffs and provisions, but prices for food and fuel returned largely to normal as the Ottoman Empire was

\[^{157}\] Ibid.
\[^{158}\] “Report: The Financial Conditions of 1911,” 9 February 1912, MD LOC 16/6, 139.
\[^{159}\] “Economic Conditions – Causes and Results,” March 1915, MD LOC 16/6, 182.
not yet involved in the war.\textsuperscript{160} But then, upon the Ottoman entry into the war in late October and early November 1914, dealers sought to either hide their stores or sell their goods on the black market, in order to avoid military requisition of their stocks and to take advantage of the spike in prices caused by the shortages.\textsuperscript{161} In short order, by March 1915, Whiting reported that rice, sugar, and petroleum products were effectively “non-existent in the market, and if any is sold secretly it is done at abnormal prices.”\textsuperscript{162}

The isolation of Palestine imposed radical changes on the local fuel regime. Petroleum had primarily come from Russia, and the railroads were powered by coal, mainly in compressed brick form, which was imported from England.\textsuperscript{163} As the Ottoman Empire geared up for war, export bans on fuel stores were joined by military requisition orders, which focused on mobilizing men and animals.\textsuperscript{164} In addition, the Ottoman authorities confiscated the rolling stock and coal fuel stores of the Jaffa-Jerusalem railway, which was a French concession, in the fall of 1914.\textsuperscript{165} In late September, an Ottoman military commander demanded that the railway company

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid. Curiously, local products like wheat and grains came down considerably in price, which Whiting chalked up to a lack of cash for speculators, who could not get money to speculate with the banks closed, as well as to a fear of government seizure as Turkish mobilization would potentially lead to the requisitioning of stores of flour, rice, sugar, petroleum, lentils, and peas for military use. In the short term, with low liquidity, dealers were hesitant to sell on credit, and so prices remained low on imported staples, despite the stoppage of imports, because of low demand by the purchasing public.

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 183.

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 185.

\textsuperscript{164} European consuls such as the French were primarily concerned with the effects of Ottoman mobilization in 1914 on non-Muslims, specifically the Christian minorities that the French had declared themselves the guardians and patrons of. See CADN294PO/B/5, dossier affaires militaires, sous-dossier la mobilization ottomane (1914); sous-dossier service mulîtaire des chrétiens 1909-1912; et sous dossier réquisitions militaires de sujets hellènes (1914).

\textsuperscript{165} Siège de société anonyme ottomane à Jaffa to Consulat Général de Jérusalem, « Plaintes de Société de Chemin de fer Ottoman de Jaffa à Jérusalem et prolongements », 14
send “all moving stock, construction supplies, as well as combustibles in your store above your demands” to the interior. The Ottoman military commander in Palestine, Zeki Bey, and a local imperial intermediary, Jerusalem notable Sa`id Nashashibi, followed up to demand all of the remaining coal stocks, superseding the initial military order that allowed the company to keep what they needed and provoking the French subjects to complain to their government of mistreatment. Once these stockpiles of coal ran out, the railroad needed an alternate, local fuel source, or it could not run.

Without kerosene, some Palestinians could turn back to wood or potentially olive oil if available for heating, cooking, and light. Without coal, the locomotives would need to rely on firewood. Therefore, some degree of deforestation would be a natural result, particularly in areas near the railways. In 1914, an individual from Zwata village (near Nablus) presented a petition to the Nablus municipality, requesting an estimate of the damages to his plantings caused by the Hejaz railway. Presumably the crops had been confiscated either for food or fuel; however, it is unclear what standing the municipality would have had in such an investigation, let alone the possibility of redress, particularly in wartime.

octobre 1914. CADN294PO/B/5, dossier affaires militaires, sous-dossier réquisitions militaires de sujets français.
166 Commander in Chief of the 8th Army Corp in Damascus to Company Headquarters in Jaffa, no. 476, dated 24 September 1914. Annexe to « Plaintes de Société de Chemin de fer Ottoman de Jaffa à Jérusalem et prolongements », CADN294PO/B/5, dossier affaires militaires, sous-dossier réquisitions militaires de sujets français.
168 NMA sijillat volume 9, page 12, decision no. 41, 1914: “Concerning petition presented to municipality from one of the peoples of Zwata village to estimate damages occurring to his plantings because of the Hejaz railway line.”
1915, the Year of the Locust, and the darkest days of World War I

By March 1915, the conscription of men and confiscation of draft animals had begun to hinder planting and plowing efforts. Worse, locusts had been spotted east of the Jordan River.\(^{169}\) The locusts would eventually do perhaps even more damage than the Ottoman military or the Entente embargo. The government took various steps to attempt to combat the locust plague, first mandating the collection of eggs, which was strictly enforced, to the point of closing shops, but to no avail.\(^{170}\) Even better-organized, smaller-scale efforts, such as those mounted by the American, German, and Jewish colonies, failed.\(^{171}\)

In a private letter sent after the war in 1919, Whiting reiterated the extremely fortunate timing of the locusts. The grain was ripe in much of Palestine and harvested before the swarms could attack; “for had they come a month earlier, it would have been starvation for the multitudes.”\(^{172}\) Unlike other areas of Syria, then, famine was not the immediate result of the

\(^{169}\) Whiting, “Economic Conditions – Causes and Results” March 1915, MD LOC 16/6, 185.

\(^{170}\) Whiting, “The Locust in Palestine,” undated (likely summer 1915), MD LOC 16/6, 201-206. This is likewise corroborated by Turjman’s diary, op. cit. See, for example, entries from 25 April 1915 and 20 May 1915, pages 110 and 125 respectively.

\(^{171}\) Zionist agronomist Aaron Aaronsohn, whose brother (appointed by Cemal Pasha at the instigation of German officials) oversaw a broader effort to combat the plague. In his account of the plague, Aaronsohn, employing ideological and culturalist explanations, blamed the laziness and fatalism of neighboring Arab farmers for the failure of the colonists’ efforts. At the same time, however, he noted in passing that nothing short of the mobilization of every single hand in the country could have possibly prevented the plague — meaning mitigation would have been the best possible outcome. A. Aaronsohn “With the Turks in Palestine [account of 1915 locust plague]” cited in E.R. Sawer, “Agricultural situation in Palestine: Review by the director of the Department of Agriculture,”15 June 1923, no. 579. TNA CO 733/46 (15-30 June 1923), page 27, item 55. It would not be until the midcentury, after World War II, that technology (in the form of flamethrowers made portable and effective enough in wartime for postwar civilian applications) could have supplanted the labor of collecting eggs and digging trenches by hand.

\(^{172}\) Whiting, Jerusalem to Hon. Wm. Coffin, Dept. of State, Washington DC USA, 17 July 1919, MD LOC, Box 6, Folder 2 (Miscellaneous correspondence, “1919 July”), page 1.
locust plague.\textsuperscript{173} The harsher and more long-term effect, most notably around Jerusalem, was the loss of the olive crop, and the resultant inability to produce olive oil and olive-oil soap.\textsuperscript{174} Worse, the poorest would be most hurt by the loss, as Whiting rightfully noted: “Olive oil is a staple article of food among the peasants and poorer classes, taking the place of meat.”\textsuperscript{175} While the wealthier classes would have initially been able to substitute olive oil for kerosene, the locusts made even the thought of such a fuel substitution impossible. Additionally, the locusts consumed even the bark of many olive trees, meaning a good crop in 1916 could not be expected.\textsuperscript{176}

Whiting, also a photographer, took extensive pictures of the locust plague, and printed beautiful hand-tinted images bound in albums that the American Colony Store would sell. Two images on the following page illustrate an olive tree before the locusts (Figure 5), and then after (Figure 6).\textsuperscript{177}

\textsuperscript{173} For more on the differentiated effects of famine in Palestine during World War I compared with experiences elsewhere in Greater Syria, see working paper by the author, “Diets, trade, and food in Palestine before and during World War I: the urban/rural divide and class-differentiated impacts of the blockade and famine,” presented at “From ‘Mjaddarah’ to ‘Fatti de Luxe’: Food and Middle Eastern Diasporas” at North Carolina State University (Raleigh, North Carolina, USA) on April 5-7, 2018.

\textsuperscript{174} Whiting, “The Locust in Palestine,” MD LOC 16/6, 206.

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 207.

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{177} Whiting, “Photograph album, locust plague of 1915.” MD LOC, Box 8, images 26 and 27.
Figure 5. Whiting photograph of olive trees before the locusts, 1915.

Figure 6. Whiting photograph of olive trees after the locusts, 1915.
According to an article Whiting wrote for *National Geographic*, published in December 1915, the olives were largely consumed in June.\(^{178}\) While noting how catastrophic the loss was for the peasantry, Whiting presented his account to a general audience in quasi-apocalyptic language regarding the effects on Christian worship in the Holy Land in a section vividly entitled “Lamps Never Before Dim Are Being Extinguished From Lack Of Olive Oil”:

Last spring the olive trees were over-loaded with bloom and a fine crop was anticipated. Now the majority of the groves have been so severely injured as to render them fruitless for several years. As last year was the off or bad year, olive oil, usually so plentiful, is now high-priced and almost unprocurable … From days immemorial olive oil in this land has been used as fuel for lighting sacred lamps. Because of the locusts, lamps never before dim, hanging in Christian churches in front of icons and altars, are daily being extinguished, just as the sacrifices of Judah’s Temple were unwillingly suspended after the locust devastation described by Joel […] (1:13).\(^{179}\)

The loss of the olive crop, “being one of the food staples of the poor, taking the place of meat and butter,” Whiting lamented, “no doubt will outweigh, economically and commercially, the destruction caused to all other crops combined,”\(^{180}\) particularly owing to its unique role as both the primary fat and protein in the peasant diet.

The devastation to the olive trees in June is corroborated by the diary of a Spanish diplomat posted in Jerusalem during the war.\(^{181}\) Ballobar wrote: “The olive trees, the vineyards, the sown fields and orchards, they have eaten everything and I ask myself what we will be able

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\(^{178}\) John D. Whiting, “Jerusalem’s Locust Plague: Being a Description of the Recent Locust Influx into Palestine, and Comparing Same with Ancient Locust Invasions as Narrated in the Old World’s History Book, the Bible,” *National Geographic* 28:6 (1915), 541

\(^{179}\) Ibid., 543.

\(^{180}\) Ibid.

to eat this summer.” In visiting the areas around coastal Jaffa, the Spanish consul noted: “The olive trees had their trunks and leaves yellow; the fig trees had been lost some time ago, and some of them even the bark,” while non-fruit trees such as pines and cypresses he thought harder for the locusts to chew were thus less initially tempting, and therefore attacked only after the fruit trees had been consumed. By August, Whiting wrote in a consular report: “At present the markets are pitifully empty of olive oil; in fact it is difficult to get any either for food or to use as light or fuel in place of the now unprocurable imported kerosene.”

Therefore, the locust plague of 1915, in combination with the Entente blockade preventing the importation of kerosene, would likely have brought about the peak of the felling of olive trees the following winter. With olive oil unavailable as a fuel source thanks to the locusts, and many trees likely unable to produce for another year again for the same reason, the short-term need for warmth in the winter of 1915/1916 may have quite understandably outweighed the long-term monetary loss of felling still-productive olive trees, especially with trade impossible because of the war. With kerosene likewise unavailable, a return to wood was unavoidable. The extent of the damage, however, remained debatable long after the war ended, as the next and final section will address.

In a personal account of the last two years of the war, circa 1917-1918, Nicola Ziadeh (later to be a professor of history at the American University of Beirut) recalled a childhood in Jenin shaped indirectly by the blockade, which had forced his family to find local substitutes for imported goods and staples: “We used ordinary lamps with olive oil because kerosene had

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182 Ibid., 67.
183 Ibid., 68.
become absolutely unobtainable,” and maize instead of wheat to make bread.\textsuperscript{185} “There were some olives,” he added, “but the better olives were taken for the army and only tiny little ones remained for the people.” Ziadeh summarized the desperation of the situation with an exclamation: “People could hardly sell olive oil!”\textsuperscript{186} When the British arrived in northern Palestine in 1918, one of the important changes Ziadeh recalled was the return of kerosene.\textsuperscript{187}

Ziadeh’s recollections illustrate how, in popular memory, the British received the credit for reversing the fortunes of the people. What occurred, in effect, was a reversal of the blockade, which appears in this view to have been a success: first, the blockade demoralized the inhabitants, who in theory would blame their political leadership, the Ottomans, such as how Ziadeh noted that all the good olives had been confiscated by the military; then, after the invasion, the British could supply the inhabitants with the goods of the empire, and people would then thank the new occupiers. By doing so, the British not only asserted their claims of being more sympathetic and capable rulers of the region, but also began formally integrating Palestine into the networks of its empire. Although the British and their Entente ally France had been responsible for the blockade that forced Palestinians to find local fuel substitutes, they received credit at least indirectly for the return of imported fuels like kerosene.

\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., 271.
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., 272. In addition, rice and flour could again be purchased at normal prices, though not from the usual sources. Rice, for example, which had previously come from Egypt, now came from India.
4. Post-war Palestine: British military occupation and assessments of olive tree devastation (1918-1923)

Despite the resupply and the reintegration of Palestine gradually into global circuits of the trade, the British advance was not without destructive effects. The town of Gaza was nearly completely destroyed over the course of the three battles between British and Ottoman forces, and would lie in ruins for years.

In September of 1918, the editor of the British-sponsored Egyptian newspaper *Al-Kawkab*, reported to the British military leadership on his recent trip to Palestine. The editor, Mohammed al-Qilqily, blamed the Egyptians accompanying the army’s advance for the damage to Palestinian villages, attempting to account for why myriad villages were destroyed by either British occupation or from merely being passed on the lines of march:

The British army was accompanied on its march through Palestine by Egyptian Transport men, and it is a matter of common talk in Palestine that whenever the army comes to a village they proceed to pillage and loot, and to steal the property of the army and sell it to the poor and ignorant, so getting them into serious trouble. These men steal everything they find in the houses and convey it from village to village selling it at very cheap rates. They take the roofs off the houses and the wood from the doors and windows to use as fuel.

al-Qilqily relayed the personal testimonies of a number of elite Palestinians whose notable ties he elaborated in order to assert their credibility. First, he cited Jaudet El-Nashashibi, “a notable of

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188 Despatch 176, 22 June 1921. TNA CO 733/4 Despatches June 16-July 1921.
189 A plan to rebuild the town would not be elaborated until the spring of 1924. Despatch 328, 5 March 1924. TNA CO 733/65, Despatches February 15-March 8 1924, 610.
190 Mohammad al-Qilqily, editor of *al-Kawkab*, to General Wingate, High Commissioner of Egypt, and to General Allenby, Commander in Chief of the British Army in Egypt and Palestine, “Report on the Present Condition of Palestine,” 29 September 1918. TNA FO 882/14 (Arab Bureau), PA/18/12, 1. al-Qilqily as editor of *Al-Kawkab* (evidently a mouthpiece for British propaganda) had been sent to establish his newspaper’s credibility and expand circulation in Palestine.
191 Ibid., 3.
Jerusalem, a brother of the Arab martyr,” who testified that some Ramallah-area villages (north of Jerusalem) “had suffered considerably at the hands of these people [Egyptian porters] in the way of pillage and devastation, most of the buildings being destroyed, and the grain, tīb[n [sic, an untranslated Arabic term for hay or straw], olives, bedding and clothes being looted.”192 Second, he relayed the testimony of Omar Ibn Mahmud Saleh, “notable of Deir Ghassana and the son of Sheik Selim,”193 who recounted the arbitrary, brutal destruction and dispossession of not only their homes but also their life savings in the forms of women’s jewelry and the village’s olive oil:

The English had turned them out of their houses and refused to allow them to take any food, clothing, or bedding with them or even women’s jewelry which they were obliged to leave behind in their houses. To quote my informant; “We were turned out without anything in our hands or on our backs worth mentioning, and after that the Egyptians who accompanied the army proceeded to pillage the grain, tīb[n [sic, hay], [olive] oil, olives, bedding, furniture, jewelry, and clothing – until nothing was left; after which they proceeded to lay hands upon the doors and windows and carry off the wood for fuel. We are in habit of storing a good deal of olive-oil in wells — a fact which escaped the notice of the pillagers — so we repeatedly asked the English permission to go back to the village to take the oil from the wells and make a little profit by selling it in these hard times, but our request fell upon deaf ears [emphasis added].”194

Despite the ideological and political imperatives to blame the Ottomans (and their allies the Germans) for the problems of Palestine, the British invasion brought about a temporary vacuum of authority, which even a source sympathetic to the British felt obliged to report — if deflecting the blame to foreign subalterns in the process

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192 TNA FO 882/14, PA/18/12, 3.
193 The elites of the village of Deir Ghassana were aligned with the Nashashibis at the time, which is an interesting connection. Although closer to Salfit, the village is linked to Ramallah as well. Much later, in 1966 under the Jordanians, the village would merge with neighboring Beit Rima to form the municipality of Bani Zeid.
194 TNA FO 882/1, PA/18/12, 3.
The period of British military rule from 1918-1920 over much of Palestine was subsequently dominated by concerns of reestablishing basic order. British and Palestinian firms attempted, without success initially, to reestablish trade links; however, in a continuation of Entente blockade practices, the authorities preferred to maintain an extremely limited “white list” of approved trading partners (as opposed to a blacklist), which was updated in a slow and tedious manner.\textsuperscript{195} The continued whitelist practice is an example of the lack of attention to more complex commercial affairs, beyond keeping order. The top concern of the military commanders was foremost security, with much attention to the establishment of various police forces; secondary was settling the questions of confiscated enemy property and prisoners of war.\textsuperscript{196} These latter issues, particularly the fate of confiscated property, tied into the diplomacy and politics contested in Paris and Versailles among the Great Powers and a variety of delegations with varying degrees of influence.\textsuperscript{197}

In an effort to sway the Great Powers to support their political project, a number of Zionist delegates made trips to Palestine to report on the situation there. The writers occasionally evinced a degree of understanding (or even respect) for how certain traditional practices

\textsuperscript{195} Individual traders and firms inquired throughout 1918, for example, regarding unfilled prewar contracts and the resumption of prewar trading patterns. A large variety of such correspondence can be found in TNA FO 368/2000 (commercial department).

\textsuperscript{196} See, for example, TNA FO 1111/375/1.

\textsuperscript{197} See TNA FO 608/100 (Paris peace delegation) for more. In particular, some members of the Zionist delegations to the Paris Peace Conference had aspirations to take over German property in Palestine as one way forward in implementing the Balfour Declaration, which is what the vast majority of the diplomatic and political records of the time pertain to: British support for the Zionist movement and assistance in furthering Jewish colonization. In the meantime, Palestinian notables, especially from Nablus and Jaffa, sent petition after petition in Arabic to the peace conference in an attempt to contest these aims. For such petitions, as well as extensive examples of correspondence between the Great Powers and both Zionist and anti-Zionist groups, see also: MAE La Courneuve 49CPCOM/1-13, Correspondance politique et commerciale (CPC-E) – Levant – Palestine, 1918-1920.
accorded with the terrain and the other environmental particularities of certain areas; however, most of the reporting is marked by condescension toward the indigenous inhabitants, with scorn toward traditional agricultural practices in particular. For example, the political officer in charge of the Zionists’ Commission (linked to the London Zionist Political Committee) misleadingly reported in August 1918 that the highlands were depopulated to a degree greater than the plains. In essence, the political officer argued that Palestine was an empty, neglected land ripe for immigration and development. Yet atypically for a pro-Zionist narrative, the author, Mr. Ormsby-Gore, pointedly noted the exceptions of what he called “highland oases such as Nablus, Bethlehem, Hebron, and Beit Jibrin, where the terraces have been maintained, olive groves cared for, and the wells kept open.” The first three towns remain some of the primary population centers of what would become the West Bank after 1948. So while the reporter mentioned these

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198 No. 1, Mr. Ormsby-Gore to FO, 22 August 1918, “Report on existing political situation in Palestine and contiguous areas by Political Officer in charge of Zionists’ Commission. Encloses summary of recommendations and conclusions arising out of above and minutes of a meeting of the London Zionist Political Committee,” pages 6-7. TNA FO 406/40, Confidential Print, Correspondence: Eastern Affairs Part I, 1918.

In order to make this argument, the political officer misrepresented the deserts of the east and south as indicative of the state of settlement in the uplands overall, and in doing so minimized the importance of the central spine of Palestine’s hills. Mr. Ormsby-Gore’s assessment of the Palestinian agricultural economy ignored the essential factor of annual average precipitation in differentiating between cultivable and non-cultivable land, and therefore which types of hills could carry permanent population centers. Rain-fed crops, after all, do not grow where there is insufficient rainfall. By ignoring the considerable variation in precipitation throughout the hills of Palestine, the political officer let the deserts in the eastern and southern areas stand in for the hills of Palestine as a whole: ostensibly undeveloped and underpopulated. In reality, the southeastern hills that receive minimal precipitation are better suited to seasonal grazing (particularly after heavy winter rains) by flocks tended by transhumant groups such as the Bedouin, rather than continuous cultivation and permanent settlement.

199 Ibid. He otherwise blamed erosion caused by rain resulting in bare rocky hillsides and the use of the hills as “wretched pasturage for the destructive herds of goats.” He estimated that it would take a generation of toil, reforestation, terracing, and well drilling to restore the highland to full fruitfulness.
towns in passing as exceptional “oases,” they might be more accurately considered the rule to the central highlands.

Zionist leader (and later first president of Israel) Dr. Chaim Weizmann echoed Ormsby-Gore’s assessments more than a year later after a number of visits in early 1920, noting that the hillsides of Palestine should be developed by planting olive trees, pine trees, and carob trees (in that order of importance). Citing the opinions of experts and experiments throughout the country, Weizmann argued: “There is no need to dwell on the possibility of growing olive and pine-trees. The wealth of Nablus and vicinity comes from the hills, whose flanks are covered with magnificent olive groves. There is no reason why similar olive groves should not be planted on the barren hillsides all over the country.” Thus even while otherwise condemning or ignoring the practices of indigenous cultivators, these reports could not help but reveal the suitability of traditional patterns of fruit-tree cultivation.

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201 Ibid. Zionist planters would quickly abandon the slower-growing olive tree in favor of the faster-growing pine, for political reasons as well as practical expediency.
Perhaps even more significantly, these reports from the immediate postwar years by relatively unsympathetic sources regarding indigenous agriculture indicate that the olive groves south of Jerusalem (Bethlehem and presumably Beit Jala, Beit Jibrin, and Hebron) had been spared. This is surprising, since apocalyptic assessments regarding the impact of the war—particularly the destruction of the landscape by the rapacious Ottoman war machine and ignorant Arab peasants—would only gain in currency as the Mandate progressed. The above railway map (Figure 7), which was updated by the British military in 1918, helps to illustrate why the

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202 This image of the map has been cropped by the author to illustrate the most relevant area, and edited to show the key compactly by imposing it over a blank area. TNA WO 303/507, “Index Map of Syria showing Railway Lines and Routes,” compiled/produced: GSGS, War Office GSGS number: 2067a, Scale: 1:500 000 Corrected. Gauges hand-coloured against key. Stamped by Director of Railways and Roads MR2(A), WO, 23 Oct 1918. With MS notes concerning proposed dismantling of lines S of Gaza. Original map: June 1905 (Date Issued); January 1918 (Date Corrected).
areas south of Jerusalem were relatively unscathed. With draft animals confiscated for the military transport of food primarily, the transportation of timber from the southern hills would likely have been unfeasible.

What is more surprising is that both Ormsby-Gore and Weizmann pointedly noted the olive-derived wealth of Nablus, which had a train station on the Palestinian Hejaz railroad extensions, and whose olive trees the Spanish diplomat Ballobar claimed to have seen in ruin at the hands of the Turks. The line ran north from Nablus through Jenin to the junction at Afula where the tracks ran west to the port at Haifa. While a spur was built north to Acre expressly for the purposes of fuel wood for the railroads, no rail lines ran east of Acre through the olive-producing villages of the Western Galilee.

From Nablus, the railroads ran west through olive-growing land that was likely deforested along the railways to Tulkarm. However, no rail lines went south from Nablus to Jerusalem. A short-lived narrow-gauge railroad was constructed by the Ottomans and then commandeered by the British during the offensive north from Jerusalem toward Ramallah. Besides that, the rest of the olive groves in what is now the West Bank would have been remote from the railroads. What seems most likely is that olive trees in the vicinity of the railroad were victimized, while wide swaths out of reach of the locomotives survived wartime exigencies.

Initial postwar assessments of the damage to the Palestinian environmental landscape and rural agricultural economy, however, indicated a catastrophe, particularly in the percentages of olive trees reported by Western consuls to have been felled for fuel. They were perhaps influenced by reports such as the following from Aaron Aaronsohn, who served as a spy for the Arab Bureau (British military intelligence) in the latter stages of the war:
From whatever side one looks on poor Palestine, one gets a very gloomy picture indeed. The Country is thoroughly ruined, the only thorough thing the Turk has ever done in History is: ruin. The country was an agricultural one, its agriculture has been destroyed. The native farmer … has been robbed [of all].

Aaronsohn saved most of his vitriol for the issue of the destruction of Palestine’s olive trees:

“The real accumulated capital of the Country consisted in what was left of its woods, and in its fruit trees: olives, etc. These have been ruthlessly destroyed by the Turks. Visitors to Palestine used to look at the Country as a treeless one, what would they say of it, were they to see it now in its desolate condition?”

Aaronsohn blamed “the Turks” entirely for this alleged deforestation, going so far as to report a personal conversation between himself and the Ottoman Governor of Syria Cemal Pasha regarding the destruction of olive trees to fuel the railroads:

And the Turkish beast is far from being satisfied. On complaining to Jamal Pasha who prides itself to be an administrator who has always an eye on the future; of the ruthless cutting down of old olive trees, the writer had the unexpected reply: “If the olive trees are gone and the war is not at an end, we shall cut down the orange trees; the locomotives have to be fed.” Kress von Kressenstein, when hearing the same complaints is reported to have assured: “if the trees are gone the locomotives will be fed with human bodies; War is war.”

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204 Ibid., 18.

205 Ibid. Aaronsohn does not specify when these possibly apocryphal conversations took place. Aaron Aarsonsohn had left Palestine in the wake of the locust plague and been traveling abroad, mainly to drum up support for his cause in the West, for much of a year. By the time of this account’s belated writing at the end of 1917, most likely from Cairo, Aaronsohn’s spy ring, known as Nili, had just been exposed, and his sister Sarah as the ringleader in country had been captured and tortured; she ultimately committed suicide to avoid imminent execution. For more on Aaron and Sarah Aaronsohn’s espionage exploits, told with novelistic flair, see Scott Anderson, Lawrence in Arabia: war, deceit, imperial folly, and the making of the modern Middle East (Doubleday, 2013). See also review by Alex von Tunzelmann, “Who was T.E. Lawrence?” New York Times Sunday Book Review (11 August 2013), 16.

Unlike the indigenous Jewish community in Palestine, which roundly and broadly condemned Nili for exposing them to suspicion of treason as a fifth column, Aaronsohn had essentially already made a bet with his life on British conquest (over continued loyalty to the Ottomans) by working for British military intelligence. In sum, he had every motivation on
The first British assessments from the Mandate era appear to be based on a simple mathematical error. A maximalist prescriptive interpretation of Ottoman orders to cull wood from olive groves would have meant a reduction of around 40 percent of Palestinian groves. But it is doubtful that most farmers totally complied. The Ottoman military’s capacity to reach and commandeer resources from the interior, remote from railways, would have been weak to begin with — and further reduced throughout the course of the war.

In 1919, the first postwar assessment of the American consul in Jerusalem was that the olive oil industry would need 50 years to recover from the damage of the war — as he reckoned that half of all the olive trees in Palestine had been felled. Noting the Anglo-French blockade and the subsequent need for substitution for imported coal, the consul asserted that in Palestine the olive trees were the principal victims, cut down in all the districts where the railways had run. Furthermore, he reported, “the Turks mutilated the small branches of the olive trees for quick fuel” as they retreated, compounding the initial devastation of the locust plague and then battle damage of 1917-18, caused by the front moving north from Jerusalem through olive-growing territory, which he claimed prevented plowing at the necessary time. As noted above, the battles

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206 British colonial officials in the early 1920s claimed up to 60 percent of all olive trees had been culled on the basis of Ottoman orders issued during the war to olive growers to provide 10 percent of their groves as wood; another order was later issued for another 10 percent; and then finally an order for 25 percent of the remainder. This totals 40 percent, meaning 60 percent were untouched, rather than 60 percent chopped down. E.R. Sawer, “Agricultural situation in Palestine: Review by the director of the Department of Agriculture,” 15 June 1923, TNA CO 733/46, page 18 paragraph 39.

north of Jerusalem may have caused damage in the vicinity between Jerusalem and Ramallah; however, the primary importance of plowing olive trees is for weed control, which could be accomplished in other ways or ignored in the short term without dire results.

Just a year later, the assessments of the American consul, Oscar Heiser, had become much less hyperbolic. In a follow-up report in 1920, Heiser downgraded his assessment of the recovery time for the olive oil industry from 50 years to 10 years. In addition to adjusting the necessary recovery time from half a century to about a decade, the consular official now estimated that just one-third of all trees within a 10 mile radius of the railway lines had been cut down nearly to the ground, or coppiced, as opposed to half of all of the trees in the country.

The abrupt reversal was undoubtedly driven in part by the fact that the harvest in late 1920 was a record year, yielding (in his own words) “almost a normal pre-war crop.” Heiser gave the credit to a heavy February snowstorm, which damaged some tree branches owing to the weight of the snow, but had the benefit of killing off “parasites and worms.”

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208 Coppicing is a type of very vigorous pruning, in which the vegetation is trimmed nearly to the ground. Certain shrubs like hydrangeas in particular respond very well to coppicing. It is particularly beneficial if, as in the case of the scrub oak, the vegetation is intended to be harvested regularly as firewood, owing to the rapid regrowth in regular straight branches that are easier to bundle and carry. Since the primary source of firewood in Palestine at the time was the scrub oak (and in times of emergency the olive tree), as hardy plants they should have been able to regenerate from severe pruning.


210 Ibid., 1-2. He estimated the yield as 900,000 gallons, which converts to just over 3,400 metric tons. Heiser also noted the impact of the Palestinian diaspora in America in maintaining the olive oil storage market that Whiting had documented before the war: “The price of olive oil has dropped considerably, owing to the size of the crop, but not sufficiently in proportion to same, the cause being that a large number of country people returning from the Americas with plenty of money, have stored the oil for speculation, thus keeping the price relatively high. The actual price is about $1.25 per gallon.”

211 Ibid., 1.
concluded by noting that the British government claimed to be implanting a program of “extensive measures [for] the propagation of the olive tree in Palestine, but nothing has been done so far.” Perhaps some of the credit should have been due to the Palestinians themselves, who clearly had not destroyed as many of the olive trees as he and others had initially claimed.

By 1922, Heiser’s successor claimed that the average olive oil yield had more than doubled from 1920’s record crop, to 7,000 metric tons in the more prosperous of the two typically alternating years of the olive tree’s biannual production cycle. Southard repeated his predecessor Heiser’s assessment that the Ottomans commanded the “cutting down of 30 per cent of all the trees within a 10-mile radius of the railway lines to provide steaming fuel.” However, in a fitting illustration of the persistence of the colonial discourse blaming the peasantry for deforestation, Southard then contradicted both himself and his predecessor by then repeating the argument that half of all bearing olive trees had been cut down during the war, without any new planting. Southard claimed that there had been “a great deal of unauthorized destruction of olive trees” in wartime by their owners, beyond the Ottoman orders, such that Palestine’s two million olive trees in existence before the war were now estimated to number only one million.

Since, as Southard rightly notes elsewhere, olive trees take 8-12 years to begin bearing, the estimate of one million trees is not credible, particularly in light of the estimated yield of 1922 (7,000 tons). Southard also correctly noted that a mature olive tree will yield 12-25 kilograms of olives per year. Throughout the 20th century, one constant in analysis of the olive sector is that agronomists estimate that roughly 80 percent of olives in Palestine are pressed for

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212 Ibid., 2.
oil, with the remainder pickled. Of that 80 percent of the total olive oil crop, the yield in oil is typically in the vicinity of 20 percent (less with simpler, older methods; more with more efficient modern methods). Working backwards using these commonly accepted estimates, if there were one million trees, each would need to produce just under 44 kilograms, which is impossible. It is thus far more likely that there were closer to 2 million trees. At the upper band of 25 kilograms of olives per tree, a conservative guess would be 1,750,000 trees around the start of the British Mandate. Throughout the next 25 years of the Mandate, Palestinians would plant 150,000-160,000 olive trees nearly every year. There were estimated to be between six to seven million olive trees in Palestine by the end of the Mandate after World War II in the mid-to-late 1940s. Therefore, there had to be close to two million olive trees at the end of the Ottoman period and the beginning of British rule. Yet the myth of widespread peasant culling and destruction would persist, while the colonial government would take credit for a miraculous, massive expansion in olive cultivation.

**Conclusion**

On the core question of deforestation: trees were both objects of taxation and a traditional (if increasingly scarce and less commonly used) source of energy as firewood. Despite their central importance to Palestinian agriculture and industry, and their perennial value, olive trees were certainly coppiced in some areas during the war. The collapse of political authority and desperation during the war may have led to the culling of the olive trees, with an attendant short-term impact on the production of olive oil and soap. However, deforestation of fruit and other

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214 See section six of chapter three of this dissertation for more on late-Mandate statistics and olive tree planting.
trees, to the extent that it occurred, was not the result of Eastern despotism or the Ottoman yoke, as British colonial and Zionist discourses later posited. The key question is where, precisely, deforestation occurred. The answer is primarily along the railways, which did not extend comprehensively or evenly throughout Syria.

Rather than rapacious Ottomans or ignorant Palestinian peasants, the foremost cause of wartime deforestation was the British policy, along with its Entente ally France, of establishing a coastal blockade of the Eastern Mediterranean that required the Ottomans and Palestinian locals to find substitutes for imported coal and kerosene. Before the war, city dwellers had become dependent on Russian kerosene for fuel and light; the railroads depended on British coal. Without their preferred sources of energy, the Ottoman military and Palestinian civilians were forced to rely on locally sourced wood.

The Ottomans are not blameless for deforestation, as Cemal Pasha’s edict legalized the consumption of fruit trees for fuel in desperate times. The chief variable remains the application of the edict, which in turn depended on the accessibility of groves (specifically proximity to the railways) and the extent and type of culling (pruning, coppicing, or uprooting). Most likely, then, if any parts of Palestine suffered significant deforestation, it was the triangle (al-\textit{muthallath}) between Jenin, Nablus and Tulkarm, owing to the extension of the Hejaz railway into that area. Similarly, the Hejaz extension west of Afula to Haifa may have caused similar damage to the surrounding areas. The root cause, however, was not Ottoman despotism or Arab ignorance, but a lack of practicable alternatives, forced by the Entente blockade.

Persistent colonialist discourses have exclusively blamed the Palestinian inhabitants, ignoring a broad range of largely external factors. In the case of deforestation, political
conditions (the Anglo-French blockade; Ottoman mobilization and confiscation of men, animals, and food; hoarding by elites and other failures of imperial distribution networks in conjunction with local intermediaries) combined with environmental factors (drought, heat waves, locust plagues) and the import-dependent fuel regime to create a dire need for firewood. It is much easier but of course beyond simplistic to blame ignorant peasants for cutting down too many trees at a time of crisis, and for prescriptivist Orientalists to look at Ottoman tax and permit regimes and assess the level of culling on the basis of these laws and orders — without sources on the effects of their implementation, and without statistical knowledge of the state of orchards and forests at the time. Sweeping claims of 50-60 percent of all trees in Palestine being cut down during the war should be heavily discounted. The cutting down of trees was not a well-managed, well-administered effort. It was ad hoc, highly localized, and the level of damage to certain groves could have been much higher. But many other groves in the hills of Palestine, beyond the eyes of Western consuls and visitors — and most importantly, beyond the reach of the Ottoman roads and railroads — were likely spared.

These discourses disguise the damage done by the colonial powers themselves, particularly the central role played by the Entente blockade, which used the recently changing balance of trade and the prewar fuel regime as leverage. Additionally, the British military advance caused inadvertent destruction during the offensives and along the lines of march. The process of colonial takeover did not abruptly begin with the British military conquest and occupation of Palestine during late World War I, but had its roots in the 19th century, when European consuls and Western missionaries made informal imperial inroads in various ways. As olive oil and olive oil soap had become increasingly important commodities throughout the late
19th century, olive cultivation became emblematic in Western accounts of the backwards ways of the Palestinian peasantry. Not only were Palestinian olives and olive oil considered disagreeable in taste to Western observers — the very shape of the olive tree was found to be objectionable in Western eyes. Critiques of cultivation practices, such as hitting the trees to knock off the olives at harvest, helped to buttress arguments about the stagnation, or even deterioration, of conditions in the Holy Land since Biblical times (the unquestioned, authoritative period of comparison). To advocates of colonialism, the indigenes had been so negligent and so ignorant over the intervening millennia that the only solution was some form of Western control. The discourse of deforestation during World War I is an extreme example of this type of argument.

What all of these Orientalist critiques, which were really ideological arguments for a certain form of territorial and economic politics, masked was the fundamental rationality of peasant practices, governed by the conditions of the time. Settled, rural Palestinians in much of the country depended on olives for subsistence, but marketed their biannual surplus in various, increasingly sophisticated ways. The prosperity provided by and stability of olive oil prices in the pre-war years, combined with the examples of local forestry conservation in Nablus and trade controls by the port authorities in Jaffa, contradict the stereotypical images of late Ottoman decline and despotism. Yet these successes, the vibrancy of late Ottoman Palestinian society and its agricultural economy overall, have been systematically ignored by scholars of the Mandate, who have taken assessments of environmental catastrophe in this era as given. More significantly, this discourse of degradation then governed colonial practice. The experience of World War I, reinterpreted through these colonialist discourses, set the stage for the imposition of the British Mandate over Palestine, and its agricultural and forestry policies in particular.
CHAPTER 2


The history of Mandate Palestine has been distorted by viewing Palestinians almost exclusively as objects of British and Zionist colonialism, rather than as historical actors with agency. The focus on the development (and ultimate failure) of Palestinian nationalism in this period in relation to the Zionist movement in Palestine has unfortunately exacerbated this tendency. The framework of settler colonialism has offered vital insight into how this process of displacement occurred, particularly in relation to the question of land. Furthermore, the relational paradigm has been a vital and important innovation for understanding how Palestinian nationalism and Zionism developed in a dialectic with one another, rather than independently as nationalist histories on both sides tend to assume. But the relational paradigm is mainly of utility in mixed urban environments where Arab and Jewish Palestinians came into more frequent contact, though even these narratives of cooperation, competition, and coexistence must contend

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1 I am seeking to make a similar intervention for the Mandate period and the 20th century overall as Beshara Doumani did for the preceding centuries of the late Ottoman period: Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700-1900 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).


with the tensions of separatist tendencies amidst growing polarization.\(^4\) The settler-colonial framework is best applied to specific localities of successful Zionist colonization via land purchases in this period, such as in the coastal areas like Jaffa/Tel Aviv, or inland in the Jezreel Valley/Marj Ibn ‘Amer.\(^5\) Outside of these specific examples, rural areas have typically been viewed in the scholarly literature almost exclusively through the impact of British policy on rural Arab communities that existed separately from and were governed differently than Zionist settlements.\(^6\)

Assessments of the Mandate, owing to the nature of the sources (mostly generated in English by the British),\(^7\) almost universally focus on the impact of British policy on the ruled, implicitly in order to explain what happened with the end of the Mandate: the failure of British

\(^4\) Sherene Seikaly has most notably attempted to move past the limiting framework of the Zionist-Palestinian framework by analyzing the changing political economy of the World War II-era (which I will deal with in the next chapter) through the categories of class and gender, particularly be reconstructing the efforts of the eponymous Palestinian capitalist class in her *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).


\(^7\) An important exception to the wide variety of works predominantly based on British archives cited throughout this introduction comes from the comparative richness of Zionist archives, which has led to innovative work relating the Zionist settlement project to the environment, nationalism, and public health: Sandra M. Sufian, *Healing the Land and the Nation: Malaria and the Zionist Project in Palestine, 1920-1947* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
peacekeeping, the failure of the UN partition plan, the failure of pan-Arab military intervention, the success of the Zionist movement and the establishment of the State of Israel, and the resultant Palestinian nakba or catastrophe. Particularly in narratives sympathetic to Palestinian nationalism, there is a strong tendency to focus on how British policies at best impeded Palestinian nationalist ambitions and attempts to organize, in contrast to the case of the new yishuv.\footnote{For the best example of this strand of scholarship, see Rashid Khalidi, “The Palestinians and 1948: the underlying causes of failure,” in The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948 Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim eds. (Cambridge University Press, 2007). Khalidi argues that the violent suppression of the revolt of 1936-1939 and the subsequent exile and disorganization of nationalist leaders might have doomed Palestinian nationalist efforts more than a decade prior to the Nakba. But in addition, the quietism of most Palestinians during World War II contrasts with the growth of the violent Jewish underground in the same period, and similarly Palestinians lacked training and military armaments in comparison to the Yishuv (Hebrew for settlement, the shorthand term for the proto and later para-state institutions built by the Jewish settler community in Palestine during the Mandate period).}

To varying degrees then, in these histories of the Mandate period, British policy becomes the determining factor for not only what happened in 1948 and thereafter in the Arab-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli conflicts, but also during the Mandate period itself.\footnote{Roza el-Eini, Mandated Landscape: British Imperial Rule in Palestine, 1929-1948 (London: Routledge, 2006).} British policy was either well intentioned, but failed, or was doomed to failure from the start owing to the inherently contradictory imperatives of the Balfour Declaration.\footnote{On the futility of colonial policy, for example, see the evocatively titled work of Naomi Shepherd, Ploughing Sand: British Rule in Palestine 1917-1948 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999).} This chapter aims to instead document the changes in Palestinian olive culture from within, in order to expose how inconsequential British agricultural and forestry policy largely was. It is essential to note that the relative power, agency, and capital of Palestinians varied broadly across society. The dislocations of the period
were not evenly felt by all Palestinians, with a particularly sharp contrast between the rural peasantry and urban capitalists in the form of factory owners. Nevertheless, all were ultimately forced to make policy themselves in lieu of effective state action.

In emphasizing the agency of ordinary Palestinians, I am relying on the moral and political economy approach of the British Marxist humanist school epitomized by the work of E.P. Thompson, complemented by later lessons derived from the Subaltern Studies school. The study of rural areas must move beyond the extensively and repeatedly demonstrated failure of British policies, by shifting our historical perspective away from a top-down state-centric view and attempting to write the history of this era from below, in which the fellahin are actors with agency, rather than the mere objects of colonial policymakers. Taking an approach based on the “moral economy” of E.P. Thompson and his school of Marxist humanist, new social historians suggest a need to reinterpret the colonial archive to understand the motivations of previously marginalized actors. In addition, the Subaltern Studies school that developed out of South Asia has much in common with English historians’ attempts to write history from below, in particular the overt objective of making subalterns the subjects, not the objects, of history. In the third section of this chapter, I use the category of class to attempt to differentiate between the relative power and agency of different groups of Palestinians, who are in turn subaltern to varying degrees.

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11 For an application of Subaltern Studies school to the broader region, see Joel Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).
Why do subalterns or subordinate social groups matter? Their agency is crucial for explaining not only the numerous failures of British rule, but also the extensive continuities within Palestinian society and its economic structures dating back to the Ottoman period, which the discourses of environmental degradation sought to erase. In the cases of Palestinian agriculture and forestry, the Mandate period is defined by the persistence of traditional patterns of cultivation, and the failure of paternalistic colonial policy to disrupt these practices. When it came to rural, olive-cultivating areas, Palestinians were largely left on their own, for better and for worse.

The first half of the Mandate is essentially a case study for how weak the civilian colonial apparatus was in many ways. Despite declaring British civilian rule to be a clean break from the

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15 The inapplicability of the relational paradigm for understanding the rural political economy of Palestine is based on a number of factors, some of which are specific to the olive subsector. The Palestinian olive economy faced essentially no Zionist competition at first, thanks in no small part to the secessionist tendencies of the new yishuv and its intention to construct a separate economy (though local economies wound up being quite intertwined in certain coastal urban areas, such as in Haifa). Another factor was the inability of the Zionist movement to colonize rural interior areas (again with some important exceptions like the Jezreel Valley), particularly olive-growing hills. Yet another factor were issues related to taste and cost of different kinds of cooking fats. Newly established coastal factories crushed cheaper imported seeds, such as copra and cotton, and exported cheaper industrial-grade edible vegetable oils and toilet soaps, and were thus largely not integrated into patterns of domestic trade at all, at least at first. Tensions would arise over tariffs in the 1930s and 1940s as overseas seaborne trade was increasingly disrupted by regional and global events like the Great Depression and World War II, but these factories like Shemen would develop a largely separate customer base among new arrivals, who preferred less strongly flavored, more neutral vegetable oils over the taste of olive oil, which cost substantially more to boot. Issues of counterfeiting and adulteration would arise as the price of olive oil rose throughout the Mandate, which were investigated by the authorities only in very small samplings owing to multiple factors, including a dearth of facilities for testing, resistance to labeling, and competing priorities for funding.
past, there are surprising continuities between the late Ottoman and early British periods. Bureaucrats took over preexisting institutions, and often manipulated them for their own purposes, in order to give themselves credit for things like a massive expansion in schools (some of which were renamed and re-categorized *kuttabs* or public Qur’anic schools).\(^\text{16}\) In many cases, villagers were forced to fund the construction of village schools almost entirely themselves.\(^\text{17}\)

These patterns of the colonial state taking credit for local initiatives and aggrandizing its impact were similarly present in the cases of agriculture and forestry, which additionally used mythical narratives of widespread environmental destruction in order to argue for the benefits of European intervention. Before the Mandate, this narrative claims, ignorant Arabs and rapacious Ottomans had ruined the Biblical Holy Land for millennia. These narratives focus in particular on the impact of deforestation during the First World War, which was assessed in the previous chapter. The redeployment of colonial discourses regarding Ottoman and Arab deforestation in particular disguised the essential similarities of late Ottoman and early Mandate governance.

In particular, the advent of colonial rule pretended to portend the creation of new categories of statistical knowledge. But, in reality, these statistics were really just the recategorization of preexisting data. For agriculture, crop statistics remained based upon rough, inaccurate tithing estimates; the olive crop was undocumented in the 1920s, and instead

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extrapolated from expected olive oil yields. For forestry, as detailed in the first chapter, the Ottoman municipality of Nablus had made it mandatory for villages to post guards for crops and trees circa 1908; however, the British passed an ordinance in mid 1921 that made it sound like it was creating the category of the village “ghaffir” or forest guard in Palestine for the very first time.\footnote{“Village ghaffir and gendarmerie ordinance,” HC 36127, 20 July 1921. TNA CO 793/1, register of correspondence for 1921.} The British did not create a countrywide system of rural policing instantaneously, in the same way that hundreds of schools did not pop up overnight. The protection of trees and crops had concrete precedents from the late Ottoman period that were swiftly appropriated, their pre-Mandate past erased — perhaps intentionally by the earliest colonial officials, but just as often out of ignorance.

Although technically a League of Nations-sanctioned Mandate, the British ruled Palestine as a crown colony in all but name. Officials in the agricultural and forestry departments were rotated from posts in Cyprus and India, incorporating Palestine into imperial bureaucratic networks. The Palestine Government reported to the Colonial Office. Despite periodic proclamations of intentions to appoint indigenous bureaucrats as heads of these crucial departments, this never came to pass and native-born Palestinians remained literal subalterns, thanks in no small part to the intervention of political events like the 1936-1939 Revolt. Indigenous knowledge regarding agriculture and forestry was thus marginalized and forgotten with each new colonial official rotation.\footnote{Arun Agrawal in “Dismantling the Divide Between Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge.” Development and Change (1995), 413-439 and Environmentality: technologies of government and the making of subjects (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) defines} Each new batch came in with an imperial worldview, in most cases influenced by the Orientalist discourses of Ottoman despotism and Arab ignorance.
In terms of the periodization of this chapter, I am defining the early Mandate period as preceding the 1936 Revolt. For rural agricultural and forestry policy, the revolt marked the failure of all previous (largely underfunded and halfhearted) attempts to acclimate the rural peasantry to the economic dislocations caused by mass Jewish immigration and settlement, which were considerably worsened by the onset of the Great Depression and then by the protectionist policies enacted by neighboring states (British Egypt and French-Mandate Syria) that disrupted Palestine’s officially sanctioned regional trade nearly for good. 1936-1947 will be addressed in the subsequent chapter, as the experience of the revolt was formative for the totalizing World War II-era policy toward agriculture and forestry.

The impact of British policy upon the olive sector was similar to that of the effects of agricultural and economic policy on the Palestinian peasant economy overall: “a story of colonial bungling.” But the failure of British policy was essentially inevitable, regardless of officials’ intentions, because the British Mandate was operated on a shoestring budget, funded mainly by indigenous knowledge as contextual, contingent, hegemonic, and communal — reflecting the economic, social, cultural, ideological, and belief systems in which it is found.

In doing so, I am following in the footsteps of Ann Mosely Lesch, *Arab politics in Palestine, 1917-1939: the frustration of a nationalist movement* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979) and of Barbara J. Smith, *The roots of separatism in Palestine: British economic policy, 1920-1929* (Syracuse University Press, 1993). Since Smith’s unit of analysis is British economic policy, her work logically ends with the advent of the Great Depression, which marked a watershed change. Lesch needed to account for the political effects of the revolt, which was a time when civilian policy was essentially nonexistent in rural areas, as the military and security forces took over instead.

The imposition of economic and trade controls spurred smuggling along the margins, particularly near Palestine’s northern border with Lebanon. See next chapter for examples of the uncontrolled movement of goods during World War II.

Similarly following Seikaly, op. cit.

the country’s own revenues generated by taxes and tariffs, especially on exports (which in turn were increasingly oriented to serve British industry). As elsewhere, colonialism was fundamentally extractive, and only “worked” (to the extent that it did), when it was done on the cheap. As was true of much of the Mandate economy, any advances in the olive sector throughout the period were almost entirely due to indigenous Palestinian initiative. The beginnings of the transformation of the olive sector that would continue throughout the rest of the century, which the British took full credit for, actually had very little to do with the colonial state. Instead, I will seek to restore Palestinians to the center of this story, and to show how their indigenous, subaltern knowledge as expressed through concrete actions was central to the changes of the Palestinian olive sector in this period.

This chapter is organized thematically. The first section details the ideology of British governance, which is what left space for Palestinians to govern themselves. I dub this “colonialism on the cheap.” British governance of the Mandate of Palestine was constantly constrained by the fact that the Mandate was supposed to pay for itself. Yes, but how? Expand the economic base by supporting Zionist colonization and industrialization? Exhort the fellahin to be modern and pay modern kinds (and levels) of taxes? Encourage export industries and marginalize domestic-focused sectors? Under the logic of “colonialism on the cheap,” all three would be priorities, until fellahin discontent at the uneven and dislocating impacts of these processes erupted into violence, causing the state to bemoan its failures to safeguard the interests of the non-Jewish indigenous population. But proposed reforms and interventions into rural

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24 Or as the Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917 had originally and carefully put it: “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine,” who had constituted upward of 90-95 percent of the population at the
society to smooth the transition into modernity foundered, predictably, on the shoals of funding issues. Instead of marking a clean break, colonial governance in regard to agriculture and forestry operated in the early period of the Mandate largely along the same lines as it had under the Ottomans.

The second section is a microhistory detailing the saga of a partially state-owned olive press, Bad El Jami. This detailed dispute over the value and worth of shares in an olive press in a small village in the Tulkarm area illustrates the paradoxes of British colonial rule, and the utter dependence of administrators on indigenous, subaltern knowledge. While the British claimed to be modernizers, in the case of olive oil presses it was actually Palestinians themselves who were investing in new, modern equipment, which ultimately led to a major reorientation of the olive sector through the reduction of acidity levels. High acidity had not been a concern when the sector’s surplus was primarily marketed as inedible industrial grades of oil for soap production, lamp or heating fuel, and textile processing. Hygiene, among other factors, became a critical point of intervention for both state officials and for Palestinian producers who sought to produce the increasingly lucrative edible grades of olive oil with lower acidity.

The third section chronicles the impact of the Great Depression on the Palestinian olive sector through the reactions of Palestinians themselves. In doing so, I use the category of class to analyze the disparate effects on and responses of the different Palestinian actors within the sector, broadly separated into groups of rural farmers and urban factory owners. The Nablus soap industry peaked in the 1920s, and was subject to extensive bureaucratic debates in the 1930s over time of its issuance. See McCarthy, op. cit. on historical population statistics of Palestine. For the original text of the declaration, see Arthur Balfour, Foreign Office, to Walter Rothschild, 2 November 1917. British Library Additional Manuscripts 41178.
whether it was worth saving. The Great Depression resulted in trade barriers and tariffs that eliminated Nabulsi soap’s traditional markets in neighboring Arab territories like Egypt and Syria. But in the meantime, surplus Palestinian olive production began to pivot away from industrial olive oil and toward more profitable edible olive oil. As would be typical throughout the Mandate period, British officials would suggest a variety of initiatives to help the peasantry, yet a lack of funding meant that governmental efforts amounted to little if anything. Changes arose instead from the efforts and investments of indigenous Palestinians themselves.

1. Colonialism on the cheap: continuities between the late Ottoman and early British Mandate periods

On 30 July 1921, High Commissioner and Commander in Chief of the British Mandate of Palestine Herbert Samuel signed the first annual report summarizing the work of the new civil administration.25 Buried in the middle, in the section on finance, Samuel and his bureaucrats summarized the core logic — the ideal — governing the Mandate: “The cost of the civil administration of Palestine has been kept within the amount of the local revenue, and no grant-in-aid is received from the British Exchequer.”26 This is crucial for understanding the policy decisions that would later be taken throughout the Mandate, and perhaps more importantly, the decisions that would not be made — and the local decisions that would be negated or overridden by policymakers elsewhere in the empire.

26 Ibid., page 10.
In taking over from the Ottoman Empire, the economy of Palestine was integrated into the circuits of the British Empire; however, it was not fundamentally reoriented, because European direct governance had been preceded by decades, if not quite a century, of economic integration into world patterns of trade in a form of informal, economic colonialism. The main steps that Samuel trumpeted were the encouragement of tobacco cultivation and the British takeover of Ottoman railways\textsuperscript{27} — in doing so, taking back exactly the same kinds of lucrative, cash-producing industries and concessions that European companies had already controlled and developed before the Ottoman military commandeered them during the First World War as enemy property essential to the war effort. Thus the war was more of an interregnum, a pause or a vacuum, in European indirect control. The Jaffa-Jerusalem railroad was French prior to the war, and British afterward.

In order to generate the necessary revenue to run the Palestine Mandate Government and further its primary mission to aid Jewish immigration and establish a Jewish national home in Palestine per the stated guiding policy of the 1917 Balfour Declaration, the Palestinian economy needed to export goods in order to obtain money in return. This may sound very basic, but it needs to be stated, because the mercantilist logic of Mandate Palestine’s economic governance ultimately served political goals. Thus export industries like the Jaffa orange were considered important and encouraged, while crops like olives grown for domestic consumption mattered mainly for their function in reducing imports and promoting a positive balance of trade (meaning more exports than imports). While this ideal would not always shape all policies, it was the fundament of colonial governance.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., page 11.
The end of the first financial year of civil administration in mid 1921 spurred the first assessment of the economic situation, which again presents a picture at odds with later mythmaking about the devastation of pre-European rule: “The country is under-populated and under-cultivated, and lacks capital and foreign trade, but the wants of the rural districts, other than those they can satisfy by their own production, are few, and there is little poverty.”\textsuperscript{28} As in the Ottoman period, Palestinian peasants remained largely self sufficient, and also as under Ottoman governance, agricultural production figures at the time were still based on tithe estimations.\textsuperscript{29} Rather than taxing agricultural produce on the basis of actual yield after the crop had been harvested, estimates of expected yields were set in advance, meaning that farmers needed to fill a quota, typically a set percentage of what the land should produce, regardless of the actual crop. The one exception was in times of drought, when tithe collection could be suspended or forgiven. All in all, this meant the government had no need to measure actual crop

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[28] “Fishing & Economic situation,” HC 41139, 17 August 1921, TNA CO 733/5 (August 1921), page 1. On page 11, the report argued that out of 2 million possible hectares for arable cultivation, just under 300,000 were under winter crops, plus 200,000 under summer crops, hence postulating that agricultural area under production could be quadrupled — and by extension, the land of Palestine could support a significantly higher population. The main focus of the report’s ire was poor cereal yields caused by “primitive” or at least backwards cultivation methods — again an implicit argument for increasing the “absorptive capacity” of the land for Jewish immigration.
\item[29] Ibid., pages 10-11. The report stated that the basis on tithe estimation meant figures were underreported by at least 15 percent. With that note of caution, it offered the following production figures:
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|}
\hline
 & 1919-1920 & 1920-1921 \\
\hline
Wheat & 45,800 & 75,200 \\
Barley & 25,800 & 51,900 \\
Dura & 15,300 & 30,400 \\
Melons & 2,400 & 16,300 \\
Oranges & 13,300 & 17,077 \\
Olive oil & 367 & 6,700 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Selected agricultural products (estimated based on tithes) in metric tons}
\end{table}

Source: TNA CO 733/5.
production. Tithing estimates were frequently set quite conservatively, and thus are regarded as a highly imperfect measure.

Much of the assessment of the early impact of British intervention focused on cost of living. Although prices (like weights and measures) were often highly localized, British officials attempted to compare an average of figures with 1913-1914 levels, which they asserted showed a 200 percent increase in prices. However, a closer look at the prices of the basket of products demonstrates that the vast majority of figures had increased between 300-400 percent. For example, while olive oil was priced at 420 piastres per 100 kilograms in the early war years, at its lowest in the winter of 1921 (with a bumper crop for the season) the price of olive oil had more than doubled to 900; and in the winter of 1920, with a weak crop, the price of olive oil hit a height of 2,000 piastres. Similarly, wheat, barley, and sorghum (durra) all at least doubled but had often quadrupled in price, while fuel (kerosene, wood, and charcoal) had at least quadrupled, with firewood and charcoal at times selling at prices 6-10 times what they had before the war — thanks, most likely, to the “fuel famine” of the winter of 1920-1921 referenced in the previous chapter.

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30 An American report from 1923 sensibly noted that since there was no national produce market, products were cheapest at their point of origin: barley at Gaza, meat at Beersheba, fish at Jaffa and Tiberias, olives in Nablus and Acre, charcoal in Jenin, and olive oil soap in Nablus. Owing to high transportation costs via camel or horse, a product transported halfway across the country could cost quadruple what it would at the source. American Vice Consul George Gregg Fuller and American Vice Consul in Charge George C. Cobb to Department of State, “Cost of living in Palestine,” prepared 8 December 1923 and received 23 January 1924. Original classification 867n.5017. NARA 250/25/25/1 M353 [Microfilm] Roll 86.

31 “Fishing & Economic situation,” HC 41139, 17 August 1921, TNA CO 733/5 (August 1921), page 12.

32 Ibid., appendix VII (page 75).
This assessment (of triple and quadruple, rather than merely double prewar prices) is borne out by rival French consular assessments of the time as well, who sought to compare prices in Cairo and Jerusalem as a standard benchmark for the impact of wartime and postwar inflation. Apart from olive oil and soap, which had just about doubled in price from before the war in 1914 until after the war in 1921, nearly all other essential goods (food and fuel) had at least tripled and most had quadrupled in price, such that the average increase in price for the basket of goods between 1914 and 1921 was 380 percent, driven mainly by increases in the cost of fuel.


34 The French consulate in Jerusalem illustrated local inflation with the following:

Table 3. Average retail prices [in Jerusalem] per rotal in Egyptian piastres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good</th>
<th>1914</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>Percentage increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bread</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>265%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>240%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olive oil</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>200%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butter</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>365%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soap</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>250%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firewood</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>360%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charcoal</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>400%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petrol</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>375%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coal</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>400%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Table « Prix moyens en piastres égyptiennes au détail par rotol », Ibid.

Note that the French figures are given in Egyptian piastres, and per rotal, a customary measure that could range as high as almost 3 kilograms or as little as half a kilogram (owing to variations over time and between regions or even villages until later standardization).
What was the chief cause of this shortage and spike in the prices of fuel, years after the war had ended? Palestine had no coal, petrol, or significant timber reserves of its own. While the newly formed Mandate Department of Agriculture and Forestry noted that the Ottomans had a provincial agricultural and forestry service, the department’s first director asserted that it and its records had disappeared without a trace during the war. In its first, massive 200-page survey of the agricultural situation in Palestine, compiling reports originally drafted between 1919 and 1922, the department assessed indigenous agricultural and forestry practices as marked by “poverty and ignorance,” blaming “centuries of neglect and failure to apply the most elementary principles of forest management; wholesale fellings during the war, and deforestation in favour of meagre cereal crops [that] have produced dire results.” Without a cadastral survey, which would not be begun for a decade, the initial forest survey was based on impressions formed by tours of the country. This “reconnaissance” noted the irregular nature of Palestine’s forests according to European standards:

Forest, in the sense of regularly grown trees, producing marketable timber of good quality, only exist as artificially formed plantations, wood lots or shelter belts, of Eucalyptus, Pine and Casuarina, organized by settlers in the plains. If, however, the expression “forest area” be employed in a non-technical sense, the country is comparatively well-endowed, for such occur widely over the northern sector.

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35 “Agricultural situation in Palestine: Review by the director of the Department of Agriculture,” [E.R. Sawer], no. 579, 15 June 1923. TNA CO 733/46 (15-30 June 1923), page 187 of bound volume of correspondence, page 2 of the full report itself, which is in fact an omnibus of a variety of reports from the preceding four years (beginning 1919) totaling over 200 pages. The overview, from which the subsequent citations are drawn, is dated 15 March 1922.  
36 Ibid.  
37 Ibid., 16.  
38 Ibid. Appendix XVI (page 54 of part IV: appendices) gave estimates of the total area under hill forests broken down by urban center; however, it is laughably low. It gives the total hill forest area for the entire country as 622 square kilometers, which converts to 622,000 dunams. As concluded in the previous chapter, at least 1,750,000 dunams were under olives alone at the time, likely closer to 2 million.
thinning out southwards with diminishing mean rainfall and disappearing at the edge of the desert belt. These areas may be distinguished as hill-forests with oak as the dominant species, olive groves, woods of artificial origin and the belt of timber peculiar to the Jordan valley. … At the present time these [mixed oak, Aleppo pine, olive, and carob] hill forests constitute the major portion of our forest capital, and form a chief source of supply of the domestic needs of the population, viz. firewood and charcoal; rough timber for house-building and agricultural implements; limestone and brush-wood for lime burning; grazing, and such minor products as fruit, honey, wax, tannin barks and thyme oil … Indirectly these so-called forests play an important role by preventing floods and landslides, rationing the rain-fall, equalizing stream flow, and furnishing cover for game. Generally speaking, however, they are in very poor condition, and exhibit numerous flaws … [above all, incomplete canopy cover leading to] forest soil deterioration thanks to sun, wind and other erosive agents.  

It is important to note that a technical study to back up these last claims (known as a soil survey) would not be carried out until 1927-1928, and would intentionally exclude the hills of the Galilee and the West Bank, because the reports were mainly intended to facilitate Zionist colonization in the plains.

More significantly, this irregular definition of forest, as a mixture of cultivated fruit trees and wild indigenous species like the scrub oak and the Aleppo pine, would be characteristic of forestry assessments throughout the Mandate. The assessment made special note of the hardiness of these species, which “fortunately … reproduce freely from coppice, a fact to which alone we owe their survival. Almost all have been brought the under the axe during recent years, and so

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39 Ibid., pages 16-17.
40 See TNA CO 733/156/4, Submission to the Palestine Joint Survey Commission: Reports on Horticulture (1927) and Soil Reconnaissance (10 January 1928). For the relationship of the reports to the facilitation of Zionist agricultural colonization see page 3 of the first report, “The horticultural possibilities of Palestine: as especially related to agricultural colonization,” by Knowles A. Ryerson (1927). For the exclusion of the “Galilean and Judean hills” see page 2 and 91 of second report, “Soil reconnaissance [sic] of Palestine” by A.T. Strahorn (1928), which correspond in the combined file to pages 163 and 254 respectively.

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present a general appearance of coppice woods ranging from two to six years in growth.”

This provides further confirmation of my argument in the preceding chapter: that while trees in many areas were partially culled or pruned severely in order to provide fuel during the war in a state of emergency, the trees in most areas were not completely uprooted or killed — and most importantly, could indeed regenerate from such coppicing.

While the report attempted to present the new department as a clean break, in its words a “complete severance with this past,” the bulk of their accomplishments were to promulgate laws seeking to criminalize a variety of offenses under the rubric of forest law. In doing so, the department was in fact merely continuing late Ottoman-era traditions, as the previous chapter illustrated. The small supervisory staff (five mounted rangers, 10 unmounted guards, and two deputy forest inspectors) needed to, in the course of the first three years of the civil administration of Palestine, complete the following tasks: patrol the entirety of the country; educate and explain forestry law throughout; arrest offenders; issue and check licenses to prune and chop down trees; supervise said felling; and collect revenues for said licenses. Needless to say, the duty of patrolling still-undemarcated state forests was a difficult task by itself, stretching the staff quite thinly. Furthermore, the requirement for Palestinians to obtain licenses to prune

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42 The report listed names of particular villages whose “finest oak woods” were subject to atrocities under the Turkish wartime yoke, mainly in the Haifa area of the Galilee, singling out two in particular: the experience of the village of Usfiya, which had a daily fuel wood quota to fulfill, and the razing of newly planted pine trees on Mt. Carmel. Ibid., page 19.
43 Ibid. The skeleton staff seems to have mainly focused its attention on arrests for forest offenses, obtaining 370 convictions out of 387 cases brought against the populace.
44 The department would begin to demarcate state forests the following year, but would find it extremely difficult in the north owing to small, formally unregistered plots of land under cultivation. “Annual Report for 1923,” despatch no. 298, dated 28 February 1924.
olive trees for “bona fide” purposes at the appropriate time of the year had already been suspended — likely bowing to practicality and the impossibility of effectively regulating such a widespread, necessary, annual practice. The authorities essentially hoped that village mukhtars would implement regulations regarding the pruning and felling of olive trees out of self-interest, praying that measures such as deregulating pruning and limiting licenses to fell olive trees would “relieve the owners of olive groves of the present unfair temptation to sell their birthright for a mess of pottage.” In explanatory notes to the department’s legislation, the Woods and Forest Ordinance of 1920, the officials essentially noted that enforcement would rely on the self-interest of mukhtars to prevent their villagers from burning or cutting down olive trees. This again illustrates the many continuities in methods of governance that the early Mandate period shares with the late Ottoman period, perhaps in this case even marking a regression, in terms of the dependency of central authorities on local intermediaries.

non-parliamentary publication, colonial no. 5, 19 June 1924, page 67. TNA CO 733/65, Despatches 15 February-7 March, 1924.

45 “Agricultural situation in Palestine: Review by the director of the Department of Agriculture,” [E.R. Sawer], no. 579, 15 June 1923. TNA CO 733/46 (15-30 June 1923), page 20. In a typical expression of the colonialist discourse of the time, the report blamed the difficult-to-eradicate “habit” of “compulsory felling of olives under the latter Turkish regime” for continuing problems: “The impecunious owner, almost as a matter of course, felled an olive tree whenever he stood in need of ready cash, and the situation was aggravated by a fuel famine in Jerusalem during the winters of 1920 and 1921.” The department sought to limit fellings by approving very few applications to licitly fell trees; however, the report admits that this approach was a failure: “[t]he prices obtainable for olive wood rendered smuggling a lucrative occupation and the preaching of thrift a forlorn hope … illicit destruction was only too common.” The government took a few minor steps, such as encouraging the alternative use of eucalyptus trees for fuel instead of olive trees and diverting charcoal that had been intended for export — very much indeed the kind of step the Ottomans had taken during shortages in the preceding half century; see previous chapter.

46 Ibid.

47 Part II. Legislation, page 26; page 236 of bound volume
The importance of the olive tree as a type of mixed unconventional forest was reinforced by the value of exports of fruit and fruit products, which altogether for the first fiscal year of civilian rule (1920-1921) constituted just over half of the value of all exports.\textsuperscript{48} The continued reliance on export statistics in the early 1920s is telling. Crop returns for the early period of the Mandate were furnished by the revenue department, again illustrating the continuities with Ottoman rule, as government continued its reliance on estimated tithes, which were conservative projections rather than a descriptive statistic.\textsuperscript{49}

For an illustration of the problematic nature of the estimates of crops based on tithing assessments: the figures for 1923 asserted that 1,116 metric tons of olives somehow yielded 2,987 tons of olive oil.\textsuperscript{50} The typical yield for olive oil at the time was less than 20 percent of the gross weight of the olive crop. Perhaps a decimal was misplaced, because either the 1,116 tons olive crop should have yielded around 223 tons of olive oil; or the 2,987 tons of olive oil had been pressed from a crop of nearly 15,000 tons of olives.

The more significant conclusion from these statistics is that they cannot be taken as credible. They marked no significant improvement over Ottoman-era statistical collection as a

\textsuperscript{48} “Agricultural situation in Palestine: Review by the director of the Department of Agriculture,” [E.R. Sawer], no. 579, 15 June 1923. TNA CO 733/46 (15-30 June 1923), page 22.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., Part IV: Appendices; Appendix II, page 2 (page 244 of bound volume): “Crop returns, furnished by the revenue department.” See also Appendix III, page 5 of the section (page 245 of bound volume). These estimates should be taken with more than a grain of salt, but it does show the volatility of the olive cycle: a good crop in 1920 of 6,700 tons of olive oil contrasts with a 1921 yield of less than 600 tons, an apparent drop of more than 6,100 tons. Of course, tax relief in times of hardship was a common practice, so it is quite likely that for a variety of reasons both figures are underestimates by a significant margin — likely more than the officially given underestimation by at least 15 percent.

form of state knowledge of rural society. Laws remained ambitions on paper, and estimates were unverifiable guesses. The new British civilian administration claimed a clean break, but the continuities in the cases of agriculture and forestry and state policy were starker than the ruptures.

2. An olive oil press microhistory: Bad El Jami, Deir al-Ghusoun, 1924-1934

The saga of a partially state-owned olive press helps to illustrate the main theme of this chapter: the primacy of Palestinian agency in the history of the period, particularly when it came to the rural economy. In this particular case, the ignorance of central colonial officials of rural areas is highlighted by their utter dependence on subalterns, whether indigenous cadres in the local bureaucracies or their local intermediaries. In addition, it helps to draw out the rapid progress and investment in olive oil presses by indigenous Palestinians in the 1920s, who would begin to reorient their surplus production toward the increasingly more profitable edible grades of olive oil. However, this process of highly localized, family-driven indigenous modernization was threatened by growing indebtedness, compounded by the massive socioeconomic dislocations caused by the events of the period — above all, the onset of the Great Depression.

Three quarters of the shares (16/24) of a press known as Bad El Jami, located in Deir al-Ghusoun (today in the West Bank, north of Tulkarm) had been given to the government in lieu of a cash fine. The head of the Department of Lands expressed dissatisfaction at the extremely

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low rents the state received, and repeatedly tried to sell its stakes, initially denying requests by the private owner to repossess his forfeited shares in the fall of 1924.52

In fact, the government was not entirely sure of how it had obtained the shares, let alone what they represented and what their value could be. The Department of Lands thus commissioned a demarcation and survey in October 1925 of the state’s holdings. This process was not completed until the summer of 1927, as it involved the district officer, the Tulkarm registrar of lands, the village mukhtar and other elders, as well as the owners of adjoining properties.53 Over the next three years, the government failed to lease the press, the primary reason being competition in the villages thanks to the installation of new, more efficient motorized presses.54 In the fall of 1930, the district officer was asked to approach the co-owner, ‘Abdeljabar al-‘Omar, who put forth an offer of £P 8, with the justification that the “oil press is in a grotto and not working.”55 The director of lands accepted; however, al-‘Omar immediately

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52 Sub-district governor of Tulkarm to ‘Abd al-Jaber al-‘Amr, Deir al-Ghassun, 22 October 1924. ISA M-4826/4, Document 19.
53 ISA M-4826/4, Document 41, 18 July 1927. The property was one of three partially state-owned presses in the village, and in the middle of the three in terms of value, given as £180 at the time.
54 District officer of Tulkarm to Department of Lands, 31 July 1929. ISA M-4826/4, Document 56a; district officer to director of lands, 3 September 1930. ISA M-4826/4, Document 74.
55 Department of Lands to district officer, 10 September 1930. ISA M-4826/4, Document 75; District officer to Department of Lands, 23 September 1980. ISA M-4826/4 Document 77. ‘Abdeljabar al-‘Omar to government, offer [handwritten in Arabic] to purchase 16 shares of the government for 8 guinea (n.d.). ISA M-4826/4, Document 77a.
changed his mind and asked not to go through with the purchase, declaring the press to be “kharab,” or ruined.\(^{56}\)

The reason for the co-owner’s change of mind immediately became clear when the local Department of Health declared the site closed as unsanitary. The press, which had not been operational for years, had become the de facto village toilet. An official for the Tulkarm Department of Health informed the director of lands that everyone had been going to the bathroom in the defunct press for some time:

The co-owners of this oil factory for several years previously had been neglecting it and not running it. The factory had no door and so many people in the village were using it as a public latrine. Consequently those co-owners were warned on 20-10-30 to fix a door to the factory to prevent its use as a latrine on which the door was closed up by masonry. Should those owners wish to run this factory after cleaning up the place there will be no objection from the public Health [sic] point of view.\(^{57}\)

Since the co-owner refused to acquire the government’s shares, the director of lands decided to put the press up for auction in the early spring of 1931; however, no offers were received.\(^{58}\) The director of lands therefore decided that the obligation of the co-owner to buy the shares for the proposed £8 was still binding.\(^{59}\) The district officer wrote to al-ʿOmar, who replied that he could

\(^{56}\) Director of Lands to district officer. ISA M-4826/4, Document 78; al-ʿOmar to government n.d. ISA M-4826/4, Document 80; District officer to Director of Lands, 1 January 1931, ISA M-4826/4, Document 82.

\(^{57}\) Ibrahim Itayem, Tulkarm Department of Health, to Director of Lands, 2 February 1931. ISA M-4826/4, Document 85.

\(^{58}\) Director of lands to District Officer of Tulkarm, 12 February 1931. ISA M-4826/4, Document 87; District Officer of Tulkarm to Director of Lands, 11 March 1931. ISA M-4826/4, Document 89.

\(^{59}\) Director of Lands to District Officer of Tulkarm, 20 March 1931. ISA M-4826/4, Document 90.
not acquire the funds, “owing to his financial situation.” The acting director of lands followed up again in the summer, asking if the co-owner could now afford the shares.

al-ʿOmar wrote back in Arabic that he was not party to the original agreement, which he now claimed had been between his mother — who had since passed away — and another man, Sʿaid al-Haj Qassem. For his part, al-Haj Qassem also declared the press to be “kharab,” or a ruin — not because of its unsanitary history as the village latrine, but because of the competition from the three new mechanized presses in the village. The district officer forwarded both Arabic letters to the director of lands, who acquiesced, saying Qassem could withdraw his offer, and the press would be put up for auction again in three months.

More than two years went by until an offer was made by Mustafa ben Daud and a man identified initially as Muhammad ibn al-Haj Muhammad Yusef. After negotiations, the government’s majority stake in the press was sold for £8.6 in the winter of 1933 to the latter (whose first name was actually Mahmud, and not Muhammad as initially recorded), who took 3 quarters of the shares sold — and in an interesting twist, Sʿaid Hag Qasem ibn Ahmad [sic], the

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60 District Officer of Tulkarm to al-ʿAmr [in Arabic], n.d. ISA M-4826/4, Document 91; District officer to director of lands, 4 April 1931. ISA M-4826/4, Document 92.
61 Acting director to district officer, 17 June 1931. ISA M-4826/4, Document 94.
63 Sʿaid al-Haj Qassem to district officer [in Arabic], 22 June 1931. ISA M-4826/4, Document 97.
64 District officer to director of lands (the district officer transliterated their names as Said el Haj Qasem and Abdul Jabbar el Omar). ISA M-4826/4, Document 98; Acting director to district officer. ISA M-4826/4, Document 99.
65 Subsequent documents give the latter’s first name as Mahmud, rather than Muhammad. ben Daud and ben al-Haj Muhammad Yusef to district officer, 7 November 1933. ISA M-4826/4, Document 101.
co-owner who had refused to purchase the press previously owing to the competition of the mechanical presses and his own precarious financial position.

At the time of bidding, another member of the al-'Omar family showed up at the district office in Tulkarm and “claimed the right of purchase by pre-emption,” and was told to take it up with the courts, since the district officer believed the newcomer, Sʿaid al-ʿOmar, was merely pretending to have a stake in the press. Examination of the land registries indicated that Sʿaid al-ʿOmar was not officially registered as a co-sharer, and he was informed that he had six weeks to produce registration in his name if he wanted government intervention.

In late March, Mahmud ibn Muhammad al-Yusef in lovely Arabic handwriting sent a petition urging the sale to be completed, while Sʿaid al-ʿOmar sent his own long, dense petition in Arabic, mentioning that his now-deceased mother had possessed about three or four shares in the press. The petitions were forwarded by the district officer to the director of lands, who decided the sale should proceed; Mahmud al-Yusef was informed that the transfer was effective so that the new owners could clean the press in preparation for the next olive season in October.

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66 Receipt voucher for revenue (in which al-Yusef’s first name is corrected but the Ibn is omitted: “Mahmud hag Mohd Yusaf [sic]”), 21 December 1933. ISA M-4826/4, Document 112; Notice of purchase to land registrar at Tulkarm: 12 kirats to Muhmoud Ibn El Jah Mohd. Yuusef Mohd [sic] and 4 kirats to Said El Haj Qasim Abu Ahmad [transliterations as given; the typist appears to have transposed the “h” and “j” in Haj, yielding Jah], 21 December 1933. ISA M-4826/4, Document 113.

67 The relationship between ʿAbd al-Jabar and Sʿaid al-ʿOmar is not specified, but since they both at points claimed property rights through a deceased mother, it can be assumed that they were brothers. District officer of Tulkarm to director of lands, 3 February 1934. ISA M-4826/4, Document 114; Director of lands to district officer, 9 February 1934. ISA M-4826/4, Document 115.

68 Director of lands to district officer, 3 March 1934. ISA M-4826/4, Document 117.

69 Petition from ibn Muhammad al-Yusef to district officer [in Arabic], 17 March 1934. ISA M-4826/4, Document 119; Petition from Sʿaid al-ʿOmar [in Arabic], n.d. ISA M-4826/4, Document 120.
Sʿaid al-ʿOmar, whose mother’s shares seem to have never been officially registered, was told in early October 1934 to have recourse to the courts, after the property was sold and registered in the names of the new purchasers in September 1934.  

In sum, the story of Bad El Jami in Deir al-Ghusoun illustrates the overarching theme of this chapter and the larger dissertation on the micro level: the importance of subaltern Palestinian agency and the state’s corresponding policy failures owing to its lack of capacity. The saga of Bad El Jami highlights the central government’s lack of local knowledge and minimal capacity to intervene. The department of lands did not know how it obtained the shares or why; it took two years to ascertain the value of the property; and then it took another nine years for the property to be sold. Interpreted more positively, however, it shows the importance of local indigenous officials as subaltern intermediaries. The district officer for Tulkarm, as well as the medical officer, were bilingual Palestinians, corresponding in Arabic with the villagers and in English with the colonial officials.

Beyond the official subalterns, this case also illustrates the importance of non-governmental Palestinian initiative, expressed through the agency of ordinary family members in the rapid process of indigenous modernization in the villages. In a matter of years, a

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70 District officer to director of lands, 29 March 1934. ISA M-4826/4, Document 121; District officer to director of lands, 14 April 1934. ISA M-4826/4, Document 122; Director of lands to district officer, 26 April 1934. ISA M-4826/4, Document 123; District officer of Tulkarem to Mahmud al-Yusef, 17 May 1934. ISA M-4826/4, Document 124.
71 Director of lands to district officer (official registration, cancellation of state domain records, and transfer in Land Registry Tulkarm under Volume 1 Folio 40 in the names of Said El Haj Qasim Abu Ahmad [sic] and Mahmud El Haj Mohd. Yousef [sic] of Tulkarm), 25 September 1934. ISA M-4826/4, Document 129; District officer to al-ʿOmar, 4 October 1934 in reply to letter of 13 September 1934. ISA M-4826/4, Document 130.
longstanding traditional press became a public bathroom for the village as others invested in new motorized presses. Although less efficient, traditional presses could still be profitable in surplus years when the capacity of the newer presses was full — since significant waiting time after harvest leads olives to over ripen, increasing acidity and thus decreasing the quality of the olive oil. Lower acidity meant higher profits and greater opportunities for marketing as edible grades, which became increasingly important priorities for Palestinian olive oil producers as the Mandate progressed and olive oil surpluses expanded, which the Nabulsi soap industry could no longer absorb. ⁷²

There are two other related conclusions that can be drawn from the story. This microhistory illustrates the complexities of local property rights, especially when subdivided through inheritance. In particular, it highlights the potential precarity of women’s property, which in this case appeared to be a customary arrangement. According to Annelies Moors, women in Palestine frequently declined to exercise their formal property rights under Islamic law in order to retain alternative claims of kinship, specifically support from male relatives. ⁷³ In short, women would not officially make property claims if it was not expedient to do so. ⁷⁴

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⁷² The causes of these changes are complex; please see the next (third and final) section of this chapter, as well as the sections of the next chapter on Nabulsi soap in the late Mandate, for more on the changing — and ultimately, declining — significance of olive soap production within the political economy of olives.

⁷³ Annelies Moors, Women, Property, and Islam: Palestinian Experiences, 1920-1990 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), especially chapter 3, “Women and inheritance,” 48-76. The tradeoff of disinheriting for customary kinship claims depended mainly upon the woman’s family ties, particularly whether she had paternal brothers to serve as surrogates for her father, which is unknown in this case, as well as the situation of her own heirs.

⁷⁴ While Moors sees this as its own type of power, she does not note that the woman’s choices are still restrained within a system of patriarchal relations, in which her brother is effectively substituting for her father. In her fieldwork, some interlocutors when pressed by Moors state that they do not want to bother their male relatives to ensure they are getting the
Without further information from all the parties, particularly the family’s structure, it is
difficult to ascertain the mother’s decisionmaking process or to get to the truth of whatever local
disputes were occurring behind the scenes between the al-ʿOmar family and Qassem, and
perhaps among the agnate members of the same family. But by taking advantage of the
ignorance of Mandate officials, and their reliance on likely incomplete land registries, the new
purchasers were able to circumvent whatever customary arrangement may have been in place
between Qassem and the unnamed mother of Sʿaid and ‘Abd al-Jabar. Since the state no longer
had an interest in the press, its files on the subject ended, so it is unclear whether Sʿaid al-ʿOmar
was successful in pursuing his deceased mother’s property rights. But it can perhaps be assumed
that since the shares were forfeited to the government in the first place in lieu of cash payment,
Sʿaid al-ʿOmar perhaps would not have had the funds to go to court.

While the mother is anonymous in the file on Bad El Jami (her ownership ultimately
undocumented), she in fact had owned another olive oil press, in which the government had a
smaller stake, in the same village.  

75 Bad El Hayazi, as it was known, similarly had low rents and

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equivalent income or rents from the property, trusting in them to provide. Formal rights would be
claimed only in specific circumstances, such as if a woman lacked confidence in the agnate to do
the right thing. Thus, the decision to forfeit a formal right in order to claim an informal right
could be considered something of a wash. Women are subsequently forced to make do with what
they are given, managing the household budget, but having no actual control over the income
streams (and the possibility that income is being diverted without their knowledge). For an
illustration of similar opportunities and dilemmas in a different context entirely, relating to the
ideals and realities of working-class motherhood in Victorian England, see Emma Griffin, “The
Emotions of Motherhood: Love, Culture, and Poverty in Victorian Britain,” The American
Historical Review 123:1 (February 2018), 60-85.

75 Appendix to agreement (land form no 3), showing government ownership in Bad El
Jami as 16/24 shares and in Bad El Hayazei as six of 24 shares, 1923. ISA M-5169/10,
112.0.9.60, Dossier: “Sheytakh madina: mafal shemen [State domain – olive oil factory: Bad
Hayazei (alternatively spelled in transliteration in government documents as Bad el Hayazi)],
minimal usage for much of the 1920s, owing to the installation of motorized presses — though not to the point of dereliction of Bad El Jami in becoming a latrine.\textsuperscript{76} In September 1930, the government offered to sell its quarter of the shares of the press to the co-owner: none other than ‘Abd al-Jabar al-‘Omar, who offered six guineas or £6 per share.\textsuperscript{77} While approved in December 1930, owing first to an absence from the village and then second to Ramadan and then third to the “nonavailability of money with him,” ‘Abd al-Jabar al-‘Omar repeatedly delayed payment.\textsuperscript{78}

In mid March 1931, ‘Abd al-Jabar al-‘Omar finally paid and completed the purchase, providing to the district officer a number of supporting documents: first, that ‘Abd al-Jabar al-‘Omar had previously purchased 3 kirats or shares from another relative, Khalil El Omar [sic]; second, a certified note from the other co-owners that they did not wish to purchase the available shares; and third and most importantly, a title deed no. 28 of 307, “in the name of Saa’da bint Hussein Abou Sara (mother of the purchaser now deceased).”\textsuperscript{79} So while Saa’da may not have had an official registered share of Bad El Jami, preventing one son (S’aid) from intervening in a purchase — and it should be noted, after another son ‘Abd al-Jabar had reneged on a purchase agreement in partnership with Qassem years earlier — she did have a registered deed in her name for Bad El Hayazi.

\textsuperscript{76} District officer Tulkarm to department of lands, 3 September 1930. ISA M-5169/10, Document 31.
\textsuperscript{77} Department of lands to district officer, 9 September 1930. ISA M-5169/10, Document 32; District officer forwarding offer letter to department of lands, 23 September 1930. ISA M-5169/10, Document 33; Letter [handwritten in Arabic] from ‘Abd al-Jabar al-‘Omar ,n.d. ISA M-5169/10, Document 33a; Letter [handwritten in Arabic] from district office to mukhtar of the village as intermediary to invite the coowner to the district office, n.d. ISA M-5169/10, Document 33b.
\textsuperscript{78} Director of lands to district officer, 13 December 1930. ISA M-5169/10, Document 34; District officer to director lands, 3 January 1931. ISA M-5169/10, Document 38.
\textsuperscript{79} District officer Tulkarm to director of lands, 10 March 1931. ISA M-5169/10, Document 42.
So why did Saa’d claim ownership of shares in one olive oil press and not the other? The main reason that Moors found for a rural woman to stake her claim officially would be to provide for her sons.\(^\text{80}\) Perhaps she had tried to claim ownership of both olive oil presses, but only succeeded in one being formally documented. Or, the outcome may have related to the relative conditions of each press at the time of her death, since Jami had become a village latrine, while Hayazi was simply disused.

In conclusion, these issues alternatively may have reflected the family’s indebtedness, which had likely led to the state’s stakes in the first place. ’Abd al-Jabar’s procrastination in purchasing the shares in both olive oil presses (Bad El Jami and Bad El Hayazi), to the point of abdicating the agreement to repurchase the government’s stake in the former, reflected the dire financial strains of many Palestinians in the early 1930s. His proffered excuses — of having to buy gifts and extra food during the holidays, and of a general lack of liquidity — ring true, in light of customs and traditions for the former and in light of official British reports on rural conditions of the fellahin at the time (such as the Johnson-Crosbie committee report and Hope Simpson enquiry, both of 1930) for the latter.\(^\text{81}\)

### 3. Class relations and the Great Depression: farmers and factory owners

While the dislocations caused by British policies and Zionist immigration resulting in outbursts of popular violence like in 1929 and 1936 have absorbed much of the attention of

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\(^{80}\) Moors, op. cit.

scholars, and in the case of 1929 prompted the above-mentioned reports of 1930, both enquiries showed that the cost of living had been rising considerably for rural Palestinians along with peasant indebtedness, both of which were intensifications of longer-term trends. A confidential American summary in October 1930 of agricultural economic conditions nevertheless noted that the Johnson-Crosbie survey “seems to show conclusively that there is no room at present for further immigration … [,]” and that the indigenous rural population needed government intervention to alleviate present conditions. Since no such intervention had occurred, reading the 1929 disturbances through a moral economy framework marks them as an outlet for popular dissatisfaction, rather than as expressions of religiously defined and motivated protonationalism. Regardless, putting aside such exceptional outbursts of spectacular violence

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82 While both rising cost of living and peasant indebtedness cannot be entirely divorced from the impact of growing population through immigration, neither should the Zionist project be seen as the sole or even the primary cause, considering that both trends were hardly new, and colonization efforts were highly localized in certain areas, typically away from hill villages, and designed as separate economies (in theory at least, though later increasingly so in practice).


84 The British termed it the “Wailing Wall riots;” Palestinian nationalism has called it _thourat al-Buraq_, or the Buraq Uprising, following the tradition of relating the Western Wall to the Prophet Muhammad’s magical steed during _al-Isra wa-al-Miṣraj_. Both names localize the events to the Old City of Jerusalem, though the massacres of Jewish communities in Hebron later became a rallying cry for the settler movement after 1967. Another long-term outcome of the events was worsening relations and hardening lines between different religious communities, as well as feelings of suspicion or hostility toward neighbors, which should rightly be interpreted through the relational paradigm. On the causes of the 1929 violence, please see the Shaw Report of the Commission on the Palestine Disturbances of August 1929 (printed as Cmd. 3530, London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, March 1930), which emphasized Arab fears of continually growing Jewish immigration and land purchases, leading to a landless, discontented class of evicted former peasant tenants. The Shaw Commission report also led to the establishment of the Hope Simpson Enquiry.
and overt conflict, how would different groups of Palestinians react and seek to change
detrimental governmental policies via other, everyday means of resistance?

Both follow-up reports (Hope Simpson and Johnson-Crosbie) to the Shaw Commission
showed not only that British policy had made no real progress toward development in rural areas,
but also that in the critical cases where British policy had been effective (as with trade and
immigration policy), the Mandate government’s actions seemed to be worsening the economic
conditions of the fellahin, despite promises to the contrary. Most importantly, the Johnson-
Crosbie report noted, the local oil-seed production (particularly of olives and sesame) was more
than ample for the manufacturing needs of the country.\(^85\) Yet the Great Depression had led to a
massive drop in prices obtained by Palestinian farmers — about half.\(^86\) The main cause seemed
to be a glut of imports caused by dumping by other countries in an attempt to rectify global
overproduction.\(^87\)

Most injurious to the fellahin was the inability to sell surplus wheat and olive oil
production, owing to lack of demand for these commodities.\(^88\) The drop in prices meant that the
net income for Palestinian farmers also dropped in half. The most important step to alleviate
these conditions, the Johnson-Crosbie committee concluded, would be protective measures
against imports of foreign agricultural produce, particularly wheat, flour, olive oil, and sesame

\(^{85}\) Ibid., enclosure [Johnson-Crosbie report], pages XXXVI-XXXVII.
\(^{86}\) Prices in June 1929 for a ton of wheat: £P 12 versus £6 in 1930; barley dropped from
£6 to 3, and olive oil from £P 77 to 40. Ibid., XLI.
\(^{87}\) Ibid.
\(^{88}\) The two being the “principal means of barter, of transactions with money-lenders and
of realising cash to pay tithes and taxes. Similarly the money-lender holds as security more
wheat and oil than he can dispose of, and is therefore unwilling to increase his commitments by
further advances.” Ibid., XLII.
seed;\(^9\) the committee singled out the prohibition of importation of unrefined olive oil in particular, since local production was sufficient for domestic needs.\(^9\)

A series of articles in the Arabic-language *Filastin* newspaper over the next two years (1931-1932) illustrates how the committee’s recommendations went unheeded and governmental policy continued to aggrieve Palestinian olive growers. In late October 1931, members of the Nablus chamber of commerce complained to the heads of the customs department about the damage caused by the importation of foreign oils, which yielded only a vague promise to take these concerns into account after the meeting according to the newspaper’s Nablus bureau.\(^9\)

While the issue largely fell partially along Arab-Jewish lines, to use the categories of the British Mandate era, and could perhaps be expected to result in nationalistic solidarity — Arab Palestinian producers against Jewish importers — the reality was much more complex and fractious. While some of the largest coastal factories that imported seeds, crushed them, and turned the resulting seed oils into toilet soap and edible oils mainly for export markets were Jewish owned and run (such as Shemen in Haifa and Izhar in Tel Aviv), there were a number of similar if smaller Arab-owned factories running their enterprises in Jaffa and Haifa as well.\(^9\)

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\(^8\) Ibid., LIV
\(^9\) Ibid., LV.
\(^9\) “Foreign oils and their competition with local oils [in Arabic],” *Filastin*, 20 October 1931. CZA S90/2266/35.
\(^9\) The case of these factories in the urban ports producing edible oils and soaps, primarily using cheaper vegetables and imported seeds like cotton, offers a good example for the application of the relational paradigm. For an extensive cataloguing of agroindustrial processing facilities in the era, see S.B. Himadeh, *Economic Organization of Palestine* (Beirut: American University Press, 1938). Regarding Jaffa olive soap, see below in the next subsection of this chapter. For a local, relational history of the Haifa edible oils and soap-processing sectors, see Mustafa Abbasi and David De Vries, “Commodities and Power: Edible Oil and Soap in the History of Arab-Jewish Haifa,” in *Haifa Before & After 1948: Narratives of a Mixed City*, 144
Additionally, olive oil soap producers, including the largest artisanal factories in Nablus, responded by adopting cheaper, imported olive oil at the expense of their countrymen, following the lead of smaller soap factories in other cities like Jaffa.

In fact, then, the situation did not lead to a united Arab Palestinian front composed of different groups of farmers, traders or middlemen, and factory owners — even in relatively homogenous Nablus. The newspaper Filastin blamed the traders first and foremost for exploiting the fellah, who despite the rising cost of soap, continued to receive a very low price: “it is incumbent upon them [the middlemen] to assist the fellah and revive his fortunes.”93 The typically nationalist newspaper cast it as an issue of patriotism, using the term “watanin” [fellow citizens] as a synonym for “fellahin,” urging the Nablus olive oil traders to adjust their prices. Otherwise, their fellow fellahin-citizens would only have recourse to Jewish-owned factories instead. Doing so would “encourage Zionist factories” at the ultimate expense of the fellahin, “upon which is concentrated the architecture of the country.”94

Filastin’s reification of the fellah as the defender of the land — really, as one with the land — reflected discourses that would become clearer and sharper in memories of the 1936 revolt shaped by the intervening decades and events of 1948 and 1967 in particular.95 In 1923, Khalil al-Sakakini had written that the fellahin are fellahin through and through after many

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93 “The Prices of Olive Oil [in Arabic],” Filastin, 2 December 1931. CZA S90/2266/35
94 Ibid.
95 Swedenburg’s ethnographic fieldwork speaks to the continuing resonance of similar discourses at the time of his research in the 1980s. Ted Swedenburg, “The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier.” Anthropological Quarterly 63.1 (1990), 18-30. See also Ted Swedenburg, Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past, revised edition, (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2003), 22-23
generations, in their muscles, bones, blood, and tolerance for the elements: “There is no such thing as first or second generation fellah, the fellah does not create a fellah, he emerges generation after generation.”

The fellah, in Sakakini’s telling, was born of and part of the land. These discourses are problematic on a number of grounds: most importantly, the educated, urban classes writing in the newspapers they owned tended to treat the fellahin more like draft animals than human beings — prized for their endurance for outdoor labor and tolerance for its abuses — or as naturally occurring resources produced by the land itself, like a crop of wild thorns or scrub cactus [al-sabbar].

Nevertheless, the rhetorical impact of this line of argument is clear: the traders who exploited the fellahin were not only greedy but also traitors. Of course, the ultimate beneficiaries of this exploitative trade and the higher soap prices were not the middlemen, but their patrons:

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96 Khalil al-Sakakini, reprinted newspaper column from March 1923 (originally published in al-Siyasah), collected in Filastin b’ad al-Harb al-Kubra [Palestine after the Great War], Part 1 (Jerusalem: mutab’at bayt al-muqaddas, 1925), located at the National Library of Israel [hereafter NLI], Jerusalem, Israel.

97 The title of Sahar Khalifeh’s novel al-Sabbar (originally published: al-Quds [Jerusalem]: Manshurat Jaliliyu [Galileo Publications], 1976), on life under occupation in the post-1967 West Bank. I would like to thank Sharif el Musa, one of the leading contributors to the Institute of Palestine Studies’ landmark All That Remains, for pointing out the importance of al-sabbar as marking erased Palestinian villages in Israel after 1948, since even when burned, it returns (an association remarked upon by Swedenburg as well as many others, as far back to al-Taher’s work on olives from the 1940s). However, Palestinian claims to the wild thorns or cactus must contend with the Israeli settler discourse of the kibbutzim, part of claims to reinvigoration of oneself and the land simultaneously through a return to the earthliness of agricultural activity. In Hebrew, sabra stands for the character of the first generation of native-born Israelis, prickly outside but sweet inside. Sabra is also, notably, a brand of hummus marketed today in a joint venture between Israeli food manufacturer Strauss and Pepsi Frito-Lay in the United States that claims to be the largest hummus manufacturer in the world with nearly half of the American hummus marketshare. Aviv Levy, “A jump in sales of Strauss hummus in the U.S.: occupying 40 percent of the market [in Hebrew],” Globes, 25 November 2009.
the Nablus factory owners. The soap factory capitalists were not critiqued at all in the article, perhaps in order to avoid antagonizing the Nabulsi elite.

However, as the situation continued unresolved the next year as well, the Palestinian factory owners were no longer spared criticism. A dispatch in Filastin from Jenin in August 1932 mocked anyone who would argue that cheap foreign oil benefited the fellah in any way, accusing the factory owners of selling out the vast majority — the increasingly desperate fellahin.98 “The most important of the calamities plaguing the fellah is the fall in the price of olive oil, a horrifying drop, which if it continues would mean the end of olive cultivation; therefore the government should enact a tax on foreign oil in order to maintain the prices of the most important commodity of all the essential commodities of the country…. .” To allow cheap imported oil, the letter from Jenin continued, would benefit only the business interests of “a few persons whose number does not exceed the fingers on one hand, being the owners of soap factories” at the expense of tens of thousands of women and children and the best interests of the country.99 The strident critique ended in a note of resignation, however, that the import tax would not prevent the factory owners (and by extension the middle men, either independent traders or the factory agents) from simply returning back to their old, usual methods of “taking the olive oil of the fellah at rock-bottom prices [b-abkhas al-athman].”100 This series of dispatches speaks to simmering class disputes, which could perhaps be papered over by rhetoric of nationalist, patriotic camaraderie; however, in a time of economic crisis, it seems that economic self-interest could easily take precedence, particularly in the short term.

98 “Jenin letter regarding import tax [in Arabic],” Filastin, 15 August 1932. CZA S90/2266\35
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
The rise and fall of Nablus soap in the 1920s

Writing to Earl Curzon in early 1920, Chaim Weizmann noted the economic power of Nablus:

The prosperity of Nablus is based chiefly on the olive-tree and the industry connected with the production of oil and soap. The chief argument against Zionism of the people of Nablus is that Zionism may build modern factories and so compete successfully with their oil industry. One important agitator based his opposition against me particularly on the ground that I was a chemist and probably had the intention of making soap in Palestine.  

While the anonymous agitator was wrong to focus on Weizmann, who merely became one of the founding fathers of Israel, Nabulsi suspicions were ultimately proven correct.

The Nabulsi olive oil soap industry had survived the war basically unscathed. During the war, there were 23 larger factories and 6 smaller workshops, producing 2,000-3,000 tons of soap a year. Out of about 50 total shops in Palestine, producing in total up to 8,000 tons a year, an American consul counted 30 olive oil soap factories in Nablus in 1922. A local Palestinian source counted 33 in 1923.

The decade of the 1920s was to be the peak of the Nablus soap industry. While British estimates based on tithes remained improbably low, American consular reports for 1921-1923

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put the average annual returns for olives as 11,000-14,000 metric tons.\textsuperscript{105} In the immediate aftermath of the war, as early as 1919-1921, soap exports had resumed to the tune of 1,500 tons annually, worth nearly £150,000 pounds at the time — a close second in terms of value to the rapidly expanding Jaffa orange industry.\textsuperscript{106} As in the late Ottoman era, oranges and olive oil soap remained the two principal and most valuable exports of Palestine in the early years of the Mandate.

But beginning with the Great Depression, which resulted in a global wave of autarkical restrictions on trade from which the Nablus soap industry would never recover, Nabulsi annual production dropped in half — effectively below the levels of World War I. Despite efforts at resuscitation in the 1930s and 1940s, the loss of traditional neighboring markets in Egypt and Syria and shifting demography and tastes among Palestinians (Arabs and Jews alike) themselves — along with rising input costs compounded by domestic competition from cheaper alternatives — meant production for the rest of the 20th century was cut to less than a third of what it was at its peak. A number of these problems for the Palestinian olive oil soap industry, historically concentrated in Nablus, were evident from the start of the Mandate.

First, and perhaps most crucially, the Nabulsis faced competition from the 20 or so coastal manufacturers in Jaffa, Haifa, and to a lesser extent in Lyd — the less scrupulous of

\textsuperscript{105} Acting Vice Consul George Gregg Fuller to Department of State Washington DC, “Vegetable oil products,” pages 4-5, prepared 17 December 1923. Original designation 867N.60. NARA 250/25/25/1 M353 [Microfilm] Roll 86. In contrast to the British tithing quotas, the American interpretations were likely overestimates. Fuller stated that these amounts somehow yielded 8,000 metric tons of olive oil, which would then be turned into an average of 6,000 tons of olive oil soap. Both figures are probably close to double the actual production levels.

\textsuperscript{106} “Fishing & Economic situation,” HC 41139, 17 August 1921, TNA CO 733/5 (August 1921), page 3. 647,063 cases of oranges worth £E.162,409 were exported in 1919-1920, and 830,959 orange cases valued at £200,475 were exported in 1920-1921. 1,540 tons of soap worth £142,407 was exported in 1919-1920, and 1,475 tons valued at £132,169 in 1920-1921.
whom were rumored to substitute cheaper imported oils as the base ingredient. Second, the key export market for Palestinian soap was Egypt, which consumed about half of Palestine’s production in the early 1920s, but which had begun to develop its own soap industry. Third, the Nabulsis, despite periodic efforts at organizing themselves, too often undermined one another.

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107 The quality of the soap, as well as the quantities, were considered by reputation to be vastly inferior to the Nabulsi manufacturers. From Jerusalem Palestine, American Consul AES/IK [signed with initials], “The Soap Industry of Palestine,” 1 August 1921, page 1. NARA RG 166 Foreign Agricultural Service, Agriculture Attaché reports [and predecessors] 170/72/28/01-07 (Narrative reports of special agents, consular officers, and agricultural attaches, 1904-1939), Box 424.

According to NARA’s finding aid for RG 166, the first distinct predecessor to the US FAS was formed in 1930 as a division of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, until it was transferred to the Department of State in 1939 and redesignated the Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations within the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture. It was not formally named the Foreign Agricultural Service until March 1953.

108 The American consular report of 1921 pointed out that nearly all of the main, large manufacturers had about the same production capacity. Ibid., Enclosure, page 9:

**Table 4. Soap manufacturers who may be addressed at Nablus, Palestine**

[Note: 250 jarrah is given as a little more 1,640 US gallons on page 3, roughly equivalent to 6,210 liters or around 6 tons. Each factory in a good year could conduct up to 50 tabakhat or bakes, for a total capacity of about 600 soap bakes a year, which combined for an annual average production of 4,000 tons of olive oil soap in Nablus alone in a typical good year (see page 6).]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Capacity of Kettle Operated</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abd-el-Ghani El Anebtowi</td>
<td>250 Jarrah of Olive-Oil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odi El Amad</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abd-el-Latif El Nabilsi</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nimr-el Nabilsi</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Mahfusa El Nabilsi</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohamed El Nabilsi</td>
<td>750 (3 factories, each 250)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamdu Nabilsi</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmed Shaaiki</td>
<td>500 (2 factories, each 250)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tahir Masri</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutih Abdo</td>
<td>250</td>
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<tr>
<td>Said Camman</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aarif Khayat</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anas Abd El Hadi</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hafiz Tokan</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Said Abd-el-Majid</td>
<td>500 (2 factories, each 250)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abd-er-Rahim Tamimi</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite efforts at registering and trademarking their names and logos (imprinted on the wrappers or bars), most named their sons Hassan and thus nearly all of the soap brands wound up being a variant of Hassan Nabulsi.\textsuperscript{109} The newer soap factories in Jaffa and Cairo got in on the same act, such that dozens of very similarly branded soap were on the market.

Copyright enforcement was ineffective domestically, and effectively nonexistent abroad, which added to customer confusion, beyond the basic problem that dozens of Hassan al-Nabulsi variants were on the market. The owner and namesake of the al-Shakʿah factory, for example, had taken steps to protect his brand by registering the name, along with its molds in 1914.\textsuperscript{110} Three decades later, al-Shakʿah attempted to bring an Egyptian factory to court in the late 1940s for copying their trademark camel logo.\textsuperscript{111}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{ll}
Tahir Kemal & 100 \\
Amir Arafar & 100 \\
Abd-er-Rahim El Nabulsi & 75 \\
Abid El Talin & 75 \\
Khadir El Amad & 65 \\
Aarif Shaaka & 50 \\
Shukri Fakhri El Dib & 50 \\
Omar El Alul & 50 \\
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

“The above are all Moslems of families who have for generations been engaged in making pure olive-oil soap and they are very jealous of the quality of their product. Most of them are men of substantial capital. The NABILSI family soap is famed throughout Egypt and Syria and their trade-mark of ‘Hassan Nabilsi’ is a very valuable asset.”

These statistics from the American consular report of August 1921 indicate that the larger factories had possibly upgraded and expanded the capacity of their copper kettles from 200 to 250 jarrah since al-Sharif’s snapshot from the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century. The additional capacity roughly converts to an additional ton in the 1920s, meaning the factories now turned 5-6 tons of olive oil into 6-7 tons of olive oil soap with each bake or tabkhah.


\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 22. See also page 66, which offers reproductions of the original mold registration.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
Well-regarded Nabulsi (and to a lesser extent Jaffa-region) soaps through the 1920s outcompeted Marseilles soap in the Egyptian import market.\textsuperscript{112} A 1928 report estimated that three quarters of Palestinian soap was exported to Egypt, with the remainder going to Syria.\textsuperscript{113} Of the soap marketed to Egypt, an unknown proportion was than re exported and marketed to the Muslim population in British India. In Jaffa, the two largest factories were owned by Jean Damiani and the Isside brothers respectively, each employing about 30 workers and producing 1,000 tons of soap annually.\textsuperscript{114} Most of the other Jaffa shops were more artisanal, producing a few hundreds tons per year. In total, Jaffa at its peak produced less than half of Nablus. In Nablus, the five largest factories each employed 70 workers, and produced about 2,000 tons a year combined.\textsuperscript{115} The still relatively new Shemen Factory in Haifa employed 130 workers, and produced about 1,000 tons of soap (divided between two different types: an imitation Nabulsi-type soap and a Marseilles-type soap);\textsuperscript{116} however, Shemen’s principal products were cheaper

\textsuperscript{112} “La Palestine: rapport de l’attaché commercial,” Attaché commercial près de consulat general de France en Palestine, relations commerciales no. 34, 5 septembre 1925, page 5. MAE La Courneuve C-185 (RELATIONS COMMERCIALES 1919-1940), Sous-Série : Asie, Carton 2, 1924-1928, Dossier : Palestine 1924-1928.

\textsuperscript{113} “Rapport sur l’industrie paletinienne,” Commercial Attaché Achard and Consul General Doiry (Jérusalem) to MAE Paris, no. 40, 14 May 1928, section 4 page 2. MAE La Courneuve C-185-6, Carton 3.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., section 4, page 1.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., section 4, page 2. The five largest soap factories were ascribed to Said Effendi Abdul Majid; Nimmer Trabulsi [sic], Anis Abdul Hadi, Abdul Fatah Aga Touqan, and outside of Nablus in Burqa, Fares Massous.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid. The report further detailed what it called the indigenous olive-oil producing region of Haifa (meaning the Palestinian-populated western Galilee), whose production would be forcibly reoriented to serve the Shemen factory in the early years of the Israeli state. See Chapter 4 of this dissertation and the article by the author, “Olive Cultivation in the Galilee, 1948-1955: Hegemony and resistance,” in \textit{Journal of Palestine Studies} 184 Vol. 46, No. 4 (Summer 2017) for further detail. Just as a few examples, in 1928, Shef ‘Amr is reported to have produced 70 tons of olive oil a year, with two modern presses and four older animal-driven presses; Tire, 200 tons, with two modern presses and seven old. The Acre subregion altogether was said to produce
vegetable oils, crushed from imported oil seeds, which would lead to conflicts in the debates over escalating import and export tariffs in the 1930s.

**Tariff wars: Palestinian olive oil industries in the Great Depression**

With the worldwide Great Depression hitting in the late 1920s, British colonies turned to protectionist tariffs, even against other British colonies. Egypt, under British control, imposed

2,000 tons of olive oil (Rama, Kefr Yasif, Yarka, Majdel Krum, Meghar, Sakhnin and others), with a decent number of modern presses (at least eight throughout the various towns and villages) as well as at least 14 older presses.

Imported nuts and seeds — copra (or coconut), groundnut (or peanut), cottonseed, and occasionally sunflower seeds — were the main raw inputs of Jewish-owned factories in the coastal centers of Haifa and Tel Aviv, according to the most detailed British reports compiled under control during World War II. In 1944, for example, the Shemen and Izhar factories produced groundnut (peanut), cottonseed, and coconut (copra) oils in the following quantities: Shemen, 3,735 tons of edible oil (principally groundnut, sesame, and cottonseed); Izhar, 1,884 tons; all Jewish factories together, 6,427 tons. See “Food Control Department, Annual Report,” 1944. TNA CO 814/17-0010. A 1928 report had noted that the Shemen factory at Haifa had expanded sunflower seed oil production in particular, and was “now working day and night to meet orders,” though this was possibly a temporary adjustment. See “Annual Report for Palestine and Transjordan, 1928.” TNA CO 733/171/2-0005.

Coastal factory production of cheaper edible oils was a concern for some olive oil producers mainly for the potential of counterfeiting and adulteration; although, since most olive oil was consumed by its producers or marketed along fairly traditional idiosyncratic channels (often depending on personal trust), it is unclear what if any importance to ascribe to these findings in terms of impacting the broader olive oil market. Taste was clearly an important factor, since Arab Palestinians did not consider cheaper edible oils to be substitutes for olive oil.

The Department of Health’s Chemical Division absorbed the agricultural analytical service in 1931, and expanded sampling of adulteration in edible oils and fats by 1934, finding that a remarkable 20 percent of olive oil was adulterated, chiefly with peanut oil (Arachis ground-nut oil), in 43 of the 56 adulterated olive oil samples out of 271 total. “Department of Health. Annual Report,” 1934. TNA CO 814/9-0010.

The next year, the laboratories found peanut (Arachis) oil in 70 percent of adulterated samples of olive oil, and in all samples of sesame oil. “Department of Health. Annual Report,” 1935. TNA CO 814/10-0010. The report noted that almost all of the Arachis oil was pressed locally from imported ground-nuts — which would most likely implicate the Shemen Oil Factory, among others, in the adulteration of local oil products.

Nevertheless, because of a number of factors including consumer taste and economic structures, the vegetable and seed oil sector was largely separate from the olive oil sector.
high tariffs against imports from neighboring Palestine, whose Mandate had been assigned by the League of Nations to Great Britain in 1923.

In early 1931, an assessment of Palestine’s olive oil industries (presses and soap factories) found 477 presses, 25 of which were considered modern (meaning powered by machines rather than animal or human labor), and 42 soap factories.\textsuperscript{118} The value of annual production of olive oil was estimated at £P 210,500, and olive oil soap annual production around £P 350,000.\textsuperscript{119} Hence, up to the early 1930s, Palestinian olive oil processing remained oriented toward the soap industry, though increasing family investment at the village level in mechanized, powered presses (as illustrated in the preceding section of this chapter) had already begun and would partially cause the shift away from soap and toward edible oil production, along with the decline of the olive oil soap factories and growing olive oil surpluses overall. There were also important regional variations. While Acre and its surrounding villages focused on olive oil production, the soap factories centered in Nablus and to a lesser extent in Jaffa and other coastal cities took up the surplus of their hinterland villages. The 24 factories in Nablus were estimated to employ 200 workers, with a capital investment of £230,000 generating about £P 240,000 per

\textsuperscript{118} “Note sur l’industrie du savon en Palestine et Liste des principales fabriques de savon de Palestine,” Consulat general de France en Palestine (Jérusalem) to MAE, Paris, 10 February 1931, no. 14, Direction des affaires politiques et commerciales, Sous-Direction Relations commerciales. MAE La Courneuve C-185-6, Carton 4, Palestine 1929-1932, page 1. The report noted that the soap industry had existed for many centuries at least, as one of the oldest and principle industries of the country, and highlighted the interreliance of both the olive oil industry and the olive oil soap industry. These reports were subsequently shared by MAE with the Marseille chamber of commerce and the Marseille soap syndicate (Chambre syndicale de la savonnerie), on 12 March 1931.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
year. The 18 coastal factories (12 in Jaffa, 2 in Tel Aviv, and 4 between Ramleh and Ludd) were said to employ 125 workers producing about £P110,000 worth of goods per year.\textsuperscript{120}

Just before high protective tariffs by Palestine’s neighboring countries were enacted, in 1929 about £160,000 worth of soap was exported to Egypt and £53,000 to Syria, with slightly higher amounts exported to both countries the year prior.\textsuperscript{121} Palestine had imposed its own tariffs on imported soaps;\textsuperscript{122} however, oil seeds were imported tariff free, which the olive producers decried as advantaging coastal producers like Shemen.\textsuperscript{123} This competition from cheaper, lower quality vegetable-based oils had begun to undermine both the olive oil industry and the olive oil


In Jaffa: George Dabbas and Sons, Bishara Dabbas and Brothers, Hanna Damiani, Mohammad Shams al-Din Dabbagh, Bishara Abulhauf and Son, and the Issid Brothers; and in Tel Aviv: Havatzeleth, Gershon Franco, Franco and al-Gazi, I. Winsten and company, J. Kammerstein, haShemesh, and I. Feigen.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., pages 1-2.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., page 4. Palestine itself had raised tariffs in 1927 from 2 to 10 mils (about 0.8 Francs at the time) per kilogram of imported soap, making the importation of Marseille soap prohibitive. See “Industrie du savon,” Caumeau (Consulat Général de France à Jérusalem) to MAE Paris, direction des affaires politiques et commerciales, sous-direction relations commerciales, no. 167/22/B, 4 October 1933, page 5. MAE La Courneuve C-185-6, Carton 5, Palestine 1933-1934.

\textsuperscript{123} Shemen Ltd. in Haifa (originally called the Eastern Oil Industries Ltd.) in particular put pressure on the British Mandatory authorities to lift import tariffs, since the factory was dependent on imported raw materials. Letter from Shemen to Department of Agriculture, January 1930. ISA M-5165/11, 128.0.4.11, “Exemptions: Sesame and olive oil January 1926-December 1930.” See also “Droits de douane sur les savons importés en Palestine,” Consul General D’Aumale, Jerusalem, to MAE, Paris. Direction des affaires administratives et techniques: sous-direction relations commerciales, no. 31, 31 January 1931. MAE La Courneuve C-185-6, Carton 4, Palestine 1929-1932.
soap industry in 1926. Not only did local consumers rightly begin to fear substitution of cheaper, lower quality fats, the soap producers themselves began to fear that religious populations abroad (in Egypt and Syria, their principal export markets) would begin to “lose their faith” in the quality of olive oil soap, and suspect the use of religiously forbidden animal fats. In the face of possibly losing essential external outlets, it is little surprise that most soapmakers had little impulse to invest further in the sector in order to expand production.

Soap exports to Egypt dropped sharply from 1930 to 1931, and in 1932 constituted less than half of 1928 exports in both quantity and value (see Graph 4). While typical price fluctuations owing to the volatility of the olive crop caused further problems, the prohibitive Egyptian import tariffs provided what would prove to be a “fatal blow” to the development of the industry. The temporary cessation of soap production resulted in a general economic depression in Nablus. While prices remained relatively consistent (£P 32,000-33,000 per ton

124 The Nazareth Chamber of Commerce was astonished to learn in the spring of 1926 from the official gazette that both sesame and olive oil would be exempted from customs duties; the director of the department of agriculture agreed that it was driven by the demands of the newly establish Jewish mills and would mainly help Chinese and Spanish producers of raw sesame and olive oil, at the expense of hurting local Arab production. By the end of 1926, the olive growers of the Jerusalem district pleaded with the authorities that the imports would cause a great loss in the olive oil market, resulting in low prices and mad markets. See ISA M-5165/11, 128.0.4.11, “Exemptions: Sesame and olive oil January 1926-December 1930,” in particular: Nazareth Chamber of Commerce to Department of Agriculture, April 1926. ISA M-5165/11, Document 1; From E.R. Sawyer, M-5165/11, Document 6; and from olive growers of Jerusalem district to department of agriculture, 25 December 1926.


127 Ibid.

128 Ibid., page 4.
from 1930-1932), the quantities and thus total value of olive oil soap exported from Palestine plummeted precipitously.\textsuperscript{129}

This steep drop, and the attendant negative impact on the economy of the Nablus region, spurred Mandate officials to seek to intervene.

**Educate the fellah or save the Nabulsi soap industry?**

1933-1934 was the worst year for crops since 1917, owing to inadequate rainfall, but efforts to support Arab cultivators finally expanded, half a decade into the Great Depression.\textsuperscript{131}

1934-1935 as a result was the high watermark for rural policy supporting Palestinian agricultural

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid. Tonnage dropped from 5,945 tons in 1930, to 3,830 in 1931, and 3,598 tons in 1932. The tonnage and value of the toilet soap produced by the rival Shemen factory dropped similarly: from 4,895 tons worth £P 171,669 in 1930 to 2,566 tons worth £P 81,134 in 1931.

cultivators up to that point. The revolt of 1936 and a withdrawal of government from rural areas — apart from the military — would shortly negate these efforts almost entirely.

Yet even at this high watermark, the impact was muted. Development efforts focused on the education system, examining possibilities of expanding universal education culminating in technical training focused on extension, thereby modernizing Palestinian farming and husbandry. This in turn would increase the absorptive capacity of Palestine, allowing increased Jewish immigration quotas by decreasing the minimum sustainable farm sizes for Arab Palestinians. The fellahin would become modern, switch to cash crops and market more profitably. Farming, after the violence of 1929 and the 1930 Hope Simpson and Johnson-Crosbie reports, remained inextricably linked to debates over absorptive capacity and immigration quotas. Rural education could kill two birds with one stone and theoretically resolve the paradoxical mission self-imposed on British policymakers since the Balfour Declaration.

Nevertheless, skepticism among colonial officials in London about rural education for boys in particular remained strong. High Commissioner of Palestine Wauchope held out hopes for inroads among girls and women, through a tentative “scheme to improve conditions in Arab villages by spreading a knowledge of domestic science among women and girls,” thereby

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133 Op. cit., that the British government during late World War I viewed “with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people … it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine … .”

134 Colonial Office bureaucrats, drawing on analogies to experiences with India, disputed the efficacy of expanding rural education, noting the frequent early withdrawal of male students and the ineffectiveness in particular of single class or single teacher schools. See correspondence in “Expansion of rural education in Palestine particularly in boys’ schools,” TNA CO 733/262/7, 1 May-31 July 1934; and “Rural education,” TNA CO 733/282/11, 27 June-20 November 1935.
ameliorating “domestic conditions” as a means to making modern “progress” in the villages. Colonial office policymakers and colonial officials in the relevant agencies held out no hope, however, of reforming the backward, stubborn male fellah.

Ultimately, rather than help the fellahin such as by expanding rural education, the local Mandate government focused its attention on the olive oil and olive-oil soap industries. A government report from 1934 blamed the picking and storage practices of the fellahin themselves for the problems of the industries. In addition to better instruction in picking, the presses needed better filters and storage procedures, plus advertising, in order to improve the reputation and marketability of the local products. While from 1922-1929 the average wholesale market prices of olive oil in the 14 main towns in Palestine averaged £P 70 per metric ton, prices dropped even further than the Johnson-Crosbie report had indicated with the advent of the Great Depression, bottoming out at £37 in 1930 and 1931, then rising only slightly and slowly in subsequent years.

Rather than focusing on the glut caused by imported oil, the local bureaucrats as well as some of the elites in the soap industry focused on the issue of the quality of Palestinian olive oil — implicitly a critique of the fellahin, their picking practices, and of the presses, and their storage practices. The government thus formed a committee on oils, oil seeds and fats, which met

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137 Ibid., 64 and 66.
138 The average annual price for 1932 was £44; £55 in 1933; and £58 in 1934.
repeatedly in the mid 1930s and came up with expansive recommendations and generated massive reports on the conditions of the presses and the soap manufacturers in particular (who were, not coincidentally, represented on the council).\footnote{ISA M-5108/2, 7.0/8/126, “Committee on oils, oil seeds and fats 1935-1936; rules of exploitation of olive trees society 1937-1938.” The report in the above files kept in Jerusalem can also be read in London as Brown, “Survey of foreign markets for olive-oil soaps and olive oil from Palestine and proposals for re-organising the olive oil producing industry in Palestine,” 104-page report. TNA CO 852/5/12, “Oil and soil seeds: olive oil; Palestine,” Document 1.} This interest, circa 1935-1936, in saving the Nablus soap industry ultimately came to nothing, in no small part because of the revolt of 1936.

However, even prior, the colonial head office expressed extreme skepticism toward the local bureaucrats’ efforts to save the traditional Palestinian olive oil soap sector. In the spring of 1935, one official concluded that the primary conclusion of a massive report, which in his words largely “gets bogged in a morass of unimaginative figures and facts” on the re-organization of the olive oil producing sector, was to confirm “our previous impression that there is not much hope for the export of olive oil soap from Palestine,” though perhaps the exportation of olive oil itself held promise.\footnote{Minutes by Clauson, 7 May 1935, and minutes by Carrie, 4 May 1935, to report by Brown (1935), TNA CO 852/5/12, Document 1.} Olive oil soap produced little to no lather, which restricted demand not only in Europe, which had a long history of importing toilet soap from Syria, but also in the traditional Egyptian market, as its use in laundry would require more scrubbing and labor than other soaps.\footnote{Minutes by F.A. Stockdale, 25 May 1935 to Ibid. (TNA CO 852/5/12, Document 1).} Cheaper, alternative substitutes better suited for use as laundry soap had previously displaced more expensive olive oil soap, especially once religious and cultural suspicions were overcome by producing toilet and laundry soap in the region using vegetable oils — rather than from non-halal, non-kosher animal offal (as competing European soaps had...}
traditionally been made from rendered pig fat). The great masses of paper generated by the committee resulted in only one concrete recommendation: tariff alterations to protect the local olive oil industry.\footnote{Minutes by Caine, 13 December 1935 to High Commissioner of Mandate Palestine Hall to Colonial Office, forwarding secret report by committee on oils, oil seeds, and fats, requesting early approval of tariff changes proposed, 30 November 1935. TNA CO 852/5/12, Document 3.}

The question of tariffs continued to confound British policymakers. The customs agreement with French Mandate Syria made it impossible to put a duty on oil seeds; tariffs on imported oil (without commensurate action on imported oilseeds), the officials in London contended, would be a “nice present to the crushers at the expense of the consumers.”\footnote{Minutes by Eastwood, 13 December 1935 to TNA CO 852/5/12, Document 3.} Such protection for producers could be justified if the product could be improved, by reducing high acidity; however, with unattractive global prices and narrow margins between domestic and export markets, officials in London concluded that any protectionist measures would merely raise local prices, since they did not consider Palestinian olive oil “good enough to compete” in world markets.\footnote{Minutes by Eastwood, 20 December 1935 to TNA CO 852/5/12, Document 3.} The Palestinian government committee, they concluded, had produced an enormous mass of paper, with no clear way of achieving their objectives, which seemed to be aligned mainly with the interests of the domestic oil seed crushers, thus putting the interests of the manufacturer over the interests of the broader country:

The sad fact is that it is very doubtful if the olive oil industry can be saved at all, either generally or in Palestine. Olive oil is the traditional vegetable oil, but it is more expensive to produce than the “newer” oils, it is inferior to these oils for the manufacture of soap, + [sic] quite possibly no better than them for edible purposes. Italy, Spain + France have had a lot of difficulty in preserving their industries + have only done so by high protection, quotas + other means. The
Palestine industry is greatly inferior to these others, it picks + crushes the fruit badly + stores the oil wrong.\textsuperscript{145}

Ultimately, Clauson and Eastwood of the Colonial Office informed the High Commissioner that they disliked the committee’s proposals.\textsuperscript{146} In Eastwood’s final internal memorandum, he concluded that, “in the past Palestine oil has been used for soap making. This market has fallen away and cannot be revived;” however, the alternative of exporting olive oil was considered impracticable as two-thirds of Palestine’s olive oil was of insufficient quality to be exported abroad.\textsuperscript{147}

In the Colonial Office’s more detailed explanatory dispatch to the high commissioner in Palestine for why they refused to approve an increase in import duties for edible oils, they noted “the truth seems to be … that the poor quality of the olive oil was unimportant when it was used locally for manufacture into soap, but now effectively precludes Palestine oil from finding the alternative market which is essential. Two thirds of the oil contains more than the maximum

\textsuperscript{145} Minutes by Clauson, 22 December 1935 to TNA CO 852/5/12, Document 3. The pluses as ampersands are original to Clauson’s handwriting. Interestingly, by newer oils, the Colonial Office official was referring to vegetable oils derived from much cheaper plant seeds: cotton, copra (coconut), groundnut (peanut), soy, sunflower, and rapeseed (which would later be rebranded as “canola”). Improving understanding of nutrition toward the end of the century would later show that these cheaper oils were cheaper for a reason, being vastly inferior nutritionally in a number of important ways for human consumption.

\textsuperscript{146} Minutes by Clauson and Eastwood, 13 January 1936, to TNA CO 852/5/12, Document 3: Letter from High Commissioner Hall, Palestine, Jerusalem, to Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies Thomas, London, 30 November 1935, advocating an increase in tariffs on oil and oil seed imports and reduced railway rates for olive oil and olive-oil soap exports. “I too am sorry for the delay, but the subject is one of exceptional complexity + it has taken us about 6 drafts before … we were satisfied. It is fairly obvious that the local committee never really got to grips with the main problem at all.”

\textsuperscript{147} Colonial Office memorandum by Eastwood, January 1936. TNA CO 852/5/12, Document 6.
amount of free fatty acid which oil saleable on the world market can have.” The export market could bring the olive sector prosperity, but the Government would need to intervene heavily, likely via nationalization, centralization, or at a minimum subsidization of the installation of new presses and plants. Import and export duties, the colonial office argued, were secondary, but needed to be overhauled entirely: “The general theory of the duties appears to be that those on seeds should be low and those on oils high: in other words protection for the Shemen crushers.” An imposition of higher import duties on edible oils without a corresponding increase in import duties on oil seeds would merely give increased protection to Shemen, without having much effect at all on the broader olive oil industry overall. The Secretary of State for the Colonies J.H. Hall accepted these arguments entirely, forwarding the memo — and echoing the doubts of his staff in London regarding the efficacy of the proposed measures in assisting the olive industry — to the High Commissioner of Palestine.

Nowhere in these policy debates did the fellahin have a voice or advocate. While local and colonial office bureaucrats argued over trade-based control measures, indirect evidence shows the fellahin kept planting olive trees, though the Nabulsi soap industry could no longer absorb the biennial surpluses of olive bumper crops.

The American Consul in the early period of British civilian rule, Oscar Heizer, the official who revised estimates of wartime deforestation downward from the first hysterical British assessments of 60 percent deforestation to less than a third of certain trees within a

148 Eastwood to Thomas, 16 January 1936. TNA CO 852/5/12, Document 8.
149 Ibid. Eastwood concluded by criticizing the composition of the committee, which included the managing director of Shemen, Mr. Slitzand.
150 Thomas to Hall, 16 January 1936. TNA CO 852/5/12, Document 9.
A visitor approaching Jerusalem from Jaffa is certain to be impressed whether coming by railway or by automobile, by the beautiful groves of olive trees in the valleys and also on the terraces on the slopes of the rocky hillsides. Many of the trees are old and gnarled but still bear rich yields of olives of a very good quality. These trees seem to flourish very well in the rocky soil and are certainly of great advantage to the country not only on account of the olives produced but also on account of the advantage that a wooded country has over a nude country as concerns rainfall. The advantages of increasing the wooded area is apparent when one considers that Jerusalem as well as most other cities in Palestine are dependent chiefly upon rain water for drinking and other purposes during the entire year.\footnote{American Consul Oscar S. Heizer, Jerusalem, to Department of State, Washington DC, “Afforestation in Palestine,” 4 September 1924, pages 1-2. Original designation 867N.6171. NARA 250/25/25/1 M353 [Microfilm] Roll 86.}

The environmental benefits of olive terracing and planting were thus clear at the time, and have only grown in importance as the population in Israel and Palestine has grown and the water aquifers have become increasingly strained. Perhaps unsurprisingly, both Zionist foresters and British colonial officials periodically criticized the Palestinian predilection for planting olive trees, the former desiring their replacement with hardwood trees and the latter arguing for diversity in the types of nut and fruit trees cultivated — again failing to recognize issues of drought, rainfall, and pressures on the water supply resulting from switching from drought-resistant olive trees to relatively thirsty almond trees. While early Zionist efforts at planting memorial forests, such as the first Herzl Forest, were in fact composed of olive trees for ideological reasons harkening back to religious associations with the Land of Israel in Biblical
texts,\textsuperscript{152} many of these forests were evidently uprooted during the war. It is not clear if these “forests” were targeted because of the planters, or because they were in easily accessible areas, or because they were neatly ordered and planned and thus easier to harvest, or because they were new, nonbearing trees — meaning the cost of doing so would have been far lower than destroying trees in bearing for firewood. It was likely a combination of all of the above factors. Regardless, Zionist foresters took advantage of the chance to start over in the early Mandate period by switching to more familiar, faster growing species like the pine.\textsuperscript{153}

\textbf{Conclusion}

In December 1943, in the midst of World War II and two straight years of bumper olive harvests, the British Government of Palestine commissioned the two largest Jewish oilseed crushing factories, Shemen Ltd. and Izhar Ltd., to purchase 500 tons of Arab-pressed olive oil, out of a total of a conservatively estimated 9,000-11,000 tons of olive oil produced out of the

\textsuperscript{152} See the 1909 Jewish National Fund appeal for donations to plant a Herzl memorial forest of 100,000 olive trees on the occasion of five years since his passing. CZA H1/3461.

\textsuperscript{153} The connection between land and trees has been well explored by Shaul Ephraim Cohen in \textit{The Politics of Planting: Israeli-Palestinian Competition for Control of Land in the Jerusalem Periphery} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 48-53, which recounts the history of how planting trees in Palestine and Israel relates to control of the land with a primary focus on the construction of a “Green Belt” around Jerusalem between 1948 and 1967. He briefly chronicles the earlier shift by the Jewish National Fund away from planting olive trees — despite the strength of their symbolism in connection to the Holy Land, but which require a decade or more of attention before they start producing — in favor of whatever trees could be planted fastest and cheapest, which in practice meant a turn largely to pine trees. In a contemporary legal analysis, Irus Braverman has termed trees “planted flags,” looking at pine and olive trees in Israel and Palestine as a means of bi-national contestation. Irus Braverman, \textit{Planted Flags: Trees, Land, and Law in Israel/Palestine} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
The companies had to be appointed and funded as government agents in order to purchase domestic olive oil, as an experiment. Shemen, Izhar, and other smaller coastal factories in urban ports like Jaffa/Tel Aviv and Haifa since their founding in the early 1920s had always been oriented toward the sea: importing raw materials in the form of oil seeds, and exporting refined edible oils and toilet soap abroad. While the “dual economy” model of understanding Mandate-era history has been largely debunked as something of a historiographical straw man, the edible oil industry is an exception, which the relational paradigm does not suit well. Unlike other edible oils and soaps, the olive industry was largely a self-contained domestic Arab Palestinian sector. The one exception was olive oil soap, which had traditional markets abroad in Egypt and Syria, but became greatly diminished in the early 1930s owing to protective tariffs erected in response to the conditions of the Great Depression. In the meantime, olives and olive oil remained almost entirely processed by increasingly mechanized, typically family-owned Arab presses in the villages that grew the olives.

Without governmental support — and even in the face of the economic challenges of the Great Depression and the collapse of the Nablus soap industry — planting of olive trees and by extension olive and olive oil production continued to expand and increase in the first half of the 1930s. Part of the committee on oil, oil-seeds and fats submitted a report to the chief secretary on the olive oil industry in Palestine, noting that the decreased average of olive and olive oil in production from 1931-1934 compared with a period from 1922-1925 was actually deceptive, and not reflective of a decline or stagnation in planted area that might be expected (owing to the difficult economic conditions of the Great Depression and in particular the diminished export

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154 For a detailed discussion of these statistics, see section six of the next chapter. “Food Control Department, Annual Report,” 1944. TNA CO 814/17-0010.
olive oil soap trade and commensurate drop in demand from the Nabulsi soap factories for olive oil): “[B]ut the fellaheen have continue to plant olive trees and in the last five years [1930-1935] planting of new trees in the hill villages has been carried out on a large scale. The potential output of olive oil is consequently steadily increasing and will continue to increase as new trees come into bearing.” A temporary decline in olive oil production in the early 1930s was a result of insufficient rainfall, which belied the expansion in land under olives, as the sector not only recovered from the effects of the First World War but also expanded beyond pre-war levels. Increased output far above subsistence requirements, without corresponding outlets for growing surpluses, would be the main problem for Palestinian olive and olive oil producers for the rest of the century, exacerbated by the changing economic and political policies and the events of the intervening decades.

This chapter has sought to push back against a totalizing, hegemonic view of the creation of the Mandate government as a revolution in colonial knowledge. As with the discourse of deforestation in the late Ottoman period, scholars have occasionally taken these pronouncements preserved in the colonial archive at their word. Early British colonial officials, for example, argued that they were creating new departments to deal with certain policy arenas, ostensibly for the first time, but which were in fact based on clear Ottoman legacies. While putting forth new statistics in the 1920s, claiming for example to be estimating the olive crops for the first time, later in the 1930s colonial officials would acknowledge that the earliest statistics for most of the

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155 “Subject: committee on oils, oil-seeds and fats [report to chief secretary],” 4 August 1935. TNA CO 852/5/12 “Oil and soil seeds: olive oil; Palestine,” document 2. Appendix A: “Report on the present position of the olive oil industry in Palestine together with recommendations for government assistance to the industry,” page 1. The report is signed by H.M. Foot, as chairman, and by Nabulsi and Slitzan, members of the committee representing Arab and Jewish crushers respectively, page 16.
1920s were actually just tithing estimates — with about the same degree of accuracy as the Ottoman period. As a 1930 report frankly, if belatedly, acknowledged: “It has always been known that the estimated figures for fruit trees were highly speculative,” and thus that the figures for the 1920s were considered retroactively unreliable.\textsuperscript{156} While claiming to be a new form of knowledge of the rural economy, crop counts in the early Mandate era were actually much the same as the late Ottoman: estimates, based on conservatively assessed tithes.

These claims were not necessarily disingenuous. Instead, they show how little the state actually knew about the terrain it was ostensibly governing. As a result, British policy was not a decisive or determining factor in many aspects of rural life in the early Mandate period, as the gaps in colonial knowledge resulted in significant dependencies on local intermediaries. Beyond the colonial bureaucracy’s subaltern ranks, increasingly staffed with indigenous Palestinians, the state left significant space for agency and resistance by non-state Palestinian actors. These capacities would become most overt and manifest in violence like the 1929 disturbances and the 1936 revolt, which at root were protests against economic conditions in the countryside, which had been worsened by British policy, intentionally or not.

In short, the gaps in state knowledge and control left significant space for Palestinian agency and resistance. The colonial apparatus’s lack of knowledge in the early Mandate meant a lack of control over much of the country, especially in contrast to the latter half of the Mandate. In the face of the worldwide economic crisis of the Great Depression, in particular, local bureaucrats were at the mercy of decisions made by the head Colonial Office in England and by the officials in neighboring, more powerful colonial entities like Egypt. As their local knowledge

and contacts with indigenous interlocutors grew, and the political and economic tensions started
to build, Mandate officials attempted to intervene to save the Nablus soap industry in the mid
1930s. But they failed, overruled by Cairo and London.

While the soap industry collapsed, olive tree planting by Arab Palestinians had continued
to expand considerably, necessitating new outlets for the regular olive surpluses occurring every
two to three years, contingent mainly on local weather patterns. Thus the early Mandate period
marked a change in Palestinian olive processing, which began to shift its orientation toward
edible olive oil production. This in turn necessitated continued investment in mechanical presses
and greater attention to issues of hygiene, which would finally be supported by the government
in the second half of the Mandate, during World War II.

While the British would continue to give themselves credit for things like the expansion
in olive and olive oil production, these investments in orchards and olive oil presses had little to
do with the state. The massive expansion in both olive cultivation and processing throughout the
Mandate period was due mainly to personal or familial initiative of Palestinians themselves.

The primary reason why rural policy came to so little in the first half of the Mandate was
the guiding rule of governance on the cheap, with the emphasis always on balancing the budget
and funding the colonial bureaucracy through Palestine’s own resources. This also accounts for
why the director of lands spent an inordinate amount of time obsessing over the low rents
received by the state’s partial stake in a single olive oil press, Bad El Jami, located outside of
Tulkarm. The fact that the state took about a decade to eventually dispose of these shares, after a
number of dramatic twists involving local familial intrigue, gives an indication of how
overwhelmed the bureaucrats of the colonial regime were in the early years in merely getting the lay of the land.

Overall, the continuities between late Ottoman and early British rule were in many cases more significant than the ruptures. Both states promulgated ambitious laws and legislation that were difficult to put into practice owing to issues of funding and weak, decentralized enforcement mechanisms. For example, the Forest Section of the Mandatory Agriculture Department had an enormous task, of which it could accomplish but a small portion, essentially depending on the local village mukhtars for any real enforcement to occur. The owners of olive soap factories and oil seed crushing interests came to prominence as experts in the wake of the Great Depression and the resulting tariff wars. Palestinian oil seed interests made concerted efforts to influence government policy that would potentially make for winners and losers in the Palestinian local, regional, and global trade-based economies of the early 1930s.

However, the local tussles over duties and tariffs would ultimately result in nothing more than a mass of paper, as the Palestine Government bureaucrats were overruled by the colonial head office in London, which sought to cut costs and avoid any undue, expensive interventions in saving the moribund Palestinian olive oil soap industry, which had regressed in its output to below First World War-era levels. The inability of soap factories to absorb surplus olive oil meant that Palestinian olive oil production needed to reorient toward producing edible olive oil fit for human consumption rather than for industrial purposes, setting the stage for British interest in olive oil press hygiene during the high watermark of its economic interventions in Palestinian society during World War II.
World War II marked the peak of British colonial governmentality, particularly though the creation of the Middle East Supply Centre (MESC) in order to provision the British military in adjacent theatres of war. Control of shipping space through the MESC and control of food supplies through rationing marked the closest to a command economy that the Mandate of Palestine would see. And yet, olives and olive-derived commodities would remain some of the few but important exceptions to these rules as uncontrolled goods. In the wake of the utter failure of overall British policy toward agriculture and forestry, as demonstrated by the revolt of 1936-1939, the uncontrolled nature of olive commodities in wartime illustrates one of the significant gaps in colonial controls.

The practices surrounding the planting, processing and marketing of olives reveal the growing dependence of British rule on indigenous knowledge during the latter half of the Mandate, which only increased with the colonial bureaucracy’s attempts to increase the legibility of society and economy through surveys, censuses, registration, rationing, and other forms of

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2 On the organizational history of the Middle East Supply Centre, see Martin W. Wilmington, “The Middle East Supply Center: A Reappraisal.” Middle East Journal 6:2 (Spring 1952): 144-166.
invasive measurements. What were the limits of colonial governmentality in this period of the Mandate, and what were the implications for the state’s knowledge of the olive sector? How did Palestinian peasant olive cultivators and Palestinian olive oil producers and marketers seek to protect their interests and shape British policy toward olive culture? How effective was colonial policy and economic management as a result, and where can we identify the gaps that enabled Palestinian actors to shape the history of the late Mandate era, a period that has previously been regarded within nationalist historiography as one of almost-shameful quiescence? To expose the gaps, it helps to focus first on where the state claimed successes in its economic management. What could the state control in general when it came to agriculture and economics? First, trade controls, by modifying the balance of imports and exports, and through the control of shipping space as exemplified by the MESC. A second area where the late-

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4 See for example Aida Ali Najjar, “The Arabic Press and Nationalism in Palestine, 1920-1948” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Syracuse University, 1975); published in Arabic as *Sahafat Filastin wa al-Harakah al-Wataniyyah fi Nisf Qarn 1900-1948* (Amman: Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, 2005). Najjar, a former Jordanian diplomat who had been born in Jerusalem in 1938 (245), argued that the late 1930s was the most important period in the history of Palestinian journalism, both in documenting the great Palestinian revolt and “propagating, educating and agitating the masses against British-Zionist imperialism.” (192). She drew a stark contrast with the subsequent period from 1940 to 1948, as a “calm and defeated period in the Palestinian history,” marked by the deterioration of Arab nationalism in Palestine following the suppression of the 1936-1939 revolt (169). In Najjar’s narrative, the press reflected the broader political environment, with the few surviving newspapers falling victim “to the government’s mercy, with respect not only to content, but to paper as well, when an acute shortage demanded the allocation of newsprint,” and the newspapers “obeyed the strict wartime regulations,” reflecting in their content the dominance of the British authorities rather than the nationalist aspirations of the Palestinian people (193). In her narrative, suppression from the authorities led to a period of quietism until the declaration of the state of Israel in 1948, reflecting a failure of political leadership, with the Arab Higher Committee being forced into exile during the revolt and a lack of overt Palestinian resistance that contrasts with growing Jewish resistance to the British in the 1940s.

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Mandate Government attempted to intervene extensively was through control of food supplies and prices through rationing, which necessitated accurate counts and measurements of people and food, and instantly ran into myriad problems on the ground. The experiences of attempting to institute wartime rationing in particular are quite telling of the limits of economic control and the lack of legibility of colonial subjects. Furthermore, while most foods and agricultural commodities were subject to price controls and official monopolies, olive-based commodities were notable exceptions, subject only to trade controls, which were of questionable efficacy as a means of intervening in the local economy and often a double-edged sword for the producers affected.

Olive industry committees involving local factory owners sought increasing state support, as a kind of tradeoff for the limits imposed on their export trade in this period. The advocacy of these elite “men of capital” resulted in a series of olive oil press censuses and the first relatively comprehensive olive oil press inspection and regulation regime. Although olive oil presses were periodically supervised for the very first time, leading to important censuses on an annual basis, even these instances of state surveillance of the sector were dependent on press owners keeping reliable logs of their work. In addition, the experience of the Nabulsi soap industry, which again became a locus of possible state intervention in the late 1930s and 1940s, wound up unveiling concerns over the uncontrolled smuggling of Nabulsi olive oil soap. Altogether, the story of olive-derived commodities in this period shows that one of the few viable policy tools, export bans, was ineffective and possibly unenforceable.

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Although many urbanites would later recall the war as “meatless days,” Palestine in general flourished during the war. But this period of relative prosperity was not because of official policy. It was primarily a result of the relative quiet in Palestine, as World War II raged elsewhere. Apart from isolated acts of terrorism by extremists, the mostly peaceful military presence brought construction work for temporary bases and increased wages and higher prices thanks to greater consumer demand by the military personnel stationed there as well as the variety of provisioning services they required as a result. Globally, prices for most commodities rose as the world, and Palestine too, recovered from the ravages of the Great Depression and divided into warring spheres. Farmers and rural areas in general within Palestine profited greatly, while the urban poor as in the First World War were hard hit by rising consumer food prices triggered by scarcity and growing demand. But even for the relative winners of the period, trade restrictions, tariffs, and tax structure limited many of these gains and would remain in place to further limit opportunities for even greater profits after the war. So even though many Palestinians did well during the war, they could have potentially done even better, limited by official policies that placed restrictions on the movements of goods and commodities, principally to increase domestic supplies and reduce the burden of rising prices on particular segments of Palestinian society like the increasingly urbanized poor.

The war accelerated social and demographic changes such as growing urbanization, which in turn reinforced the importance of family networks. Some farming families turned to lucrative wage labor on a temporary basis to augment agricultural income or to fund farming as inputs costs rose. So while a number of farmers turned to wage labor, much was reinvested into
agriculture, since such wartime employment was often ad hoc or seasonal. As in previous periods of scarcity thanks to international or local crises that interrupted provisioning networks and commercial trade (such as World War I or the revolt of 1936-1939), the spike in food prices that benefited rural farmers drew criticism from colonial officials who regarded such groups as backwards and irrational, opposed to the modernity of their paternalistic and developmentalist policies. This newfound rural wealth, critics like a supervisor of an important wartime nutritional survey named W.J. Vickers argued at the time, came at the expense of other communities that he and other colonial officials considered to be more “modern.” In particular, Vickers was most concerned about alleviating conditions for impoverished Jewish immigrants from Europe, newly arrived to coastal areas. There was a moral judgment involved in his assessment as well, such that these Arab farmers were purported to act in frivolous nouveau riche ways, ostensibly not knowing what to do with their newfound income. Yet my research indicates that this wealth was used in largely traditional, rational ways, such as paying off debts, being reinvested in agriculture, or saved in the form of gold jewelry.

This chapter is organized thematically. The first section addresses the revolt, which marked the withdrawal of British civilian rule from rural areas, while the war period is the primary focus of the rest of the chapter, as it marked the reinstatement and broadest extension of state control over these areas. The second and third sections deal with what the state could control most in wartime: shipping, through the Middle East Supply Centre, and rationing, which

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starts to illustrate the cracks in colonial hegemony. The fourth and fifth sections shift the locus to olive oil industries: first the presses, and then the Nabulsi olive oil soap industry and issues relating to export controls and smuggling. The sixth and final section offers a critical rereading and reassessment of wartime statistics related to olive planting and production that provide a vital corrective to British claims of success in the period of the late Mandate. Department heads in the relevant agricultural and forestry bureaucratic units repeatedly took credit for initiatives undertaken by Arab Palestinians themselves, with little to no substantial governmental assistance.

The life and work of Ali Nasuh al-Taheer illustrates some of the key paradoxes of the late Mandate period in terms of colonial governmentality. First and above all, as the colonial apparatus extended its surveillance and control throughout the territory, it became ever more dependent on local intermediaries. al-Taheer was a Palestinian, originally from Nablus, who worked in the Mandate bureaucracy in the 1930 and 1940s as an agricultural expert after studying agronomy in France in the 1920s. After 1948, he would become a minister in various midcentury Jordanian governments. Beginning in the late 1930s, he began compiling statistics and collecting detailed observations on olive culture in Palestine, resulting in a two-volume encyclopedia published in the mid 1940s — that, no doubt influenced by his agronomic studies in France, sought to contextualize local production within the broader global trends in agricultural extension and development. The work was based on both his firsthand expert analyses and on reviews of the village notebooks compiling statistics from rural Palestine. It would be published in 1947 in both Jaffa and Amman, revolving principally around issues of
olive production such as diseases, and based primarily on statistics gathered in the late 1930s and the early 1940s.\(^7\)

While the colonial government depended increasingly on the connections and knowledge of men like al-Taher, the second paradox of late Mandate rule was that local subalterns remained just that: subaltern. As this chapter will show, while his assessments could differ with his British superiors, the latter could override local experts like al-Taher in formal, official reports. In short, there was a ceiling for indigenous employees of the bureaucracy. Despite his clear expertise and formal training in Europe, al-Taher never held a senior position in a relevant colonial department. Under the Palestine Mandate, the central leaders and department heads remained British civil servants, many of whom were veterans of India, Cyprus, or other crown colonies, which meant that the colonial government never fulfilled its periodically professed intentions of devolving departmental-level control to indigenous cadres. al-Taher eventually reached cabinet level positions in Jordan in the 1950s and 1960s, as a longtime undersecretary for agriculture — but only after the Mandate had ended.

Why study subaltern groups, whether in its original definition of indigenous subordinates in a bureaucratic structure, or in terms of rural peasants who had limited contact with the government overall? In particular, the latter are often only recognized in moments of open revolt, such as the 1936-1939 period. But in *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, James C. Scott sought to draw attention to the quieter, quotidian forms of resistance:

[namely,] the prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents, and interest from them. Most forms of this struggle stop well short of outright collective defiance. Here I have in mind the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on.⁸

These actions, Scott argues, illustrate the ways that peasants can defend their interests against adverse changes, without resorting to direct confrontations with authorities. Such acts, no matter how seemingly insignificant on their own, have the power to multiply and impede or obliterate paternalistic policies.⁹

As in the previous chapter, I am seeking to recenter the narrative of the Palestinian Mandate on Palestinians themselves, rather than on elite British policymakers. While the state can respond in a range of ways to the actions of the populace it seeks to govern, the significance of everyday forms of resistance lies in the capacity of the peasantry to change state policy, or at least narrow the range of policy options available to the state.¹⁰ The state, however, can neither admit that its policies are unpopular, nor expose the limits of its powers in the countryside. As a result of both the anonymity of the peasant protagonists and the fact that written records are produced by the same state, these acts of everyday resistance are muted in the archive. Scott’s framework offers a powerful way to reinterpret the failure of British policies: not as a result of bureaucratic incompetence or incoherence, but as a product of the resistance of the peasantry. The extensive Mandate historiography tends to fall into a trap of debating intentionality and effectiveness of British policy. Instead, I wish to reinterpret the colonial archive from a subaltern

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⁹ Ibid., xvii.
¹⁰ Ibid., 36.
A perspective that emphasizes the agency of actors that have previously been marginalized, in line with the new social historians who emphasized the moral economy such as E.P. Thompson.\(^\text{11}\)

How do we identify failures and gaps in colonial surveillance and governmentality when the colonial archive’s documents seek to aggrandize their successes and obscure their failures? Rather than merely speculating on the silences of the colonial archive, we can not only better identify these silencings, but also use sources from subalterns as a basis to read against the grain of the archive.\(^\text{12}\) al-Taher’s book offers a rare written source. But what about from even more marginal, less literate actors? In the previous chapter, I emphasized the utility of looking at practice, as a concrete manifestation of indigenous knowledge.\(^\text{13}\) In this chapter I will look at three different forms of economic activity related to olives: planting of olives trees; processing of olives into olive oil at olive oil presses; and the threat of the uncontrolled movement of goods across borders, or smuggling.

If peasant activity is mainly represented in the archive by agricultural statistics, then these numbers require similar, if not greater, scrutiny than narrative records, owing to their facade of objectivity as hard facts. Historically, resort to quantitative data within academia is often a symptom of disciplinary crisis, reflecting an academic discipline’s susceptibility to external

\(^{11}\) On the policy studies trap in Mandate historiography and debates over agency stemming from the Subaltern Studies school and the new social historians, see the introduction to the previous chapter.

\(^{12}\) On silencings in colonial past, both in narratives and in the sources of the archives themselves, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the past: Power and the production of history* (Boston: Beacon, 1995). On reading colonial archives against the grain, see Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the archival grain: Epistemic anxieties colonial common sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

criticisms.\textsuperscript{14} The same can be equally true of governmental bureaucracies, whose impact is frequently questioned by the public. State bureaucracies use statistics to justify their existence in the face of budgetary constraints, to measure their effectiveness in the use of public funds. Statistics demonstrate technocratic expertise, and signal to other experts outside of the agency that the state has the capacity to surveil its subjects competently. Colonial statistics are a type of technocratic discourse that legitimizes the state. These numbers can reflect the government’s ideological priorities as much as they do the socioeconomic activity under surveillance.

By comparing his work to the statistics put forth by the Mandate Palestine government in the same period, particularly the reports of the Agriculture and Forestry Departments, al-Taher’s work also illustrates some of the flaws of colonial methodologies, particularly estimated agricultural censuses, as well as the potential for evasion of government surveillance. Even in World War II, at the height of wartime controls, press surveillance depended mainly on self-reporting. Olive press owners were supposed to keep logs, supplemented by occasional visits by a small number of roving, temporary inspectors. Between a half dozen and a dozen at various years in the 1940s, these individuals were responsible for inspecting between 400-600 olive presses in operation. They were thus able to visit each press only once per year. Later in the war, the relevant departments sought to expand their writs in order to try to visit each press twice a year: once before opening prior to the olive season, and then again during operation, to ensure that it had first been cleaned in the offseason and then second remained in hygienic operation. It

is unclear if this actually came to pass, owing to competing priorities and the ever-present issue of colonial government budgeting.

The case of olive tree planting contrasts with the sharp and rapid decline of Palestine’s citrus industry (emblematized by the Jaffa orange) in the same period. With shipping space at a premium and subject to military priorities, Palestine’s exports were reduced or effectively eliminated, which in turn threatened export revenues, undermining the logic of “colonialism on the cheap,” which mandated that the budget of the Mandate be paid ideally in full by the territory itself. At a time of autarky, Palestine could no longer depend on income from exports such as the Jaffa orange to cover the costs of colonial governance, since there was little to no available civilian shipping space for the orange to be sent to England to be turned into Jaffa cakes. Instead, the Mandate Government needed to find other sources of income from within, which in turn led to increased governmental attention to olive oil.

Within the Palestinian olive sector, the shift from olive oil soap to edible olive oil as the predominant olive-derived commodity had begun earlier in the Mandate period, particularly in the wake of the decline of the Nabulsi olive oil soap factories with the Great Depression. This shift was reinforced by the growing need for an outlet for the roughly biannual olive crop surplus to replace the declining olive oil soap industry, since Palestinian olive production continued to expand, as new olive groves that had been planted in the preceding decades came into bearing.

Palestinian olive production boomed, particularly in the final years of the war, the culmination of decades of planting. The government sought to take credit for the expansion in olive groves; however, the logic of the colonial budget never allowed the government to fund anything more than the most token efforts to plant olive trees and improve the efficiency of
harvesting and processing. Nearly all of these efforts were undertaken by rural Palestinian families themselves, as a way of reinvesting wartime profits into their agriculture.

In the end, Palestinian olive oil’s fortunes as a commodity were on the rise thanks to the exigencies of war and the agency of Palestinian planters, cultivators, and processors — particularly compared to the sharp decline of the Jaffa orange and the citrus industry more generally. These temporary gains did not fully translate to the benefit of the olive groves’ owners, however, as export controls prevented Palestinians from reaping the full potential profits of the dramatic increase in global olive oil prices during the war. These controls and other austerity measures remained largely in place until the end of the Mandate, compounding the postwar instability triggered by the political question of Palestine’s future, which clouded over the economy in the lull between world war and civil war. The ignominious end of the Mandate with the 1948 war would leave about three-quarters of Palestine’s olive groves in the West Bank under Jordanian rule, while a quarter of Mandate Palestine’s olives in the Galilee would fall under Israeli rule, which will be dealt with separately in the next two chapters.

1. The Revolt: 1936-1939

“The year 1936 was unhappy,” wrote the director of the Palestine Department of Agriculture in his annual report for 1936-1937.\(^\text{15}\) It was indeed unhappy for many, particularly the government; also for Jewish farmers, who worried for their crops; and for city dwellers in general as well, who saw their food prices skyrocket with the “disturbances” preventing farmers from transporting their goods to town. The revolt upset hierarchies: the “tyranny of the fellah,” in

the coinage of Jerusalemite Wasif al-Jawhariyah, targeted men on the basis of headwear, marking the end of the residual Ottoman urbanity of the tarbush, replaced thereafter in Palestinian nationalism by the keffiyeh.16 The revolt and the resulting repression thus likely injured many rural farmers as well. But it was not unhappy for the poor in rural areas, since the general strike resulted in food prices tumbling in rural areas, thanks to local availability.17 Most significantly for assessments of colonial rural policy: British civilian bureaucratic outreach to rural areas was suspended as a result of the revolt.18

16 Wasif al-Jawhariyah, The storyteller of Jerusalem: the life and times of Wasif Jawhariyyeh, 1904-1948, Salim Tamari and Issam Nassar eds.; Nada Elzee trans. [abridgement and translation of al-Quds al-'Uthmaniyyah fi al-mudhakkirat al-Jawhariyah] (Northampton: Olive Branch Press, 2014), 236. Jawhariyah specified the role of the Palestine Arab Party founded the same year by Jamal al-Husseini in the name of his relative the mufti (Hajj Amin al-Husayni), which denounced the inauthentic, non-Arab tarbush as a target to be replaced by “authentic Arab dress”: namely the keffiyeh (scarf headdress) and the agal (cord). The denouncement was enforced with assassinations and threats of violence; Jawhariyah in his memoirs asserted that by 1937, the tarbush had effectively been abolished, with many men going bareheaded instead, though it later returned in some quarters after the Nakba (including to the head of Jawhariyah himself). Others at least temporarily adopted the fellah-associated headdress or the “Iraqi Faisaliyah cap in honor of King Fasisal the First” during the revolt. On the broader changes to patterns of social organization and the interactions between urban and rural hierarchies prior to the Nakba, see Salim Tamari, Mountain against the sea: essays on Palestinian society and culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). On the revolt and its resonance within and impact on Palestinian nationalism and collective memory, see the works of Ted Swedenburg, op. cit.


18 Ibid. A long-term loan scheme involving the distribution of £P. 50,000 to the hill villages for improvements in olive pressing and olive oil storage was suspended; the Kadoorie Agricultural School was closed — and would remain closed for almost the next seven years — when six students “went on strike under the influence of outside political agitation.” In addition, the horticultural service largely withdrew from its experiments on olives, claiming in its 1937 report, rather unconvincingly, that this was because all of the experiments, involving manure and other fertilizers as well as spraying pesticides, had succeeded. See “Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Report of the Horticultural and Fruit Inspection Services,” 1936-1937. TNA CO 814/11-0004.
The olive crop of 1936 tumbled to almost a third of what it had been in 1935, but this had nothing to do with the political climate: sirocco winds beset the trees when the fruit was setting.\(^\text{19}\) The Department of Agriculture’s 1938 report provides a final glimpse of pre-war cultivation, with 1937 marking a record high for a number of crops, including olives.\(^\text{20}\) The timing of the publication of this report gives an idea of the difficulties posed by the revolt: the department of agriculture and fisheries did not publish its annual report for the year ending 31 March 1937 until May 1938. The report itself is extremely short compared with preceding years, which reflected the extent to which the department’s activities were curtailed. The colonial office concluded in reflection:

> The year was a depressing one, [a] bad season and political unrest combined to make the year one of very great difficulty. Crops were poor, there was much difficulty in the Citrus industry owing to fruit wastage, cultivation and marketing of crops were carried on under disabilities owing to the constant recurrence of civil disturbance, while departmental activities were hampered both by disturbed conditions and the consequent financial disabilities which prevented the inception of badly needed developments and extensions.\(^\text{21}\)

\(^{19}\) “Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Annual Report,” 1936-1937. TNA CO 814/11-0001. The sirocco is a Mediterranean wind from the Sahara.

\(^{20}\) Heavy rains in 1937-1938 led to flooding in the Acre plains; despite some damage to fruit trees in the area, the olive crop overall was the heaviest in years as a result. “Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for the year ended 31 March, 1938.” 1937-1938. TNA CO 814/12-0001, from which the following chart is drawn:

<table>
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<th>1934</th>
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<th>1936</th>
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<tr>
<td>Olives</td>
<td>6,647</td>
<td>45,092</td>
<td>15,755</td>
<td>47,247</td>
</tr>
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While these figures should be taken with a grain of salt, they at least provide a relative estimate of production for these years.

\(^{21}\) Minutes by colonial office officials in response to High Commissioner, cover letter to report covering year ending 31 March 1937, 28 May 1938, no. 408. TNA CO 733/362/4, “Department of Agriculture and Fisheries: annual report, 1938.” In addition, both Kadoorie agricultural schools had to be closed, with only the Mt. Tabor School for Jewish students reopened. The bureaucrats also add a notable complaint about standardization of transliteration: “It is remarkable that after all the years we have been in Palestine there is still no unanimity to
The subsequent year, the agricultural department could still report only on generalities, suggesting that the restoration of order in rural areas did not correspond to an immediate recovery of knowledge of agricultural and economic conditions in these areas.22

Regardless of the “unsettled conditions in the country,” the department noted that strong demand continued for olive planting,23 an indication that neither the political situation nor the volatility of prices caused by disruption of marketing mechanisms were enough to dissuade the continued extension of olive propagation by Arab Palestinians. The numbers of trees planted, however, are not quantified — again, a reflection of the government’s reduced administrative presence in the countryside.

Just as the revolt began in April 1936, the Forest Service was spun off from the Department of Agriculture, to conform to the bureaucratic structure of most other colonies.24 This had been spurred, in large part, by a visit of Agricultural Adviser to the Secretary of State for the Colonies Sir Frank Stockdale to Palestine in 1935, who, according to the new forest service, “was naturally alarmed at the denuded condition of the hills.”25 In a summary report chronicling its first years as an independent department, coincidentally coinciding with the years

the spelling of the commonest unit of land measurement. The dept of agriculture uses DUNAM; whereas the dept of lands & surveys (correctly I believe …) prefers DUNUM.”

22 [Draft contribution to mandate government annual report for the department of agriculture and fisheries, 1939], “Chapter XXV: agriculture, forests and fisheries,” 1939. TNA CO 733/399/29. On page 18 paragraph 66, the department head summarized conditions as follows: the “olive crop was good in the Jerusalem and Samaria districts and normal in the Galilee district. Picking started later than usual, resulting in a higher percentage of better quality oil.”


of the revolt from 1936-1939, the new Department of Forests explained the progress of its work, or rather, the lack thereof. Owing to “insecurity and lack of funds,” Conservator of Forests G.N. Sale explained in August 1939, no real development in the department’s work had occurred.\textsuperscript{26}

While agricultural, forestry, and horticultural bureaucrats were forced to withdraw from their work, the government’s administrative presence was replaced with a coercive presence, in the form of military intervention and the authorization of corvée (forced labor) as a measure against “refractory” villages that could not be coerced into paying collective fines.\textsuperscript{27}

The one area where the relevant civilian departments did have influence was on the 1937 Peel Commission report, whose language repeats almost verbatim the departments’ critiques of the native inhabitants — as not only derelict in maintaining the state of the eroded hills, but also detrimental, due in particular to unchecked overgrazing. While the agricultural and forestry department’s officers did not actually meet the commission during its visit, the forestry department put into writing its plea for systematic action to stop soil erosion and prevent floods, like the one that occurred in 1936.\textsuperscript{28} Their attempts to convey the gravity of the situation in writing to the Peel commission were quite successful in spreading the department’s rhetoric, as the command paper ultimately duplicated this discourse, as the first chapter of this dissertation illustrated. This stood in marked contrast to the department’s lack of success in concrete

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{27} “Executive Council Minutes. Executive Council Decisions. Meetings 612-615: 2nd Quarter,” 1937. Minutes of the DCXVth Meeting of the Executive Council 26\textsuperscript{th} May, 1937. TNA CO 814/33-0001. At the same meeting where High Commissioner Wauchope authorized the imposition of forced labor, the executive council granted Barclays Bank a monopoly over crop loans in the villages.

\textsuperscript{28} “Department of Forests. Report, 1936-1939.” TNA CO 814/14-0004.
progress. Not only were funds severely reduced with the outbreak of the revolt in April 1936, but also control over the forests was essentially abandoned by the middle of 1938:

In 1936-37, protection was generally maintained, the number of forest offences brought to Court being actually more than in the previous year, though less than in 1934-5. Later, however, as the condition of the country grew worse, control in the rural areas was loosened, and Court cases fell from 1717 in 1936-37, to 970 in 1937-38, and 289 in 1938-39. The arms of the Forest Guards and Ghaffirs were called in by the Department, to avoid their possible seizure by lawless elements, and in some cases the guards were withdrawn from their stations. Various stations were destroyed by armed bands, and serious damage to the Growing Stock was done in the neighbouring plantations and elsewhere. Besides wanton damage to buildings and vegetation, there were widespread thefts of poles and fuel, and illicit grazing throughout the Closed Forest Reserves. Only in a very few areas, in specially [sic] favourably situations, was effective protection possible.  

Despite the department’s attempts to put a positive spin on it, the reality was that the forest service had essentially lost control of even its few “closed” forest reserves.

The forestry department’s attitude toward Arab afforestation — such as olive planting, which it did not count in the records of private re-afforestation in Palestine since 1918 — is well summed up by the following quote from the report: “The inhabitants of Palestine are ignorant of the use and value of vegetation, and have no forestry traditions. It is believed that the peasants and nomads in the South actually dislike trees, but the same cannot be said of the population as a whole.” The Peel commission replicated and spread this discourse. Even in the same report, however, the department could not help but note that the olive was “the most highly esteemed” of the hardy fruits trees by the native inhabitants. But, typically, the department instead decided

\[29\] Ibid.

\[30\] Ibid.
to instead support the extension of carob tree cultivation in the hills — yet another scheme that failed, owing, again, to lack of funds and insecurity.  

Another organizational and policy failure was the “Development Department,” which the high commissioner of Palestine in May 1939 proposed should be subsumed within the Department of Agriculture. The development department’s “checkered career” had led to a dwindling of staff to just one person, an irrigation officer, who was supported by four clerks and a temporary draughtsman. The department had been created in 1931 in response to a recommendation in the Sir John Hope-Simpson report, which had moved irrigation out of the purview of the department of agriculture. As an orphaned department, it suffered from lack of funding and high staff turnover. The three tasks of the department were to settle landless Arabs; organize and supervise governmental irrigation projects; and to conduct irrigation experiments and assess water resources for agricultural development. Without significant funding, there was little success in the first two tasks; then, with the revolt, the staff of the few minor projects that had been initiated were targeted for assassinations. Those that were not assassinated, such as the local Arab managers of projects in Beisan and Jenin, were respectively interned and barred by local authorities from the subdistrict, such that there was no on-the-ground direction of even these small-scale initiatives. By 1940, the Colonial Office in London considered it a sufficient

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31 Ibid.
33 Minute sheet, 21 June 1939, in response to document 1 [HCr 354, 24.5.39. TNA CO 733/405/4].
34 High Commissioner to MacDonald, no. 354, 24 May 1939. TNA CO 733/405/4.
success if the department of agriculture managed to do anything under the difficult circumstances of the late 1930s.\(^{35}\)

In fact, the director of the department of agriculture had retired in November 1938, and the high commissioner left the position vacant for over a year based on the economic and political situation in Palestine.\(^{36}\) It was only in the wake of the 1939 White Paper, which promised equal development of the land in the interest of both Arabs and Jews and specifically stressed the education and developments of the Arab fellah in his husbandry of the land, that the High Commissioner and the Colonial Office nominated a new head.\(^{37}\) In doing so, they specifically worked around one of the recommendations for the initial stage of the constitutional scheme in the white paper: that the department of agriculture should be one of the government departments headed by a Palestinian. This step of the “the introduction of Palestinian heads of Departments into the Government” would be “indefinitely postponed,” owing to the “outbreak of war” in Europe.\(^{38}\) While perhaps if the Arab Higher Committee were allowed to return from exile the question would need to be reopened, the colonial office made clear that the colonial civil services would remain as “British advisers.”\(^{39}\) Indigenous bureaucrats would remain subalterns through the inglorious end of the Mandate.

\(^{35}\) Departmental annual reports: Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, 1940. Minutes dated 16 April 1940 in response to document 1, HCr despatch no. 100, 7.3.40. TNA CO 733/418/16.

\(^{36}\) High commissioner to secretary of state for the colonies, 20 December 1939. TNA CO 733/425/5.

\(^{37}\) Ibid.


\(^{39}\) Ibid. Interestingly, this is precisely the model that would be adopted in Jordan after the end of the Palestine Mandate, wherein the British advisers attempted (not without difficulties) to
2. The war and control of shipping: 1939-1945

With the outbreak of war, the government had decided that “a more comprehensive control over the supply and prices of foodstuffs and other commodities became necessary,” and enacted the Food and Essential Commodities (Control) Ordinance, 1939 and the Food and Essential Commodities (Reserve) Ordinance, 1939.\(^\text{40}\) The Health Department assumed an ever-larger role in daily life, as the director of medical services was appointed “controller of supplies.” The department also sought to extend the application of the “Public Health (Rules as to Food) Ordinance,” with a special focus on edible fats and oils (particularly olive oil, butter, and semnah),\(^\text{41}\) as well as milk, while admitting that the department’s activities remained largely confined to urban areas.\(^\text{42}\)

At an executive council meeting in the spring of 1939, the chief secretary of the government proposed stockpiling sugar, flour, and fats, particularly butter, olive oil, and vegetable oils.\(^\text{43}\) The soon-to-be controller of supplies concurred, noting that “the provision of fats would present difficulty in time of war, as supplies were mostly imported from Europe.”\(^\text{44}\) While typically untrue for the bulk of the Arab inhabitants, the concern for ensuring the provision of fats reflected a growing concern for food supplies.

\(^\text{41}\) In sampling retail products, the department found that less than 5 percent (22 of 441 samples) of olive oil was adulterated, a marked reduction from previous years; however, 53 of 337 (15.7 percent) were found to be “below standard,” referring to the level of acidity.
\(^\text{42}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{44}\) Ibid.
Most significantly for rural Arabs, the 1939-1940 olive harvest, which supplied nearly all of their edible oil needs, was particularly poor after a succession of good years during the revolt.⁴⁵ Although the Department of Agriculture claimed that conditions had returned to normal, this was not quite true.⁴⁶ Detrimentally for the economy as a whole, shipments from the citrus industry fell in half.⁴⁷ While the government had typically favored export industries like citrus, the outbreak of war caused a near complete reversal in policy, instead encouraging autarky through the local production of foodstuffs.⁴⁸ By normal, then, the department seemed to be focusing more on its ability to return to predominantly Arab rural areas, noting that the improved “security conditions” meant “touring officers and inspectors of all services were again able to travel safely in Arab districts.”⁴⁹ By the following year, the horticultural station at Nablus would be reopened, and would even focus on distributing olive trees in an attempt to keep up with

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⁴⁵ “Department of Agriculture and Fisheries: Annual report for the year ended March 31, 1940,” 1939-1940. TNA CO 814/14-0001.
⁴⁶ Some punitive measures implemented during the revolt remained in place. For example, while the Kadoorie Agricultural School at Mount Tabor was reopened in October, 1939, the Kadoorie Agricultural School at Tulkarm remained occupied by the military (Ibid.)

The Arab Kadoorie School in Tulkarm would remain occupied through March 1941, eventually reopening the fall of that year. “Department of Agriculture. Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for the year ended March 31, 1941,” 1940-1941. TNA CO 814/16-0001.

Furthermore, 50 dunams of its farmland would remain occupied by the military authorities through at least 1944. “Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 1944,” 1943-1944. TNA CO 814/16-0035.

⁴⁷ “Department of Agriculture and Fisheries: Annual report for the year ended March 31, 1940,” 1939-1940. TNA CO 814/14-0001.
⁴⁸ Ibid.
⁴⁹ Ibid.
demand for planting,\textsuperscript{50} after years of failed attempts to encourage olive tree planting in villages that did not traditionally cultivate olives.

1940 also saw even “further intensification of the effort towards agricultural self-sufficiency.”\textsuperscript{51} What this meant in practice was government loans for tractors, expanded irrigation, and diversification of crops within settlements — showing an alignment with Zionist demands for the modernization and intensification of agriculture, through increased irrigation and mechanization of cooperative settlements along the coast.\textsuperscript{52} Little of these efforts applied to the inland olive industries. While blaming the “entry of Italy as a belligerent” for the worsening conditions of the citrus industry,\textsuperscript{53} the primary market for its products had always been the United Kingdom — meaning that besides the threat to shipping in the Mediterranean, the more likely cause for the further decline was the diversion of shipping and shipping facilities to suit military needs.

The 1940-1941 agricultural report noted that collapse of citrus exports already caused a significant reaction among cultivators, estimating that “about 18,000 dunums [sic] of the total planted area of approximately 300,000 dunums had either been uprooted or abandoned.”\textsuperscript{54} This provided a marked contrast with olive cultivation, as the 1940-41 olive crop was quite good, and

\textsuperscript{50} “Department of Agriculture. Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for the year ended March 31, 1941,” 1940-1941. TNA CO 814/16-0001.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
the department noted that demand for planting was outstripping the supply of olive grafts and stocks.  

In 1941, the Department of Customs noted Palestine’s comparative immunity to the effects of the war, the distress to trade-dependent industries like citrus notwithstanding, hardships were essentially limited to cost of living increases, rather than shortages experienced elsewhere in the world. The department noted with triumph the introduction of further governmental controls and interventions, specifically through the formation of the Middle East Supply Centre:  

With the increasing gravity of the international situation and the ever more stringent need for the conservation of shipping space, it became imperative for Palestine not only to achieve the maximum degree of self-sufficiency [sic], but, in common with the rest of the Empire, to make the maximum contribution towards the joint war effort. To this end, therefore, the appointment of a war Supply Board was made during the first quarter of the year, with the primary object of forming a link between the Middle East Command and Palestine’s industrialists. Under the direction of the Board the regimentation of local industry was begun, and by the end of the year the Board had become one of the central pivots on which the country’s economic life revolved. …  

Despite the rising prices and cost of living, the Department of Custom’s 1941 report put forth a slew of economic figures intended to highlight the benefits of war to Palestine’s industries. The customs department noted the “considerable benefit” of the “large numbers of troops in Palestine,” both directly in their service (hotel, café, retail, transport) and indirectly, through

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55 In line with the very broad and unreliable estimates of the period, the report estimated production of oil at a round 10,000 tons, with 4,000 tons of olives pickled, and 2,000 tons purchased for use by the local soap industry. Prices per ton for edible oil reached £P50-75, while unrefined industrial oil ranged between £P35-50. The Palestinian pound (£P) was pegged to the British pound sterling at an equal ratio.  
57 Ibid.
growing wage employment, either as conscripts or contractors.\textsuperscript{58} Egypt, in particular, quickly regained status as one of Palestine’s chief export markets, thanks to overland routes and the heavy military presence there.\textsuperscript{59}

As a result of both rising prices and the effective elimination of foreign competition, manufacturing outputs likely even exceeded the previous peak years of 1935 and 1937.\textsuperscript{60} Despite the largely triumphalist tone of the economic report — even spinning the uprooting of orange groves as the expansion of mixed farming to areas that were formerly exclusively under citrus — the department noted signs of an impending slowdown, owing to shortages of labor, particularly on agricultural settlements, as well as shortages of agricultural inputs like fodder, fertilizer, and seeds.\textsuperscript{61}

Additionally, despite the government’s trumpeting of its assistance to intensive agriculture (and by extension to increased food production), favorable weather conditions played a more significant role than loans, tractors, fertilizers, and pipes for the extension of irrigation — which the Department of Agriculture admitted were, in fact, in short supply during 1941-1942.\textsuperscript{62} The citrus industry continued to suffer from the loss of export markets, with at least another

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{58} Ibid. Deliveries in fulfillment of military requirements by the end of 1941 reached a value of some £P.8,000,000. While the value of total Class I exports (constituted of food, drink and tobacco) dropped in half — from over a million pounds the previous year to £P.513,561 — exports of edible olive oil returned to 1937 and 1939 levels at £P.91,000, as compared with £P.47,000 in 1940. In terms of total value, olive oil was beaten only by chocolate, produced as part of consignments to the military, which jumped from £P.9,000 in 1940 to £P.117,000.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Ibid. Trade barriers erected earlier in the Great Depression had disrupted these longstanding connections.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Ibid. The government calculated the total output of Jewish industry as £P.13-15 million, compared with £P.3-4 million for Arab industry, composed principally of soap and olive oil, followed by chocolate production and a range of smaller craft industries.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{62} “Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for the year ended March 1, 1942,” 1941-1942. TNA CO 814/16-0010. 194
\end{itemize}
6,000 dunams uprooted, and the conditions of other groves rapidly deteriorating.\(^{63}\) Furthermore, pay rates of grove laborers spiked almost 100 percent, in order to counteract the scarcity of labor, owing to the shift in employment to army works and factories supplying the military.\(^{64}\)

In the meantime, despite a poor 1941-1942 olive crop thanks to a severe *khamsin* during the tree’s blossoming period,\(^{65}\) demand for olive trees continued to escalate rapidly, far outstripping the supply in government nurseries, leading to continued and still unquantified planting of olive cuttings by private hands.\(^{66}\) These trends, of declining citrus cultivation and expanded olive planting, continued through the 1942-1943 season. The Department of Agriculture noted the boon to producers: “Citrus apart, the main feature of agriculture in Palestine was that ever higher prices were realised [sic] for all products.”\(^{67}\) The annual agricultural report cited a number of possible causes for the rising prices, including rising wages and rising costs of living, as well as a huge jump in profits for producers and cultivators.\(^{68}\) Certainly, growing incomes from increased wage labor in military-related fields could have

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\(^{63}\) Ibid.

\(^{64}\) Ibid.

\(^{65}\) Ibid. *Khamsin*, for the Arabic word for the number 50, is a type of hot, dry, dusty wind occurring in the region.

\(^{66}\) Ibid. As a result, the government estimated that only 2,000 tons of oil was produced, and the price of olive oil jumped to £P.120-180 per ton, with industrial oil ranging between £P.80-100 per ton.


\(^{68}\) Ibid. While orange planting fell to an estimated 240,000 dunams, the 1942 crop of olives was above normal. Again settling on a nice round number, the Department of Agriculture estimated that somewhere over 10,000 tons of olive oil was produced, with the price of edible oil ranging even higher to £P.180-200 per ton.
played a role. In addition, the artificial protections provided by massive reductions in trade, and of course the artificial command economy also contributed to a rise in prices.  

The Department of Health noted, however, that the prevalence of high and rising prices for produce and commodities encouraged fraud, necessitating more active sampling of high-value consumer goods like edible olive oil. Notably, for the first time, the Department of Agriculture increased its attention to both the harvest and the processing of olives: “Dates of picking and pressing were controlled under the Food Control Ordinance, and 13 additional temporary inspectors were employed by the Department of Health to supplement the regular staff in the inspection of presses during the season.” The department credited the increased attention of its horticultural inspectors to improving olive oil production, yielding, in their words, “a better edible oil” in many areas.

But how closely could a baker’s dozen of temporary inspectors actually supervise and control a national industry, with at least 400 or so presses scattered in villages across the country? The government’s claims to total wartime control and knowledge necessitate closer examination.

The war offered the government the opportunity to expand its interventions via potentially invasive regulations and price controls, aimed in particular at encouraging domestic self-sufficiency. In no small part, this shift to autarky reflected the changes to trade patterns caused by the MESC and military priorities when it came to shipping space, in addition to the

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69 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
earlier changes in regional trade causes by tariffs and other trade barriers erected during the Great Depression. But it also reflected the government’s limited policy tools for actually controlling local markets.

As the next section will show, though government ambitions to supervise and control the food chain were unprecedented, policy options in practice were essentially limited to trade controls and export bans when it came to olive foodstuffs. In order to keep prices low, goods such as olive oil would need to be kept in Palestine and consumed locally, rather than take advantage of extremely high global prices thanks to the conditions of the war. Wartime price controls took a variety of forms that will be explored in further depth here, after a brief review of the broader means of economic control and surveillance enacted by the government during the war.

3. A command economy? The limits of everyday regulation in food rationing

In her work on the wartime political economy, Sherene Seikaly argued: “The Palestine government instituted a command economy in stages, from the control of importers through licensing in 1939 to a monopoly on all imports and locally produced foodstuffs by 1942. It made intimate incursions into people’s daily lives by regulating what and when people could eat and drink through various phases of food rationing.”73 While the government did claim a monopoly over both domestically produced and imported food, the reality was messier. The development of food rationing, in particular, illustrates the limits of everyday control.

73 Seikaly, “Meatless Days,” 165; for the corresponding section in her book, see Seikaly, Men of Capital, 77-78, which focuses more on economic legibility and management in relation to colonial development.
As Seikaly rightly noted, the implementation of rationing unintentionally disclosed the government’s incapacity to count its subjects accurately. Owing to paper shortages, inadequate staffing and training, and the constraints of time, the controller of supplies decided that full-scale, national registration would be impossible, as an official census would take at least a year. While Jewish organizations had created their own records that could be transferred to the government, the government had no such comprehensive registry to draw upon for Arab residents. On 18 November 1941, the government therefore decided to attempt to register Arab Palestinians “by family.” The Food Control department sought help from a wide range of local civic actors and low-level leaders or intermediaries, ranging from mayors, municipalities, trade organizations, and retailers in urban areas, to shaykhs (elders) and mukhtars (village or neighborhood headmen) in the villages and rural areas. Only in Haifa did the government decide that the threat of air raids, and the attendant possibility of the separation of families, warranted individual registration. In every other town and village, the government registered families. Particularly in rural areas, this meant placing an incredible amount of trust and power in the hands of the mukhtars. Each mukhtar was tasked with collecting the names of the heads of

74 The shortage of paper also encouraged an uncharacteristic terseness in much of the bureaucracy’s reporting. The first report of the Department of Agriculture after the war revealed that paper shortages had curtailed its earlier reporting. “Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for the Year-ended March 31, 1946,” 1945-1946. TNA CO 814/17-0011.
75 Seikaly, “Meatless Days,” 197-198.
76 Ibid., 198.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 198-199.
households and its supported members. Ration cards were subsequently distributed on the basis of this information.\textsuperscript{79}

While the \textit{mukhtar} had been officially integrated into the Palestinian governmental bureaucracy in the 1930s by making him a salaried government employee, the government had simultaneously stripped the \textit{mukhtars} of responsibility for the sensitive duty of tax collection by introducing outside, independent, technical experts.\textsuperscript{80} Having a local resident in charge of such a process created a very clear conflict of interest. The same holds true of this ration registration process. Without up-to-date, accurate information, the government would not have known if the registrations were fraudulent or simply inaccurate. Underreporting, out of a longstanding reluctance of peasants to draw the attention of government officials, would be a distinct possibility.\textsuperscript{81} So would overreporting, by more trusting individuals hoping to receive extra rations. The government had no way of knowing.

\textbf{The taste of war in Palestine: economizing nutrition}

Beginning in 1942, the government commenced a nutrition survey, which expanded into a wide-ranging study of nutritional and economic conditions in wartime Palestine, primarily

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 199.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Illiterate peasants had long registered property, for example, in the names of others, especially prominent local landowners — the less scrupulous of whom would use coercion, and claim the land at a later date. Even those peasants who had more beneficent landowners would later find this small act of evasion could block their claims to the land, especially through the Mandate and after 1948. For more see on the issues of peasants and land registration, see Beshara Doumani, \textit{Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700-1900} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
\end{itemize}
comparing 1942 and 1943.\textsuperscript{82} Similar to the rations registration, the survey took the family as its unit of investigation, claiming to encompass 1,400 families — Arab, Jewish, urban, and rural — including “clinical and the somatometric standpoints … data on local nutritional conditions … [and] complete food analysis.”\textsuperscript{83} W.J. Vickers, deputy director of medical services, directed the study, the results of which were published as \textit{A Nutritional Economic Survey of Wartime Palestine 1942-1943}.\textsuperscript{84} In actuality, however, the report focused mainly on the large urban areas of Jerusalem, Haifa, and Jaffa/Tel Aviv, where wartime suffering was supposed to be harshest, and to a lesser extent on smaller towns such as Acre, Bisan, Gaza, Hebron, Nablus, Safad, and Tiberias.\textsuperscript{85} The survey teams visited kibbutzim (communal settlements) in the Bisan, Haifa, and Tel Aviv areas, and Arab villages near Haifa, Jerusalem, Jaffa, Gaza, Hebron, and Safad; however, this would have excluded the olive-producing villages of the hill country (much of which would become the West Bank after 1948) almost entirely. Part of the reason why may have related to the intrusive nature of the home visits:

a nurse would visit the family twice or three times a day every week. She noted all the food in the house, weighed the ingredients of each meal, and recorded food preparation and waste. The nurse also gathered information on the price of each food item, occupation and wages earned, and the families’ taxes, loans, and debts. The investigative team conducted surprise visits from time to time.\textsuperscript{86}

Although such government interventions into the home were largely absent from Arab villages, especially away from the coast, Vickers did not hesitate to conclude that “the rural Arab” had

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Seikaly, \textit{Men of Capital}, 92-99; Seikaly, “Meatless Days,” 215.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 216.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
benefitted immensely from wartime conditions, both directly through wartime employment by the military, and indirectly through military demand for local agricultural produce.\(^87\)

Despite surveying a very limited range of Arab rural localities, Vickers essentially blamed the Arab farmer for the more difficult conditions in urban areas suffering from shortages of food and housing — repurposing, in the process, a common narrative from the era of the revolt of 1936-1939. Vickers wrote that the fellah’s produce “has fetched undreamed of prices, so that land owners and labourers alike are passing through a period of unbelievable prosperity.”\(^88\) Vickers painted an exaggerated portrait of a pitiful, prewar, subsistence, barter-based village economy, now completely awash in money:

> In normal pre-war days the agriculturist depended entirely here, as elsewhere, on his crops, storing much of the surplus for the lean season; bartering what he had for what his neighbour could give him; and possibly selling something for his simple luxuries, the extra coat, the bangle, the cigarette. He lived, in fact, on his land, and the unfortunate without this asset worked for his neighbour, getting paid in food. … The rural boom … developed into a complete money racket by 1943. … Now almost every village has more money that it knows what to do with. [emphasis added]\(^89\)

Of course, putting aside the aggressively condescending tone toward the Palestinian peasant, such an abrupt change had not occurred all at once in 1943, the year of his study. A very similar discourse had been directed toward the rural peasantry during the revolt of 1936-1939, when “the rural people” lived in abundance, free to indulge in “nutritional and economic excess,” in the words of Vickers’s report, while the “urban dwellers continue to suffer from a shortage of

\(^{87}\) Ibid., 219.
\(^{89}\) Ibid., 71, cited in Seikaly, 219.
supply. This, again, is largely a projection, since Vickers’s teams had hardly visited “the rural Arab” that Vickers claimed in his report to know so well.

While the government of Palestine had begun constructing a complicated regime of controls over trade, officials and bureaucrats like Vickers routinely exaggerated the extent and the impact of their control over consumption and price control, particularly in rural areas. The rationing scheme depended fundamentally on the accounting of local intermediaries, who had recently been found unreliable enough to be removed from their role in tax collecting. Both the interests of the mukhtars as well as the individuals and families of their wider communities could potentially have been better served by misrepresenting their numbers, which the government could do nothing to check. Similarly, while the Nutritional Economic Survey claimed to cover all of wartime Palestine, Vickers’s survey teams focused predominantly on the coastal, urban areas. The Food Control Department used the Arab Palestinian fellah as a foil, in order to shift the blame for food and housing shortages (affecting recent Jewish immigrants in particular) to “the rural Arab,” without admitting a lack of accurate information on hill village conditions, instead painting a politically motivated portrait of rural nouveau riche extravagance by extending discourses dating back to the 1936 revolt. Finally, and most importantly, despite the seemingly totalizing power of the food control regime over quantities and prices, certain basic and essential commodities — olive oil and olive oil soap in particular — were actually left unregulated, and therefore largely uncounted and uncontrolled by the government.

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90 Ibid., 80, cited in Seikaly, “Meatless Days,” 220.
91 For example, please see the conclusion to Chapter 3 in Seikaly, 224-225.
4. Olive control in World War II: from trees to the press

Control of the olive sector had some precedents in the early years of the Second World War, particularly in terms of controlling pruning by the issuing of licenses, a practice that had been considered in the early 1920s but abandoned for issues of practicality — namely, the government’s inability to enforce these restrictions. In January 1938, the district officer for Ramallah expressed concern about the damage done to olive trees from pruning — arguing that a distinction needed to be drawn more clearly, in order to prevent cultivators from going beyond pruning and cutting their trees.\(^{92}\) However, in 1938 the government was focused mainly on restoring order and assuring the end of the revolt, less so the finer points of rural stewardship. In the fall of 1939, officials declaimed the need to limit the licensing of the cutting of olive trees, and restore governmental insistence on inspection. With firewood prices rising, the officials felt the short-term temptation to cut down valuable trees must be stopped, though they still had no real capacity to do so, beyond limiting licenses for cutting or pruning trees.\(^{93}\)

The next year, in the winter of 1940, the conservator of forests again expressed concern about the pruning of olive trees, to the extent that he asked all district commissioners to instruct their officers not to issue any licenses at all for cutting down or pruning olive trees.\(^{94}\) While acknowledging the potential value of regular pruning, the conservator of forests cited “the difficulty of control,” essentially admitting the inability to police the distinction between pruning


and cutting down trees: “It is found that on receipt of a licence to prune, the owner of the tree usually cuts most or all of the branches, or even fells the tree, thereafter selling the wood as olive prunings.” The conservator of forests judged this a type of “premature felling,” though it should be noted that the cutting of healthy branches could have been to support the propagation of new olive trees, as new olive trees can reproduce from cuttings. Later that winter, in February 1941, the conservator of forests again stressed that to prevent pruning in the winter, officers should refrain from issuing licenses to fell or prune, as well as refrain from granting licenses for transporting or selling any type of olive wood. In the summer of 1941, in reconsidering the question of the pruning of olive trees (known as “G licenses”), the conservator of forests explicitly admitted that the shortage of staff meant that the government could not control pruning. Officers were instructed “not to interfere with pruning operations unless large fresh branches (of more than 10 cms. in diameter) are removed, but to prosecute all unauthorised fellings of fresh trees.” The ban on permits to transport or sell olive fuelwood, reiterated in the July 1941 message, seems to have been haphazardly enforced in practice as well. A circular the month prior in June 1941 by the conservator of forests had allowed a “‘temporary relaxation’ on

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95 Ibid.
96 Conservator of forests, 20 February 1941. ISA M-1765/9, Document 9. Due to the informality of the paper stock necessitated by wartime rationing, bureaucrats frequently omitted potentially redundant information like addressees or authors in the wartime period, typically reusing small scraps from forms or the reverse of previously used documents. The smaller size of the paper scraps alone could have driven the need for informality and concision.
97 Conservator of Forests, “concerning Pruning of olive trees (G licenses),” 12 July 1941. ISA M-1765/9, Document 11.
98 Ibid.
the removal of dried olivewood and damaged olive trees to the market,” after the army’s requirements for firewood had been first fulfilled.\footnote{99} With control of the trees themselves impractical, the authorities turned to a logical bottleneck in the olive sector: the olive oil press. Long considered a central location in the attempts to improve the quality of edible olive oil, the olive oil press offered a bottleneck in the commodity chain, where modernization and improved hygiene could most likely result in reduced acidity. The resultant product, in the form of edible olive oil with low acidity to European standards, would theoretically be more valuable as an export in order to obtain hard currency for the government. The contradiction between this policy of improving domestic production with the restrictions on exports went unnoted, as policy coherence was never a defining trait of Mandate governance.

A number of committees were formed during the war to focus on the olive sector, first of which being the Olive Subcommittee within the Committee on Agricultural Economics and Marketing.\footnote{100} In terms of legislation and regulation, the most important wartime measures came under the Defence Regulations, especially the Defence (Information regarding Olive Oil Presses) Order, 1941 (dated 30 October), stipulating that “all olive oil press owners must now record
particulars of the presses and of their oil production.”\textsuperscript{101} This step came about during the preparation for publication of the first census of olive oil production for the 1940/1941 season,\textsuperscript{102} reflecting methodological concerns about the inaccuracy of the statistics, particularly over insufficient data collection. The olive subcommittee above had acknowledged that its inquiries were “apt to breed mistrust” among the villagers;\textsuperscript{103} that would go doubly so for detailed recordkeeping of olive oil production. Press owners were required to keep logs that would be periodically inspected by roving temporary officers, of which there were just a handful.

Nevertheless, the 1940/1941 census of olive oil production was the most detailed assessment of the olive oil sector up to that date, giving the best sense so far of the geographic distribution of olive production across all of Palestine. The total quantity of olive oil produced in the country in the 1940/41 season from all 605 presses enumerated was documented as 10,535 tons, of which the Nablus sub-district accounted for the largest percentage (22.7 percent with 2,387 tons).\textsuperscript{104} Together, the five sub-districts of Nablus, Ramallah, Acre, Tulkarm and Jenin accounted for more than 80 percent, with all five producing at least 1,000 tons. These sub-districts correspond to the western Galilee and the northern and central West Bank (see Figure 8, next page).

\textsuperscript{101} “Production and export of edible olive oil: summary of steps taken to improve quality.” ISA M-4323/42, Document 41.

\textsuperscript{102} Government of Palestine Office of Statistics, Special bulletin no. 6, census of olive oil production 1940/41 season. ISA M-4323/42, Document 88. The map of the presses enumerated (see next page for Figure 8) further breaks down the types of press by power for crushers and presses, and their location by subdistrict and village.

\textsuperscript{103} ISA M-4323/42, Document 19.

\textsuperscript{104} Government of Palestine Office of Statistics, Special bulletin no. 6, census of olive oil production 1940/41 season. ISA M-4323/42, Document 88.
Figure 8. Location of olive oil pressing establishments, 1940/1941 season
After the olive subcommittee of the general agricultural committee concluded its work in 1941, a new olive industry committee for the General Agricultural Council worked intensely throughout the first half of 1942, generating a detailed assessment of the industry at the time and ultimately producing olive oil press control legislation.\(^\text{105}\) The representatives of both committees were keen to draw on parallels to the organization and reform of the citrus industry; however, it became immediately clear that the two industries were not at all parallel. The citrus industry was clustered geographically mainly around Jaffa, in the hands of large landholders. Olive cultivation and processing was a highly localized, family affair, with over 600 presses scattered throughout the country. Olive-planted plots were frequently subdivided to the point that a tree or handful of trees could be owned by individuals, split up within families whose unpaid labor (particularly of women and children) was key to picking and processing the crop. Orange groves were large, commercialized plantations cultivated by seasonal, male wage laborers. Processing was highly regulated and centralized in packing plants, where oranges were graded to accepted standards and then shipped overseas. The vast majority of olive oil was kept by the families who cultivated the trees, with a share going to the press owner as in-kind payment for processing. Refined olive oil was exported abroad only in very small quantities by coastal factories, which often blended virgin olive oil bought from Arab Palestinian families for taste with other cheaper oils.\(^\text{106}\)

\(^{105}\) ISA M-672/18, 7.0/1/1091, “Olive industry committee of General Agricultural Council 1-5/1942;” and ISA M-672/17, 7.0/1/1090, “Minutes of the olive oil committee meetings 11/1941-4/1942.” The minutes of the committee’s meetings were translated into Arabic for the benefit of a number of representatives, this atypically extensive bilingualism for British documents illustrating the importance of the Arabic-speaking members of the committee.

\(^{106}\) During World War II, Palestine had the opportunity to export olive oil to British dominions, neutral countries, and perhaps ideally for the British, to the United States, in order to generate desperately needed dollars to pay off mounting war debts. This was particularly true
The final report of the 1941 olive subcommittee set the stage for the work of the 1942 committee, by illustrating the complexity of the multistage process of cultivating olives and converting them into olive oil — in short, how nearly every stage of olive processing, from harvesting to storage, could increase acidity and result in a product considered inadequate for overseas markets. Chaired by Mr. Goldwater, a manager of Shemen, the subcommittee produced a nine-page report which detailed four major areas in which Palestinian olive production needed reform: protection of olives groves, investment of capital for improvements to storage and processing, improvement of marketability by producing superior goods, and centralization of marketing.\footnote{The subcommittee indicated that the efforts by the conservator of forests and the police to prevent trespassing of goats and “malicious damage to young trees” as a type of rural crime (typically as revenge for other disputes) had negligible impact, as these complaints remained commonplace in the 1940s. While the subcommittee argued legislation was needed, problems of enforcement would have remained a persistent issue thanks to insufficient funding.}

Even if strong laws or regulations had been passed with respect to olive groves, the parallel because of the Axis occupation of or alliance with the major olive-oil producing countries in the Mediterranean — Spain, Italy, France, Tunisia under Vichy, and Greece.

Little came of this opportunity, however, as the Palestine government largely pursued restrictive trade policies that generally prevented food commodity exports.

One exception was in 1940, when the Palestine Government encouraged Shemen and Izhar, the two large Jewish-owned factories in Haifa and Tel Aviv respectively, to export to Australia. A number of smaller Arab-owned coastal factories in Jaffa and Haifa expressed interest at the opportunity, but they did not produce refined olive oil (using chemicals or heat to reduce acidity, but which was later understood to be detrimental to many of the positive nutritional qualities of olive oil), which was in demand at the time. ISA M-61/15 2.3/3/130, “Exports of olive oil to Australia, 1940;” see in particular Document 1, 16 May 1940, and Document 7.

example of the government’s inability to enforce forestry laws and regulations more broadly suggests that legislation by itself would have been insufficient. Similarly, improved rural Arab peasant access to capital had been recommended in various forms for over a decade, since the Hope-Simpson and Johnson-Crosbie committee reports at the start of the Great Depression — again without any significant progress, due to lack of funding and more pressing political priorities. The question of the quality of Palestinian olive oil had emerged thanks to the declining fortunes of the Palestinian olive oil soap industry, which had needed only industrial grade olive oil to make soap. A turn to marketing edible olive oil necessitated a reduction in acidity to accommodate tastes abroad, as opposed to the tastes of Palestinian peasants, who at the time preferred a sharper, more flavorful profile. The question of “quality” necessitated interventions at nearly every stage of the commodity chain: first cultivation, then picking, then pressing, and lastly the grading and proper storage of oil.\footnote{108} The lack of hygiene in older animal-driven presses was cited as a key issue.\footnote{109} However, it should be noted that these presses were only used during the most bountiful harvests when newer press capacity was full. The older presses were less efficient, meaning that the tradeoff in efficiency was considered worthwhile only if the olives would become overripe waiting to be pressed (thereby increasing their acidity and decreasing their quality). In addition, villagers were often reluctant to go to more distant mechanical presses

\footnote{108}{Ibid., 6.}
\footnote{109}{Ibid., 7. “The Sub-Committee feel it their duty to draw the attention of the Authorities concerned to the extremely unsanitary conditions under which the oil — including that intended for human consumption — is produced in the village presses. Animals are allowed freely to enter the press premises and not infrequently the press and the corn-grinding mill are housed in the same premises.” This assessment neglected the fact that consolidating the processing of a winter crop and a summer crop in the same location would have been a logical adaptation to the fact that olive presses and mills only operate a few months out of the year, in opposite seasons.}
owing to the expense of and possible damage caused by the transportation methods and the rough roads of the time.\textsuperscript{110}

Most crucially, the marketing processes after the press were sui generis. The 1941 olive subcommittee noted the variety of marketing arrangements in place throughout the country. The Shemen Manager, Goldwater, found that in the Ramlah area, contractors acting on behalf of merchants bought the fruits on the trees, which would then be picked and pressed at their expense; in Jenin, the farmer took the fruit to the press himself and sold the oil to coastal merchants, either taking it to the cities themselves or waiting for the merchant or contractor to come to the village, as occurred in a village like Ramah that was (and remains) well known for its olive oil. In Ramallah, Goldwater found, the small fellah grower would sell his oil to a larger merchant-grower who would combine different sources in his stores.\textsuperscript{111} Goldwater found that these larger and richer growers in Ramallah, who were in part funded by remittances from Palestinian Americans as was documented in the first chapter prior to World War I, were the only ones able to fight price manipulation (by merchant buyers acting on behalf of refiners or soapmakers), by holding and storing supplies for years until a leaner year when prices would be attractive enough to sell.\textsuperscript{112} As noted previously, this practice dated back to before World War I, funded in no small part by Ramallah and Bireh émigrés, who reinvested in the industry of many of the hill villages north of Jerusalem. Smaller, indebted famers would of course not have this

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 9.
ability. Goldwater simultaneously blamed the fellah for this predicament while indicating that the fellahin theoretically professed openness to alternative arrangements.\(^{113}\)

The wide variety of marketing methods meant there was no true coherent olive industry at the time. An olive production and marketing board, set up by the government, could have centralized and organized the marketplace; however, as with the proposals to save the Nabulsi olive oil soap industry earlier in the mid 1930s (see previous chapter), such steps were far beyond the willingness and capacity of the government.

The 1942 committee members that followed up on the recommendations of the 1941 subcommittee had no small fellah grower representation; it was mainly composed of what Goldwater called the merchant-growers and owners of soap factories and vegetable oil refineries. While the representatives on the 1942 committee were thus largely on the press side of things, they extensively discussed inferior picking practices, before ultimately concluding that it would be impossible to enforce picking regulations (such as stipulating picking the berries off the trees, rather than beating the trees to knock the olives to the ground). In the 1940s, Mandate authorities began to set official picking seasons to prevent premature picking, a tradition that the Jordanian agricultural ministry would continue after 1948. But both the wartime committees concluded that

\(^{113}\) Ibid. “The small fellah-grower cannot hold out sufficiently long and has to sell in a buyers markets should the next crop prove plentiful. It is always one and the same bargaining partner with whom the fellah deals. The fellah is inflexible; he does not bargain with various potential customers and has no access to the export markets. [Para] 35. The fellah and also the effendi-growers are acutely aware of the disadvantages of the existing system of production and marketing. They faintly realise the advantage which could be gained by collective bargaining of village and central cooperative societies. At the same time, they declared themselves unable to take the initiative in this direction and seemed to welcome the setting-up by Government of an Olive Production and Marketing Board generally to regulate and extend the industry and markets, and it is suggested that this legislation should be enacted giving the Board power to introduce and develop the recommendations above made [underline in original].”
press regulations would be the most effective way to intervene in the industry, as the bottleneck— the most centralized locale of a highly decentralized industry. Thus while bemoaning backward peasant picking practices, the 1942 olive oil committee— again, representing mainly the interests of Arab soapmakers and Jewish vegetable oil processors in roughly equal measure—logically directed the attention of the state to the press, the product of which they would obtain as their raw materials. Thus, perhaps partly out of the self-interest of the committee members themselves and certainly out of practicality, the press as the processing bottleneck became the locus of state intervention.

The 1942 committee sought and received examples of olive control legislation from Turkey, Portugal, and Spain. The Shemen company also collected example legislation from Tunisia, Algeria, South America, and Italy in addition. Of all the countries sampled, the Tunisian government’s intervention was the most extensive, involving technical assistance by the government, the establishment of laboratories for quality testing, experimental oil processing installations, sponsorship of cooperatives and associations, legislation against parasites, sponsorship of competitions and exhibitions, and the creation of two government entities: Office de l’huile d’olive in Sfax and Bureau Tunisien de Standardisation to classify and grade olive oil. By comparison to this broad range of efforts undertaken by the Tunisian government, the British Mandate Government of Palestine efforts appeared paltry.

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114 Chief secretary [Nayton] to High Commissioner, 17 November 1941. ISA M-672/18, 7.0/1/1091, “Olive industry committee of General Agricultural Council 1-5/1942,” Document 2. The high commissioner then individually sent telegrams to the respective British ambassadors to Spain, Portugal, and Turkey (documents 8-10).

115 ISA M-672/18, Document 39, Shemen collection of sample legislation, and document 39a, office de l’huile d’olive feuille d’informations oléicoles (Sfax).
The head of the department of agriculture, F.R. Mason, blamed traditional peasant culture, drawing an implicit contrast with the progressive modern orange cultivators: “The growers concerned are largely of the conservative peasant type and it is always difficult to induce such farmers to introduce changes in their methods of picking, transport and storage of the fruit or to ensure that the presses in the villages are efficiently operated under clean conditions.” From 1939 to 1941, the agriculture department under Mason prepared radio broadcast talks, carried out a small number of demonstrations and lectures, and arranged an olive oil competition in 1940-1941. The department also asked for funding in order to give out loans to build more modern presses, but the allocation request was rejected.

Instead, exports were prohibited as of the summer of 1940. Mason noted that the first statistical survey by the government statistician of the 1940-41 crop made the “need for more accurate statistics of olive oil production… obvious,” which spurred the Defence Order of 30 October 1941 that “all olive oil press owners must now record particulars of their presses and of their oil production.” This would be the basis for future interventions as well throughout the course of the war, as well as in the early years of the Israeli state, which used the wartime regulations as a pretext to seize the olive oil of Palestinian producers in the Galilee village of Ramah. While it was possible that legislation regarding the prevention of premature picking of

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117 Ibid. A similar effort had been attempted in the 1930s, forestalled by the revolt.
118 Ibid.
119 See Jeffrey D. Reger, “Palestinian olive cultivation in the Galilee, 1948-1955,” Journal of Palestine Studies 184 (Vol. 46, No. 4), Summer 2017, 28-45, as well as the next chapter of this dissertation.
unripe fruit could have been put on the books, Mason emphasized instead the need for stricter licensing and control of presses through preexisting legal frameworks.

In March 1942, the olive industry committee turned to this latter question of press inspection directly. After a weak 1940-1941 crop, the chief secretary of the committee urged the high commissioner and the director of agriculture & fisheries to take advantage of the good 1941-1942 crops — and follow up on propaganda and demonstrations, which had been carried out almost two years earlier by horticultural officials — by ensuring that the inspectors had the legal power to visit and supervise presses in order to reduce waste and improve hygiene in olive oil extraction.\(^{120}\) Based on the distribution of presses as documented in the 1940/1941 olive press census, the committee suggested that agricultural inspectors should be able to inspect each press once before the opening of the olive season for two reasons. First, to ensure that it had been cleaned since the previous season; and second, that the presses had embraced more efficient methods, such as the ones the department had demonstrated years previously. Only then, the committee emphasized, should licenses for operation be granted, especially in order to reduce the overflow of waste from the presses that was dumped during the pressing season throughout village streets. Various district commissioners weighed in, such as the officer for Haifa, who suggested that inspection could be done relatively easily under existing legislation.\(^{121}\) The district commissioner’s office for the Galilee district in Nazareth agreed, noting that licensing fees in the past had been a mere formality, but that medical and agricultural officers could step in to assess


\(^{121}\) J.H.H. Pollock, District Commissioner Haifa to Chief Secretary of olive industry committee, 26 March 1942. ISA M-672/18, Document 50.
not only at the start of the season but throughout the pressing season.\textsuperscript{122} It is not clear if these measures were actually implemented to the extent laid out here.

In the 1940-41 season, just over 76 percent of the presses in Palestine were animal driven; however, altogether they contributed less than half of the total production, just 45 percent of the olive oil yield, due to their inefficiency.\textsuperscript{123} Each animal-driven press yielded roughly 10 tons in that season, while the motor-driven presses each averaged four times as much, at just more than 40 tons each. The most primitive presses were found in the far south in Gaza, which had no mechanized presses, and in the far north. 12 of 19 presses were fully motor-driven in the Jerusalem and Bethlehem areas, and a quarter of the presses in Jenin, Hebron, Ramleh, Nablus, and Tulkarm.\textsuperscript{124}

Therefore, despite no government assistance, most of the key olive producing areas had upgraded their presses and crushers at significant costs. It is understandable that the subdistricts with minimal olive production, being in the far north and south, would be reluctant to invest in heavy machinery that works best at higher economies of scale. For example, one of the key members of the olive committee, Père Paul, the father superior of the Trappist Monastery at

\textsuperscript{122} Acting District Commissioner, Galilee District (Nazareth) to chief secretary, 28 March 1942. ISA M-672/18, Document 53. In addition, the district office noted that only a dozen of the 142 presses in the Acre sub-district were mechanized. He suggested that to bring up the standard of hygiene in the horse-driven presses, press owners would need time to build stables, since traditionally the animals had been housed in the presses, noting: “This is generally because a separate stable is not available nearby and it is held that, if the horse is put outside in the open in the state of muck sweat which he is in after work at the press, he will die of a chill.” In the marginalia, one reader (likely the chief secretary) had written “very important” in agreement; while another, presumably the director of agriculture Mason who had also been addressed, wrote in riposte: “can be covered with a blanket.”

\textsuperscript{123} Census of olive oil production 1940/41 season (special bulletin no. 6), ISA M-672/17 7.0/1/1090 minutes of the olive oil committee meetings 11/1941-4/1942, page 2.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
Latroun, identified the large number of small presses as the “principal obstacle to the industrialization of olive oil production.” In contrast, he noted the example of France where the government encouraged modern, cooperative oil presses, which required a minimum of 100 tons of olives in order to operate effectively. The mechanized presses in Palestine had similar requirements, and if the average yield was 40 tons of olive oil, with an extraction rate of $\frac{1}{5}$, those presses were processing at least 200 tons of olive each.

With the supervisory legislation enacted, censuses in subsequent years found similar results in terms of the geographic concentration of production. The census of olive oil production in 1943/44, just as in the prior two seasons, found that over 80 percent of the olive oil crop came from the same five sub-districts: Nablus, Acre, Ramallah, Jenin, and Tulkarm. Nablus alone generally produced over 2,000 tons per year, with Acre just under that amount, Ramallah 1,600 tons, and both Jenin and Tulkarm sub-districts just over 1,000 tons annually. Contrary to the hopes of the committee and Père Paul in particular, who expected smaller presses to be put out of business by more efficient competition, the number of active presses actually increased to 634 in 1943/44. While the number of active presses could drop almost in half, such as it had to 350 presses two years prior, this was because less-efficient older presses were not needed when the crop was weak, as the newer presses could handle the entire crop in time. The most presses were found in Acre and Ramallah, with 143 presses in 44 villages in the former and 119 presses in 46 villages in the latter.

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125 Père Paul to chief secretary, 6 April 1942. ISA M-672/18, Document 55a original French with accompanying English translation (document 55).
126 Census of olive oil production 1943/44 season (special bulletin no. 11), 1. ISA M-672/17.
127 Ibid.
To sum up: while the wartime years of the early 1940s saw the most attention paid to the olive and olive oil sectors by the Mandate government to date, with the inclusion of a number of prominent Jewish and Arab Palestinian private businessmen on a variety of committees, their ambitions for wholesale reform of the olive oil industry remained impractical without substantial government investment. While demonstrating that there was extensive interest in comprehensive reform by a range of elites among large olive growers and factory owners, in the end the debates of the various wartime committees all made clear that wholesale reorganization and centralization were the only true solutions, as had been concluded in the previous chapter in the 1930s during the debates regarding the inexorable decline of the Nablus soap industry.

Ultimately, the capacity of the government to intervene expanded only in the same two areas in which local officials had already acted: first, setting the season for the picking of olives, done locally by district officers; and second, licensing for presses, contingent on local public health inspectors and roving agricultural inspectors. New legislation sought to give stronger legal support to these interventions, and licensing changed from a pro forma exercise to collect a small amount of revenue (half a Palestinian pound per press), into an opportunity for health inspectors to ensure basic hygiene and for the wartime food controller’s inspectors to ensure sanitary operations. The Jordanians would continue both traditions, with an emphasis in particular on delimiting the proper picking season, while the Israelis would escalate both practices and attempt to centralize the olive sector in the Galilee, leading to claims of persecution, as the next chapter will explore in depth.
The postwar legacy of olive control

The olive control ordinance created by these extensive discussions underwent some minor revisions by the legal department, then went into force for the 1942-1943 season, and was reauthorized on an annual basis for the remainder of the Mandate. An exception was made for years of small olive crops, when picking and pressing were uncontrolled, such as in 1946-1947. During the 1945-1946 season, for example, the agricultural department held a competition for olive oil presses, offering prizes for quality and efficiency in olive oil production, as a carrot to encourage optimalization; simultaneously, as a stick, the department documented extensive offenses and violations by flagrant, repeat offenders — leading to a list of presses that should never be allowed to reopen.

At the end of the war, some of the supervisory tasks were transferred from the food controller to the department of agriculture, however, unlike the Middle East Supple Centre,

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129 ISA M-726/17, 3.0/1/695, “Ordinances: olive control ordinance, 1942-1943.”
130 ISA M-664/3 7.0/1/1926 Control of olive industry including legislation 12/1942-7/1947; see especially from F.R. Mason director of agriculture and fisheries (document 180), and document 188, dated August 1946.
131 ISA M-6547/17, 10.0/12/184, “Trades & Industries – Olive oil presses 10/1945-10/1947,” Document 22, repeated complaints of ineffective punishments by horticultural instructor, Jerusalem, with various examples, dated January 1946; in addition see document 19, announcement of prize winners in competition and list of presses that should not be allowed to reopen, January 1946; document 18, violations as of December 1945.
which ended 1 November 1945, with some functions transferred to other departments,\textsuperscript{133} the food controller department — which had always depended on other departments for actual enforcement through other departments’ inspection staffs, especially the agricultural and medical departments — itself continued in operation long after the war, through March 1947.\textsuperscript{134} In the summer of 1947, the British authorities published in the official gazette an updated control order regulating both picking and pressing for the 1947-1948 order.\textsuperscript{135} Thus, regulation and control were maintained on paper through the end of the Mandate, though events on the ground made enforcement impractical.\textsuperscript{136} With the food control ordinance still ostensibly in effect in the fall of 1947, the authorities asked the police to help prevent premature picking.\textsuperscript{137}

Even in a diminished capacity, the food controller still presented obstacles to Palestinian exporters seeking to reestablish foreign markets after the war. For example, a small number of Arab producers were granted export licenses for olive oil in 1946 to the American market. Despite the licenses, the food controller embargoed the shipments, and then revoked the export

\textsuperscript{133} Amb. Massigli London to Bidault MAE “a.s. Middle East Supply Centre,” 23 octobre 1945, no. 2725 PF/MC. CADN, Jérusalem Série C 294PO/C/11, Politique brittanique en Palestine, Dossier 10A.

\textsuperscript{134} Food Controller, 28 February 1947. ISA M-664/3, 7.0/1/926, “Control of olive industry including legislation 12/1942-7/1947,” document 191; formal revocation came in March (document 192).


\textsuperscript{136} The Israeli authorities would resurrect the office and maintain stringent food controls in the early years of the state, as will be seen in the next chapter.

licenses. Letters in protest of the embargo noted that the refined olive oil was produced specifically for American standards, and had no local market, “as the Arab population prefers olive oil with full rich flavour [sic],” yet the shipments had been embargoed in order to try to bring down domestic olive oil prices. The notice of the revocation of export licenses from the acting food controller invoked the shortage of olive oil and olive oil soap in Palestine to justify his interventions: “It is, therefore, now absolutely necessary to keep any available quantity within the country, because even comparatively small quantities help to prevent prices of these commodities from rising still further. This applies to all kinds of olive oil, as in view of the shortage the market will gladly take up any kind that is available.” Furthermore, the acting food controller dismissed concerns about taste: “While Arab consumers normally do not care for refined olive oil as they prefer a strongly flavoured oil with marked olive oil taste, in view of the present scarcity any type of oil should command a market in Palestine.” The incident illustrates the British Mandate Government’s continued reliance on export controls to attempt to influence the domestic market and prices through supply-based measures even after the war. As with the export embargoes put in place during the war, Arab Palestinians passionately protested, particularly when commodities formulated specifically for export — with no alternative domestic market — were embargoed. Similar problems had beset the Palestinian olive oil soap industries, as the next section will illustrate.

138 For a letter of protest regarding the embargo, see ISA M-95/26, 2.3/3/2066, “Import and export of olive oil, apricot oil, etc. 1946-1948,” Document 5. For the revocation of export licenses, see letter from acting food controller, November 1946. ISA M-95/26, Document 7. 139 ISA M-95/26, Document 5. 140 ISA M-95/26, Document 7. 141 From acting food controller. ISA M-95/26, Document 15.
In conclusion, not only had olive oil and olive oil soap exports been banned during the war, but similar export controls persisted afterwards, which was inexplicable to many Palestinians. The bans on exports to support domestic supplies applied even to ancillary items, such as the industrial waste created by olive presses. In the years immediately following the end of the war, at least one individual sought to take advantage of the inefficiencies created by governmental intervention. Bahjat el Issa built a factory in Acre circa 1947 to extract olive oil from “jift,” the cake-like residue of pressed olives that had traditionally been used as a high-density fuel source, in light of the food controller’s suspension of jift exports the previous two seasons, which the government intended to make permanent with special legislation in order to ensure local availability for community needs.\textsuperscript{142} The Palestine government even prevented the export of olive tree saplings. In 1947 as well, the Iraqi ministry of agriculture asked for 20 Souri and Nabali olive trees from Palestinian nurseries. But the director of agriculture and fisheries rejected the request, stating that all trees in departmental nurseries had been allocated, and somewhat incredibly added that no trees were available in privately-owned nurseries — perhaps speaking to the continued local enthusiasm for planting, but most likely an exaggeration or a reflection of the department’s imperfect information.\textsuperscript{143} In both cases, regarding olive jift and a token number of olive trees, the government’s interventions to ban exports were cast as serving local needs. In reality, a few olive trees and a few tons of olive oil byproducts would have made no real difference in the markets. Ultimately, such export bans for olive commodities —

\textsuperscript{142} ISA M-96/33, 2.3/3/2138, “Prohibition of “gift” (residue of olive crops from which oil is extracted), 1947,” Document 1, letter from Bahjet el Issa; see documents 4 and 12 for replies from food controller.

especially the primary products of the olive sector (olive oil and olive oil soap) — hurt local manufacturers oriented toward export production immensely, with few if any gains for local consumers. The use of an export ban as a policy instrument dated back to the Ottoman era, and reflected an inability to intervene effectively in domestic markets. In short, it was an early example of supply-side economics: increase the quantity of olive oil available in Palestine by restricting or eliminating exports, in order to lower domestic prices. The problem was that olive oil and olive oil soap for export were specifically formulated for external markets, and not flexible substitutes. It marked both a continuity with Ottoman governance and another example of “colonialism on the cheap.” Most importantly, the continuing reliance on trade controls revealed an overall inability of the colonial government, even at its peak, to influence local markets and control prices directly. The example of the tribulations of the Palestinian olive oil soap industry across the second half of the Mandate helps to confirm these conclusions.

5. Protecting and smuggling Nabulsi soap: 1936-1945

The general strike in 1936 had significantly hampered soap production, to the extent that Nabulsi soapmakers called 1936 “sanat nakbat al-Sabun,” or the “year of the Soap Catastrophe.”144 In reality, 1936 reinforced the decline that had already befallen the soap industry with the Great Depression and protective tariffs erected by Palestine’s historic trading partners and geographic neighbors, Egypt and Syria, in order to preserve their own rival soap industries. The artisanal producers in Nablus also simultaneously faced increasing competition from cheaper soaps produced by coastal factories using imported raw materials.

In terms of short-term pressures, however, the revolt in the countryside that targeted traditional elites in the rural hierarchy certainly disrupted the internal networks of domestic olive oil and soap manufacturing. As a result, 1936 was also jokingly known by the Nabulsis as “sanat al-sittat wa-al-Hajj ‘Azat,” or the “year of the madams and the Hajj ‘Azat.”\(^{145}\) ‘Azat decamped to al-Salt (now in Jordan), likely to avoid the threat of assassination during the revolt. He had heavily invested his wealth, as well as the money of the “sittat,” the distinguished older women of the al-Nabulsi family — headed by Mahfudhah, daughter of Hassan al-Nabulsi — in the soap trade. However, because of the 1936 revolt, the year resulted in grievous losses (“khasarah fadhahah”), such that Hajj ‘Azat was bankrupted. Sitt Mahfudhah, on the other hand, persisted in the soap trade throughout the downturn and became wealthy to such an extent that she promised her brother, al-Hajj Nimr, a significant sum of money to build in Nablus a mosque, known thereafter by her name and the name of her brother.\(^{146}\) After the Soap Nakba of 1936, soapmakers started to pay much more attention to the markets, as illustrated by increased advertising in the press.\(^{147}\)

In traditional export markets, namely Syria and Egypt, the soap industry continued to face two potentially existential threats addressed at length in the previous chapter: protective tariffs and continued consumer confusion over trademarked names, brands, logos, and the general reputation of Hassan al-Nabulsi pure olive oil soap. In the spring of 1938, the Nablus municipality wrote to the governor of Damascus and head of the Damascus municipality, passing

\(^{145}\) Ibid.

\(^{146}\) Citing interview with Muhammad Majd al-Nabulsi, descendant of the family, circa 1990, in Sharif, page 23.

\(^{147}\) See advertisements in Filastin and al-Karmel from the period; al-Sharif duplicates a number of such advertisements on page 70 of his work.
on the complaints of soap traders against a new consumption tariff on Nabulsi soap.\textsuperscript{148} The
Nablus municipality essentially threatened retribution with similar tariffs, noting that Syrian
goods imported to Palestine outweighed Palestinian exports, thus making clear that such a tariff
was against the interest of Syrian trade with Palestinian cities. The Nablus municipality asked for
the new tariff to be cancelled. The Damascus governor responded quickly, cutting the duty in
half per ton, from 400 Syrian qirsh to 200 qirsh.\textsuperscript{149} The meeting held to make this decision in
Damascus was composed of not just Damascus officials, but a “general council composed of the
heads of the major municipalities in Syria.”\textsuperscript{150} Ultimately, the letter concluded, this was done “to
preserve cordial [\textit{wadiyah}] relations between the two countries [\textit{qutrain}].”\textsuperscript{151} While Nablus’s
threat seemed to be effective, pulling together the heads of the major municipalities of Syria,
who agreed to reduce the new tariff in half, even the most minimal tax hurt the competitiveness
of Palestinian olive oil soap, which was already expensive for the poorer classes, especially
compared to newer, cheaper, lower-quality soaps.\textsuperscript{152} The new Syria municipal tariff threatened
what few external markets the Nabulsi soap continued to command in the wake of the import
tariffs imposed by neighboring states earlier in the 1930s. The Egyptian market, in particular,
hung in the balance over issues of tariffs and other restrictions on trade.

\textsuperscript{148} \textit{Da’irat baladiyat} Nablus [municipality] to governor of Damascus and head of
Damascus municipality [letter in Arabic], 6 March 1938, duplicated in al-Sharif, page 68.
\textsuperscript{149} \textit{Da’irat al-sh’un al-idariyah l-medinat damashaq almuntazah fi al-jamhuriyah al-
suriah} [Department of administrative affairs for the excellent city of Damascus in the republic of
Syria], 13 March 1938, duplicated in al-Sharif, page 69.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid. The reply to Nablus noted that 200 Syrian qirsh converted to 23 Palestinian
qirsh, meaning less than a quarter of a Palestinian qirsh would be due per kilogram of soap.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{152} al-Sharif, page 23.
While the Palestine Government’s olive oil soap committee of the mid 1930s (analyzed in the previous chapter) had produced no concrete domestic policy changes to help manufacturers, a renegotiated Palestinian-Egyptian trade agreement modified tariffs slightly, such that “pure olive oil soap” would enjoy a reduced Egyptian tariff, based on the 1935 agreement. Typical of restrictive British trade practices of the era, manufacturers had to be willing to participate and then be put on a white list of approved traders, which comprised 14 firms in early 1936 out of the 20 who had wanted to participate. Also typical of the period, officials had no idea what quantities of soap were being produced and thus had no estimates of how much soap might be consigned to Egypt under the more favorable tariff. The Assistant District Commissioner for Samaria based in Nablus guessed that the Nablus soap factories produced 5,000 tons of soap in 1930 and 21,000 tons of soap in 1934 — preposterous guesses, considering that its peak in the 1920s Nablus produced 2,000-3,000 tons of soap annually, and less than half of those numbers during World War I and for most of the second half of the


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Mandate. The soap was to be marked with the letter of the city of origin, which sufficed in the late 1930s to give the soap a more favorable tariff.

However, during the war, in the early 1940s, the Palestine government banned the export of olive oil soap almost entirely. The factory owners in Nablus sent numerous letters and telegrams protesting the order, imposed at the start of the 1941 olive season. The director of customs, excise, and trade gave the reason as reducing the price of domestic olive oil. The denial of an export license for George Debbas and Sons in Jaffa spurred a petition of protest, as their production was geared entirely for the laundry-soap export market in Egypt. Ahmad Hasan al-Shak‘ah of Nablus telegraphed a complaint on behalf of the industry as a whole, seeing further ruin compounding the damages to trade already done by protective tariff barriers erected by Palestine’s neighbors. In response to these complaints, Chief Secretary J. Jacobs noted that a third of the olive oil soap produced in Palestine was exported to Egypt, and the remaining two thirds were sold “locally” in Palestine, Syria and Trans-Jordan, concluding: “It is essential that adequate supplies shall be available for local needs.” Further complaints, regarding specialized

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155 Assistant District Commissioner Foot for Samaria, approximate figures of 1930s production. ISA M-4314/8 2.3/1/489, Document 170.
156 Chief Secretary, prohibition of export of soap, 30 October 1941, ISA M-55/41, 2.3/2/533, “Prices of Palestinian soap in Egypt during the war; applications for the export of soap 1939-1943,” Document 19.
158 Telegram from al-Shak‘ah of Nablus, ISA M-55/41, Document 23.
159 Letter from Secretary Jacobs, 21 November 1941. ISA M-55/41, Document 27. Labeling Syria and Transjordan, the former in particular being controlled by a different Mandatory power that sought to impose import tariffs, by Jacobs as local markets (akin to domestic trade within Palestine’s borders) is a telling slip. As the next subsection will show, smuggling meant these markets were effectively local. Jacobs appears to be drawing a distinction between export by sea, through ports that were more carefully controlled, versus poorly patrolled land borders.
products that had no local market, found no sympathy from Jacobs.¹⁶⁰ Radi and Hasan Nabulsi wrote that the export prohibition was a matter of life and death, of truly vital importance:

"[t]he prohibition of export could not be due to any crisis as stagnation is now observed in the markets as a result of the of the strict measures taken against hoarders. The markets are now overflown [sic] with large quantities of soap, to an extent that it is now by far exceeding the demands of the country. Authorization of the export of soap would not create a crisis but would ultimately lead to the revival of the fallah, the labourer and the merchant, who form the trinity of the economic life of the country.¹⁶¹

In response to this and petitions from unemployed laborers in Nablus, who sent telegrams attributing their unemployment to the ban on export of soap to Egypt, the government acquiesced to the export of nominal quantities of soap in order to protect the names and trademarks of Palestinian soap.¹⁶² The controller of supplies for Palestine and the deputy controller of supplies for Samaria then authorized the export of three tons of olive oil soap monthly by Eff. Nimer el-Nabulsi and of one ton per month for Mahmud Eff. Abdullatif Nabulsi.¹⁶³ Despite being the main beneficiary of this exception to government policy, Effendi Nimer el-Nabulsi wrote later in the spring that he was nevertheless compelled to dismiss his workers and shutter his factory.¹⁶⁴ Further petitions in 1943 by most of the Nablus manufactures were likewise dismissed, their

¹⁶⁰ ISA M-55/41, Document 31, further complaints regarding markets for particular brands and factories; document 34, negative response from Jacobs.
¹⁶² Telegram from Haj Sleiman al-Shami, Sadeq al-ʿAsi and ten other unemployed laborers from Nablus, 26 February 1942, ISA M-55/41, Document 55. See same file, documents 50 and 65, for examples of arguments regarding exports in order to protect reputations and trademarks.
requests to export rejected, despite the extremely small quantities of olive oil soap involved.  

This may have driven some of the soap manufacturers to export their goods illicitly, such as across the river to Transjordan or over the hills to Lebanon during the war.

The “evil” of the uncontrolled movement of goods: Nablus olive oil soap production, smuggling, and the limits of colonial control in wartime

The Food Control Department’s annual report covering the year 1943 noted, only in passing, that the prices of olive oil and olive oil soap were “not subject to price control,” which made olive-derived commodities something of an exception.  

The free marketing of olive oil and olive oil soap meant that supply and demand would theoretically set the price, without governmental support for either producers or consumers. Price volatility could frequently occur as a result of the olive tree’s typical biannual cycle of bearing and nonbearing, subject to weather patterns. In 1943, the result was that the prices of olive oil spiked beyond any previously imaginable highs — a boon for the producers and sellers, but a bane for buyers and consumers.  

The response of the government was to promulgate orders in 1943 specifically

165 Petition dated 25 August 1943, ISA M-55/41, Document 75; rejection by assistant district commissioner, document 76.
167 Ibid.

Table 6. Retail prices of olive commodities in 1943 (in mils per kilogramme)

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Olive oil (edible)</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olive oil soap</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: TNA CO 814/17-0010.

Note that prices varied even more widely locally. The report does not stipulate if this is an average of prices across different localities to produce a “national” average, or whether it is simply a compilation of prices from one locality, which would likely be the Jerusalem area owing to the government’s headquarters there.
against the smuggling of olive oil and olive-oil soap outside of Palestine.\textsuperscript{168} Thus, at the peak of its wartime controls, the Mandate government resorted to the same methods used by the Ottomans: use export-oriented trade controls to attempt to maintain a sufficient supply for domestic needs — to protect the consumer, in short.

The fact that the government needed to promulgate such an order to prevent the unauthorized “movement” of olive-derived commodities abroad likely indicated two things: first, that such smuggling was occurring; and second, that the government had been unable to stop it. Furthermore, such smuggling efforts were effectively the consequence of the near-complete prohibition on olive oil and olive oil soap exports that had been imposed since near the start of the war. There were a few special, limited cases, in which small exports of olive oil and olive oil soap, sponsored by the Middle East Supple Centre, were allowed to Transjordan and Egypt, on the grounds of maintaining traditional markets.\textsuperscript{169} But as illustrated by the preceding section, the amounts were pitifully small and sparked no shortage of distress and dissent among manufacturers and their employees.

The high prices in Palestine that year were no exception, as the price of olive oil spiked on a global scale and in neighboring countries. After multiple years of bumper crops, the needs of villagers — who kept the bulk of the olive oil in their own hands, for their own consumption — as well as those of the Nablus soap makers, who purchased and stored the remainder in bulk, were likely sated. The export ban, on the ground of consumer protection, was thus completely

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{169} Export licenses were granted in 1943 for 220 tons of olive oil soap to Transjordan and 113 tons to Egypt, for a total of 333 tons. Ibid.

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 unintelligible from the perspective of Palestinian cultivators, who would traditionally export excess as a relief valve in times of olive oil gluts.

The Food Control report for 1943 confirmed that the Nablus soap factories were indeed already largely at capacity.\textsuperscript{170} Since olive oil itself was uncontrolled in price, the price of Nablus olive oil soap was also left to fluctuate with the price of olive oil. In its report on the 1943 year, the Food Control Department claimed that it could nevertheless regulate the soap industry indirectly through allocations of caustic soda, an imported chemical essential to the soapmaking process — which had displaced locally sourced alkali (\textit{al-geli}) over the course of the Mandate owing to its relative cheapness.\textsuperscript{171} The government thus gave an impression of comprehensive control. Nevertheless, the government was forced to issue an Olive Oil Soap Order in October 1943, intended to regulate the use of olive oil in soap, in order to protect both manufacturers and consumers from a soap purporting to be pure olive oil, but in reality containing a mixture of vegetable oils.\textsuperscript{172}

\begin{table}[h]
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\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & Olive oil used & Olive oil soap produced \\
\hline
1942 & 713 tons & 957 tons \\
\hline
1943 & 1,348 tons & 1,764 tons \\
\hline
1944 & 1,335 tons & 1,745 tons \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Nablus soap production, 1942-1944}
\end{table}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid. “Allocations of caustic soda were made in accordance with past trade and stocks of olive oil on hand. Returns of raw materials used, soap produced, soap sold, stocks of soap and olive oil on hand were submitted monthly and were subject to periodical check.”
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid. In the Legal section, Divisional Controller W. Goldschmidt noted in the summary of drafted legislation throughout the year that the main intention of the Olive Oil Soap Order was “to protect the public against the sale of adulterated soap.” The adulterated soap typically had a varying percentage of olive oil incorporated in the mixture, but was sold at the same price as real, pure olive oil soap, thus constituting a type of fraud.
\end{flushright}
Crucially, the Food Control report revealed that the only actual site of control was the factory, and its only means of control was through the allocation of imported inputs. Thus, the control system was far more stringent for the coastal factories located in port cities and dependent on cheaper, imported oilseeds. Food Control allocated oilseeds to these factories; even then, however, in actuality the oilseeds were received and stored by the “Government Agents,” which were typically the same factories. Furthermore, the allocations were determined in consultation with the factories. The department in its report nevertheless attempted to draw a portrait of a command economy, proclaiming intimate knowledge of the capacities of each factory by taking monthly tallies of both inputs and outputs to complete what it called “the chain of control.” While this indeed represented an entirely new level of wartime control of the coastal oilseed factory, this system did not apply at all to olive oil, which remained uncontrolled.

The 1944 report of the Food Control Department revealed in greater detail the lack of control over the 25 registered Nablus factories, as well as other small olive oil soap factories in Lydda, Ramla, and Jaffa. Besides allocations of caustic soda — which could easily be diluted, supplemented by amounts smuggled from elsewhere, or replaced by traditional, local alternatives such as the Bedouin supplied alkali (al-qeli), or even, in a pinch, acid olive oil —

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173 For a detailed local history of both the Arab and Jewish olive, vegetable, and seed oil processing sectors in Haifa, with particular attention to the Mandate period, see Mustafa Abbasi and David De Vries, “Commodities and Power: Edible Oil and Soap in the History of Arab-Jewish Haifa,” in *Haifa Before & After 1948: Narratives of a Mixed City*, Mahmoud Yazbak and Yifaat Weiss, eds. (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation / Republic of Letters Publishing, 2011), 99-118.
175 Ibid.
176 “Food Control Department. Annual Report, for the year 1st April, 1943 to 31st March, 1944,” 1943-1944. TNA CO 814/16-0044.
“no control is exercised over the Nablus soap factories.”\textsuperscript{177} The factories themselves were supposed to submit monthly reports, estimating the amounts of raw materials used, soap produced, and amount sold. Unlike household soap, which had been controlled at a set price since June 1943,\textsuperscript{178} Nablus olive oil soap was not directly price controlled.\textsuperscript{179}

The only controls, therefore, were on exports. The Food Control Department report on fiscal year 1943-1944 is just slightly more forthright on why certain orders regarding the “movement” of olive oil soap had been promulgated: “Nablus soap finds a ready market in Egypt and Transjordan and there is reason to believe that quantities are smuggled out of the country. Steps have been taken to mitigate this evil [emphasis added].” Specifically, the government promulgated three separate orders “to prevent the smuggling of olive oil, olive oil soap and soap in general from beyond the borders of Palestine: The Olive Oil Movement Restriction Order, The Soap Movement Restriction Order, and The Olive Oil Soap Movement Restriction Order.”\textsuperscript{180}

The ostensible purpose was to “keep in the oil in the Country for edible and soapmaking

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{178} The other soap factories included 21 Jewish factories producing 4,253 tons of soap in 1943 and 14 Arab factories producing 2,400 tons of household soap: “These factories work under control. The raw materials, such as crude vegetable oil, oil in soapstock and caustic soda are allocated to the factories at controlled prices in given quantities.” Again, however it should be noted that the government cooperated closely with the larger, well-capitalized factories: “The oil, soap and margarine industry is effectively controlled and this is due in large measure to the full co-operation of the leading members of the various industries who are invariably consulted before any decision of importance is taken.” Ibid.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid. Prices for olive oil were claimed to have ranged from 209 to 245 mils per kilogramme in 1943-1944, but this likely refers only to cheaper, unrefined industrial oil for producing soap, since the previous report noted that edible oil had hit at least 375 mils per kilogramme in September 1943, when soap itself had already reached a price of 242 mils per kilogramme.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.
purposes.” From a broader perspective, however, an export ban seems like a strange way to regulate olive oil and olive oil soap, especially when coupled with the fact that prices were left uncontrolled. From an Arab Palestinian perspective, a ban on exports made very little sense, by removing a traditional release valve for excess production in a volatile sector based on a highly variable crop. Smuggling would be a logical response to resist the government’s detrimental policy.

In private, village histories have preserved hidden local histories of smuggling in wartime. Yussuf Ayyub Haddad, writing an amateur history of the northern village of al-Bassah, noted that bribery was common among British customs and police officers at the frontier. The involvement of British officials who were supposed to be enforcing the laws in at least turning a blind eye to smuggling was also well known among the French intelligence service across the northern border in southern Lebanon, which recorded common instances of corruption and involvement of British security personnel — military and police alike — in the trafficking of illegal drugs, particularly hashish and narcotics. Olive oil as a valuable and relatively compact commodity would have been trafficked as well:

181 Ibid.
182 On the variety and richness of Palestinian amateur histories of localities, including both urban areas and rural villages, see Rochelle Davis, *Palestinian village histories: geographies of the displaced* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).
184 On French concerns over smuggling of “hachiche et stupéfiants” from Palestine into Lebanon, see for example report of an arrest of a hasish smuggler, 7 February 1946. CADN 1SL/1/V/2121, Services Spéciaux du Levant, Poste de Merdjayoun (Liban-Sud), Sûreté 101, Dossier « Surveillance des Frontières », s.d. P-2 S/7. For other individual cases of commercial smuggling, beginning with World War II in 1939, see CADN 1SL/1/V/2164, « Commerces Illicites ». Thanks to Graham Auman Pitts for research guidance into the relevant French archives on Mandate Lebanon. In addition, future researchers should consult CADN.
The location of al-Bassah on the border had great importance from an economic perspective. This location aided some of the residents in engaging in smuggling between Palestine and Lebanon. *This work was further energized during World War II, when there was no stringent supervision by the authorities* and bribery was widespread, even among British customs and police officers. A few benefited from this work and obtained a certain degree of wealth. The means of transport was by camel via the passages and paths across the border, which led many to obtain camels, solely and only to use them in smuggling.\(^{185}\)

Recollections in particular of a lack of “stringent supervision by the authorities” of the border indicate a certain degree of state ineffectiveness, even over what it could ostensibly control: the movement of commodities across borders. A visit to the Palestine Police post at Ras al-Na'qoura, the major border crossing between Northern Palestine and Southern Lebanon, in late 1944 indicated that illegal crossings and the shipping of contraband had been occurring for years “on a great scale” in nearly all frontier villages, naming ‘Alma in particular.\(^ {186}\) The Palestine Police representatives replied, after their Lebanese counterparts expressed concern over issues of illegal entry into Lebanon, that “a great number of clandestine crossings” were conducted owing to three reasons: a lack of manpower on both sides of the border; difficult terrain along the border that was hard to patrol; and above all, that “[s]trict border control and restrictions on the issuing

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\(^{185}\) Haddad, 44. Emphasis added by the author.

\(^{186}\) Traduction de rapport sur le contrôle frontalier (Employés du W.D.) par le Sergent Bailey (Bureau de la Liaison Britannique, Grand Serail Beyrouth), 7 September 1944. CADN 1SL/1/V/2121, “Surveillance des Frontières,” 5821 BLO/S/8, page 6. The report details the first visit by Sgt. Bailey to the Palestinian police post in Nakoura, predominantly documenting meetings with his local counterparts, Sergeant Gould and one Adib Tabet, who had been sent to organize the post. Tabet noted that they needed to take one immediate concrete step: find funds to recruit and pay informants among the “‘illiterate’ Muslims of the frontier villages.” Other various suggestions included better communications links between British and French security services; the need to inspect military vehicles (further corroborating suspected corruption); for more personnel; and for better transportation (horses, motorcycles, jeeps), as previously “the agents of Sûreté Libanaise at the time of their arrival” worked on foot.
of visas tends to encourage people to take risks.”

Restrictions such as rationing had the unintended consequence of creating a black market domestically, while export bans and other trade controls had a similar effect along the borders.

By pilfering or smuggling olive oil and olive oil soap, peasants and producers forced the state to attempt to prevent the “movement” of these products; however, the government could neither concede the unpopularity of its policies, nor reveal the limitations on its power in the countryside. It was not, or not only, that the government was unwilling to extend full control over the olive industries. The state likely could not have done so. Even at a choke point like an official border crossing, military vehicles driven by bribed security officials could pass uninspected, while indigenous knowledge allowed local villagers to use rocky paths passable only by sure-footed animal. It is telling that the top priority of an official sent in 1944 to reform the Ras al-Naqoura police post was to find funds to make villagers into informants — in effect bribing them to cooperate and aid in reducing clandestine smuggling — rather than try to root out corruption among bribe-taking security officials themselves.

Furthermore, unlike the coastal factories, cooperating with governmental regulators and dependent on imported inputs allocated by the Food Control Department, the olive industries were not centralized in such a way as to enable the same type of industrial control that the authorities had imposed. Export prohibitions against the “evil” of olive oil commodity smuggling were effectively the state’s only recourse in the face of uncontrolled, unquantified movement of olive soap and olive oil across the borders. But the resort to export controls in the case of olive

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187 Ibid., 5. “During the two hours I spent in M. Tabet’s office, two cases of this type arose, and an agent was sent to arrest a group of five persons who were seen approaching the frontier for no apparent reason.”

188 James C. Scott, Weapons of the Weak, 36.
commodities reflected the fact that goods had already been moving uncontrolled — exposing not only glaring deficiencies in the state’s capacity to intervene in a decentralized sector, but also its lack of statistical knowledge of the sector more broadly.

6. Statistics, government knowledge, and control: annual Palestinian olive oil production and Palestinian olive tree planting before and during World War II

The issue of questionable statistics has arisen again and again throughout the records of the Mandate. These statistics matter, because they were the predominant measure of the state’s knowledge of the otherwise silenced, frequently anonymous masses of illiterate, rural-dwelling peasants. Statistics are a way for the state to illustrate its capacities of control and surveillance, and so can often say more about the image the government wants to project, as omniscient or hegemonic, or at the very least, sovereign. Read critically, however, statistics can conversely illustrate the limits of the state’s power.

The statistics on rural agriculture also need to be interpreted in light of discourses regarding Arab “backwardness,” and the need for Arab agriculture’s modernization. Technical expertise was deeply implicated with developmental politics. Columbia University Professor of

189 Scott noted in Weapons of the Weak (1985) that the colonial archive only tends to discuss peasants when their actions are violent or threatening: “The historical record and the archives — both resolutely centered on the state’s interests — abetted this romance by not mentioning peasants except when their activities were menacing. Otherwise the peasantry appeared only as anonymous contributors to statistics on conscription, crop production, taxes, and so forth [emphasis added] (xv).” In the context of Palestine, this is largely the case. In the colonial archive, Arabs are a mass to be managed and encouraged to modernize, disciplined when they threaten other interests.

190 Governmental bureaucracies, like academic disciplines, resort to quantitative measures like statistics at times of crisis, when their existence is called into question by external pressures. See the work of Porter, The rise of statistical thinking 1820-1900 (1986) and Trust in numbers: the pursuit of objectivity in science and public life (1995).
Agriculture Ora S. Morgan visited Palestine in the winter of 1942-1943 as part of a broader tour of the Near East. For Palestine, in particular, Morgan sought to explore the question of developing agriculture in Palestine to support an increased population.\textsuperscript{191} This question was, of course, tied to debates over Jewish immigration quotas. Both prior to and during his visit, Morgan was primarily concerned about the state of mechanization and intensive irrigation.\textsuperscript{192} In summarizing his findings in March 1943 in a memorandum to the Department of State, Morgan wrote: “The chief problem in Palestine, if not in the Near East, is not Jewish but Arabic. The Jews have a positive, integral modern approach to clear objectives. The Arabs have a negative, divided opportunistic plan of opposition.”\textsuperscript{193} In essence, what Morgan argued was that the issue of Jewish immigration could only be solved by “modernizing Arabs.”

Olives, whose harvest requires hand labor and thus cannot be efficiently mechanized beyond the press, tended to be minimized or overlooked by agricultural advisers and technical experts of the era as a result, especially in official policy and research. On 30 November 1942, Mendes Herze Sachs gave a lengthy lecture on Palestinian horticulture, focusing in particular on citrus, to the Palestine Economic Society, a Zionist organization promoting commercialization, industrialization, and mechanization.\textsuperscript{194} Sachs, an expert in citriculture and an American educated at Johns Hopkins and the University of California who had resided in Palestine as a representative of absentee Americans with interests in the orange groves since 1931, very briefly

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid.
noted the importance of the olive and grape, as the next two most important fruits after oranges: “Since both of these are extremely well adapted to the Palestinian climate, there is no doubt they have a sound basis.”\textsuperscript{195} With the next breath, however, Sachs dismissed their importance: “The same is true, however, in all Mediterranean countries. At present we have no distinctive high quality varieties of either that might compare with the Jaffā orange and give us an advantage in the markets.”\textsuperscript{196} Sachs noted that while the olive industry had expanded considerably in the previous few years, “the Arabs grow mainly oil producing olives on a large scale, cheaply, without irrigation, and on land unsuitable for most other purposes. Their profits are reasonably certain, but always low per unit area.” If only the quality of the oil could be improved, Sachs argued, as the government had been attempting to do by improving the “methods of harvesting and oil extraction,” then the local industry would be able to compete with other Mediterranean countries.\textsuperscript{197} Sachs concluded by noting that the efforts of Jewish farmers and Jewish agricultural research had recently showed promise in producing “higher grade and larger sized olives” with the help of “more intensive irrigated methods … particularly in growing olives for pickling or canning.”\textsuperscript{198} Although praising the development of more distinct olives by Jewish cultivators, Sachs cautioned against too rapid development:

A word of caution is needed, however, in connection with the intensive irrigated production of large olives by Jews. There has been a considerable increase in the area of good soils devoted to this purpose, but development of the market and of proper pickling methods may be slow, and as the varieties used are not altogether suitable for oil extraction because of lower oil content, so that that safety-valve is partly closed, and as harvesting costs are very high with Jewish labour, there is much greater danger of overexpansion, even though the trees respond so well to

\textsuperscript{195} “Adjustments in Palestine Horticulture,” 30.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., 30-31.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., 31.
good cultivation and yield far more heavily than Arab methods [emphasis added].

Sachs did not bring statistics into this discussion, but if he did, the numbers, for whatever they were worth, would have illustrated how marginal Jewish cultivation of olives was during the war. The 1946 A Survey of Palestine for the information of the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry placed Arab ownership of olive groves at the end of the war at more than 99 percent; Jewish Palestinians, whose efforts were so heralded by Sachs, owned maybe 7,000 dunams.

But how many dunams in total were under olives by the end of the Mandate in 1948 versus the end of the war in 1945 when in light of wartime needs statistics were gathered most thoroughly? A Survey of Palestine has traditionally offered the last authoritative glimpse of pre-Nakba Palestinian agriculture, economics, and society. The figures, though credible, were generally up-to-date only through 1945 owing to its publication date in 1946 and dependence on wartime statistical gathering. Evidence suggests that despite the upheavals and political uncertainty, Palestinians continued to plant and expand olive groves until the end of the Mandate. Thus, while A Survey of Palestine offered the conservative, round figure of 600,000 dunams under olives, it is quite possible that just before 1948, Arab Palestinians owned in excess of 750,000 dunams of olive groves. A difference of 150,000 dunams, if true, would represent a monumental disparity, a full quarter more than the commonly accepted figure.

Unreliability of statistics in the Mandate period was nothing new, reflecting the government’s inaccurate, imperfect knowledge of Palestinian society, especially in rural areas. There was no consensus, for example, among experts regarding olive oil yields, which had often

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199 Ibid.
been used as a proxy for the wellbeing of the rural peasantry, prior to World War II. Saʿid B. Himadeh, Professor of Applied Economics at the American University of Beirut,201 noted during the course of his investigations in the mid 1930s for his mammoth reference work Economic Organization of Palestine that there was “no reliable statistic of the yield of olive oil;” however, based on interviews with olive growers and merchants, Himadeh estimated annual production at 5,000 tons per year, the bulk of which went to Nabulsi soap production.202 Elsewhere in his book, however, Himadeh cited estimates given to him by a Sami W. Dajani of the Palestine Office of Statistics that 4,500 tons of olive oil was typically consumed as food each year in the 1930s, while 2,000 tons was used in soapmaking, which seems much more likely.203 Regardless, the larger point is that even an interested expert could easily contradict himself in the same book.

The three-volume version of A Survey of Palestine: prepared in December 1945 and January 1946 for the information of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry offered entirely different estimates for pre-war olive oil production. Revising Himadeh, the report estimated that, prior to World War II, oil production was 7,000 tons per year (with wide variation by season),

201 S.B. Himadeh, Economic Organization of Palestine (Beirut: American University Press, 1938). Morgan characterized Himadeh confidentially to the State Department as “conservative; inclined if anything to see Near East through Arab glasses.” Letter dated 2 March 1943, NARA M-1037/26, 867N.61/25.

However, Himadeh’s views are perhaps better understood along class lines. Writing in the mid 1930s, Himadeh on page 147 noted many of the same criticisms of Palestinian olive oil that would be raised at length by the elite-populated olive committees of the early 1940s: the difficulty of alternative uses, bad marketing, and high acidity chiefly. As a result, he recommended encouraging improvement of methods of cultivation and processing. Until then, Himadeh warned, it would remain, merely, a staple in the diet of the peasants.

202 Himadeh, Economic Organization of Palestine, 146. Of this 5,000 tons, Himadeh contended that most was used to make soap in Nablus, which was then exported to Egypt, while noting that the customs duties imposed in 1930-1931 had already crushed this export-based industry — a potential contradiction that passes unresolved.

203 Ibid., 266.
4,000 tons of which would be consumed by the local population (85 percent as oil, 15 percent as pickled olives), while 1,500 tons would be used for soap manufacture, and 1,500 tons exported. Two-thirds of the exported oil was classified as edible (non-refined but of low acidity) and exported to Iraq and Egypt, the latter of which had recently imposed stricter import quality requirements that had diminished Palestinian exports. The remaining one-third was refined oil produced by Jewish factories that was exported to the British Empire and the United States.

 Estimates for olive oil production during the Second World War settled around a nice, round 10,000 tons of olive oil produced per year, a figure echoed in the Survey of Palestine to sum up the state of the olive industries at the close of the war. A closer comparison between the reports of two different governmental departments during the closing years of the war shows that the Food Control Department constantly, if just slightly, underestimated the olive oil production in comparison to the Department of Agriculture:

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204 A Survey of Palestine: prepared in December 1945 and January 1946 for the information of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry (Volume I), 315. The report also noted that about 8,000 pounds per year of pickled olives were imported from Greece and Turkey, “especially of the black ‘Greek’ type,” likely the kalamata — a relatively small market that Sachs and others sought to replace through local Jewish cultivation.

205 Ibid.

206 Ibid. The entry also highlighted the low quality of the “local non-refined pre-war production,” meaning the Arab-produced oil, which could not be exported to countries like the United Kingdom or the United States owing to official quality requirements that would bar the Palestinian oil on the grounds of poor color, unpleasant flavor, and high acidity.

207 Ibid.
Table 8. Estimated olive oil production (in metric tons), 1942-1946

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Department of Agriculture</th>
<th>Food Control Department</th>
<th>al-Taher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1942-1943</td>
<td>10,000+</td>
<td>9,400</td>
<td>11,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943-1944</td>
<td>10,000+</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>11,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944-1945</td>
<td>2,800</td>
<td>2,700</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945-1946</td>
<td>11,000+</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perhaps the Food Control Department simply thought it looked more prudent and conservative next to the Agriculture Department’s figures; or, it may reflect the fact, as the controller bemoaned in his final annual report in 1945, that the preceding year marked a relaxation of controls, which had the adverse effect of relaxing “the necessity for, and in the fact the possibility of, compiling the voluminous statistics” appearing in previous reports. What is nevertheless surprising is that, even at the peak of claimed governmental control, different departments could have estimates of production at variance.

Besides questions of technical expertise, which the Food Control Department seemed to lack compared with the Department of Agriculture regarding Arab rural industries, ideological and political distortions cannot be discounted. These statistics were a way for the Mandate

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213 al-Taher, 62.
bureaucrats to claim total control over its colonial subjects, to illustrate their knowledge and capacities for surveillance. Furthermore, a narrow comparison between the estimated pre-war statistics and the estimated late and post-war statistics would show at a glance, in hard numbers, that British guidance over their colonial subjects had yielded massive improvements over pre-war production.

But more significantly, these statistics masked the fact that the government had imperfect knowledge of what was actually going on with olive oil production. As illustrated in the above table, according to Palestinian-Jordanian olive expert Ali Nasuh al-Taher, more than 11,000 tons of olive oil were produced in Palestine in both 1942 and 1943.\textsuperscript{218} Furthermore, al-Taher added, Palestine consumed — not produced — over 10,000 tons each year.

Unlike the official governmental annual reports, al-Taher provided the math to justify his estimates. al-Taher assumed there are 6 million olive trees in Palestine, which is conservative. By the end of the war, there were at least 600,000 dunams planted with olive trees.\textsuperscript{219} Palestine’s average planting density was possibly as high as 12 trees per dunam,\textsuperscript{220} which would then have meant Palestine had more than 7 million tree; however, estimating 10 trees per dunam would be

\textsuperscript{218} al-Taher, 62. As noted in the introduction, he was a Palestinian born in Nablus, educated in France as an agronomist, and a Mandate Palestine Department of Agriculture subaltern who later became undersecretary of agriculture in midcentury Jordan, after writing and publishing simultaneously in Jaffa and Amman in 1947 a two-volume global history in Arabic of the agronomy of the olive tree with a special focus on Palestine as a case study, from which these statistics are drawn.


\textsuperscript{220} al-Taher, 55-56. Globally, by density Palestine would have been tied for about fourth, at 12 trees per dunam — equivalent to Greece; slightly more than Algeria; slightly less than Turkey (close to 13) and Italy (close to 14). However, density does not correlate with either total number of olive trees or total amount of land under olive groves. According to 1939 figures given by al-Taher, Spain had by far the most olive trees and land planted with olives; Italy, a distant second, Greece, an even more distant third; Palestine was 11\textsuperscript{th} globally.
in line with the 1930 Johnson-Crosbie report’s methodology, confirming 6 million trees, conservatively.

In an infertile year, al-Taher held, each tree would yield around two kilograms of olives, for a total crop of 12,000 tons of olives. With 5,000 tons consumed as olives, the remaining 7,000 tons would be pressed for oil, yielding 1,500-1,800 tons of olive oil.\(^\text{221}\) al-Taher based the yield on the rationale that the average content of oil was 25 percent of the olives pressed.\(^\text{222}\) In an average year, each tree would yield about seven kilograms of olives for 42,000 tons of olives. With the same amount consumed as raw or pickled olives, 37,000 tons of olives pressed for their oil would yield 8,000-9,000 tons of olive oil. In a spectacular year, a single tree could yield 12 kilograms of olives, yielding 72,000 tons of olives. Subtracting the 5,000 tons consumed as olives, the remaining 67,000 would yield 15,000-16,000 tons of olive oil.\(^\text{223}\) These tree yields are even more conservative than the 1930 Johnson-Crosbie committee’s report, which estimated 3.5 kilograms in a terrible year, and 17.5 kilograms in a great year.

al-Taher backed up these estimates by pointing to two real-world harvests, one considered average (1937-1938) and another considered especially fruitful (1942-1943):

\(^{221}\) Ibid., 97.
\(^{222}\) Ibid. al-Taher nevertheless generally estimated less, typically between 20-25 percent, perhaps to account for the continued use of older, animal-driven presses in boom years.
\(^{223}\) Ibid.
Table 9. Palestinian olive crop comparisons: 1937-1938 versus 1942-1943

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fruit-bearing dunams planted</th>
<th>Tons of olives</th>
<th>Kilograms per dunam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1937-1938</td>
<td>489,860</td>
<td>35,689</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942-1943</td>
<td>513,636</td>
<td>60,541</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If converted using al-Taher’s formula — subtracting 5,000 tons of olive oil and estimating somewhere between a 20-25 percent oil yield from the remaining 55,000 or so tons of olives — then a more accurate estimation of the 1942-1943 harvest would have potentially been between 11,000-14,000 tons of olive oil produced — far more than either official Mandate department had estimated. Indeed, in the exceptional years of the 1940s, al-Taher noted that around 12,000 tons of olive oil could be produced in Palestine, of which 9,000 would be consumed locally, while the rest would be bought and kept by the soapmakers to guard against the possibility of a sharp rise in prices the next year.\(^{225}\)

Using the same formula, an improvement on Himadeh’s round 5,000 tons of olive oil figure per year during the prewar years would be closer to 6,000-8,000 tons of olive oil — precisely in line with the *Survey of Palestine*’s estimate of 7,000 tons per year on average. This is much more reasonable than a sudden jump from 5,000 tons before the war to 10,000 tons during the war. Since olive trees take a decade or two to begin producing regularly, increases in production would necessarily be quite gradual. The sudden jump in the statistics thus appears to be more of a corrective to British knowledge, as the wartime regime focused more closely on

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\(^{224}\) Ibid., 98. al-Taher seems to have mistakenly written 1941-1942 in his original chart, which I assume to be a typo and I have thus corrected after translating from the Arabic for two reasons. First, the figures in the rest of his comparisons in the text between the two crops are for 1942-1943. Second, the crop of 1941-1942 was supposed to be an especially poor one, estimated around 2,000 tons of olive oil, which is actually very close to al-Taher’s estimates of an “infertile” year.\(^{225}\) Ibid.
domestic production. Additionally, a quantum leap would have well suited colonial claims that it was predominantly the government — which had only recently focused its attention on olive oil and olive oil soap — that was responsible for improvements to indigenous industries. The continued inaccuracy of Mandate government statistics before and during World War II helped to paper over the government’s overall lack of knowledge of rural areas. The next section will analyze the changes in the area planted with olives to further interrogate Mandate governmentality through the colonial bureaucracy’s statistics.

Planting olive trees in Palestine and its motivations: not government encouragement, but Arab Palestinian enthusiasm

Updating his figures for the post-war period, al-Taher wrote that Arabs owned 758,550 dunams of olive groves in Palestine by 1947.226 This represents a remarkable expansion of planted area — more than half again what it had been at the start of the decade — though much of it, if so newly planted, would not yet be fruit bearing. The distinction between bearing and non-bearing dunamage may help to account for part of the vast disparity between his number and A Survey of Palestine’s estimated 600,000 dunams of olive groves circa 1944/1945.

Official sources had been quick to give credit to the government’s encouragement of olive planting, particularly in the 1940s. Yet unlike the French protectorate regime in Tunisia, which had embraced the use of mugharasah contracts around the turn of the century in order to expand olive culture on a commercial scale in the Sfax area, the British Mandate of Palestine never considered such a policy, certainly in no small part owing to the tense issues surrounding

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226 Ibid., 59.

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land.\textsuperscript{227} al-Taher himself noted, however, that Mandate government policies had begun to have a detrimental impact on olive oil prices before the war, by encouraging the importation of cheaper vegetable oils or their production in predominantly Jewish-owned factories in Haifa and Tel Aviv.\textsuperscript{228} Yet al-Taher attempted to conclude on a positive note, owing largely to the recent upswing in prices during the war: “Despite this grievous state of affairs, the fellah nevertheless has not lost everything, as the olive tree is the tree of eons \textit{[dahr, a period of time so long that it cannot be measured]} that guarantees the future of our children.”\textsuperscript{229}

The reason al-Taher could be so sanguine, despite decades of detrimental governmental policies, was because the value of olive groves themselves had grown during the war. The price of olive trees rose along with the explosive increase in wartime olive oil prices. al-Taher mentioned that a record price of £P.100 for a single tree had been rumored to have been paid during the war in the village of Ramah. After the war, prices for a single tree remained around £P.25, “whereas the best price for an olive tree before the war would not exceed £P.4.”\textsuperscript{230} al-Taher thus calculated the price of planting at an astounding £P.120-250 per dunam.\textsuperscript{231} The some 200,000 dunams of newly planted areas of olive groves since the start of the war therefore

\textsuperscript{227} On the use of mugharasah contracts — in which a farmer gains a share in the ownership of a grove, typically between a quarter and half depending on labor scarcity and terrain, in exchange for a number of years spent planting and tending to olive orchards until they come into bearing — which emerged on a limited, private basis in wartime Palestine, see Ya’akov Firestone, “Production and Trade in an Islamic Context: Sharika Contracts in the Transitional Economy of Northern Samaria, 1853-1943 (II),” \textit{International Journal of Middle East Studies} 6:3 (Jul., 1975), 309-317.

\textsuperscript{228} al-Taher, 59, states that the prices of edible oil in 1938 and 1939 had fallen to 12 \textit{qaroush} per \textit{ratl} (2 \frac{1}{2} kilograms) and 8 \textit{qaroush} for industrial oil. He appears to be referring to the two large, consolidated factories of Shemen and Izhar respectively.

\textsuperscript{229} Ibid., 60.

\textsuperscript{230} Ibid., 63.

\textsuperscript{231} Ibid.
represented an even more astounding investment on the national level of somewhere in the neighborhood of £P.24,000,000-50,000,000.

The source of funding for this expansion was the spike in olive oil prices during the war, resulting in widespread popular enthusiasm for expanding the areas of olive cultivation in the country:

Table 10. Estimated olive and olive oil prices in Palestine during the last years of World War II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Edible olive oil</th>
<th>Industrial olive oil</th>
<th>Green olives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1943-1944 232</td>
<td>£P. 200 per ton</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>40-70 mils per kilo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944-1945 233</td>
<td>£P. 300+ per ton</td>
<td>£P 150-200 per ton</td>
<td>60-100 mils per kilo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945-1946 234</td>
<td>£P. 220-240 per ton</td>
<td>£P.200-230 per ton</td>
<td>60-90 mils per kilo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By the end of the war, according to the above estimated government statistics, unrefined oil (fit only for soapmaking and other industrial purposes), was thus selling at more than what edible oil had fetched just a few years before.

Clearly then, the impetus and the funds to plant came more from the rise in prices than any sort of governmental rhetoric through propaganda campaigns or free distribution of suckers. Officials never considered encouraging mugharasah cooperative contracts, which only emerged on a limited basis owing to the relative scarcity of both land and capital in wartime Palestine. Rising prices also meant that the fellah was largely reinvesting the gains made during the war in olive trees, not wasting money on frivolities, like Vickers had accused the rural Arabs of doing with their newfound wealth.

Mandate forestry policy and forestation reconsidered

In 1945-1946, with the war winding down, the Department of Forests submitted a remarkable report attempting to cover the war years while Mr. G.N. Sale was conservator of forests, perhaps intending to pass along his insights before he was transferred to Trinidad in July 1946.\footnote{Department of Forests. Report for the years 1939-1945.” TNA CO 814/17-0014.} As noted in the first section of this chapter, while the Department of Forests was formed as an independent entity on 1 April 1936 (out of the Department of Agriculture), it had not published its first report until 1939. Sale explained why:

the whole of this period was one of civil unrest, and no serious development of the work was possible. This report again covers a wholly abnormal period, that of the War years. Although the Disturbances ceased in 1939, reduction of staff and a great burden of new work has meant that few fresh advances have been made; in many fields it has been difficult to retain pre-war levels of achievement.\footnote{Ibid.}

On the question of forest policy, the department admitted that its priorities of preventing soil erosion and rehabilitating “the large areas of ruined land in the hills” had never been implemented, owing to “the disturbances” as well as the war.\footnote{Ibid.} Upon review of the Forest Policy plan, put in place in 1936, the department recommended no changes to its focus moving forward.

In a striking parallel to discourses regarding overgrazing and land use in North Africa analyzed by Diana K. Davis,\footnote{See Diana K. Davis, Resurrecting the Granary of Rome: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007).} the problem of “over-grazing” that had ruined the landscape remained foremost in the department’s sights; however, the department argued that the greatest
obstacle to implementing its policies going forward was the illegibility of land tenure rights, and
the need to therefore seize land outright for its own protection: “Very few areas, even now, are
definitely allocated to the Department for treatment, and the improvement of the remainder, apart
from simple protection, must await the completion of Land Settlement operation.”239 The
Mandate Palestine forestry department’s primary concern, therefore, appeared to be more about
making land rights legible, as the legal settlement of claims regarding real property had still not
yet been fully completed.

The only mention of olives in the forest report was a brief note that olive suckers had
nearly ceased to be granted to the public from state reserves — at the time of greatest demand,
no less.240 British forestry officials, perhaps unsurprisingly, failed to support the massive
Palestinian Arab demand for olive tree saplings to expand orchards when prices for both olive oil
and olive trees were rising. In 1944, both the District Commissioner for Nablus and the Assistant
District Commissioner for Tulkarm separately wrote to the pertinent official in the Agricultural
and Forestry Department, the same Conservator of Forests G.N. Sale (prior to his transfer), who
rejected their requests out of hand after a delay of seven months in replying. High demand for
olive seedlings from Nablus villagers and resulting requests for governmental help in subsidizing
or supplying cuttings were thus met with official rejection.241 When 466 villagers — enumerated
individually by name — from the Tulkarm area asked for a total of 105,042 suckers, Sale replied

240 Ibid.
with the terse, euphemistic regret that “the enthusiasm of the people of Tulkarm cannot be more adequately met.” Their requests for over 100,000 saplings were in fact not met at all, resulting in not a single sucker supplied. The extent of the department’s activities for the year was to uproot 7,000 olive suckers from the Haifa range in order to supply governmental nurseries in the inhospitable Gaza and Beersheba areas.  

The enthusiasm for planting olive trees expressed to forestry officials by Tulkarm villagers was no exception. The Department of Agriculture painted a similar picture of public interest more broadly. In 1943, the department noted that interest continued to be shown in planting, with “considerable” olive planting “in the hill and foothill areas.” In 1944, Arab farmers continued to be interested in planting olives, despite high prices. Most notably, Arab peasants in the hills were reported to have been terracing more land in order to prepare to plant more fruit trees, especially olives. 

In contrast to the Department of Forestry, the Department of Agriculture claimed to be aiding this expansion by making arrangements to “increase substantially the supplies of budded olive and fruit trees in the Government nurseries for distribution to peasants,” while admitting

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242 Assistant District Commissioner, Tulkarm to Sale, 12 December 1944. ISA M-4811/4, Document 45; Sale to Assistant District commissioner, Tulkarm, 24 December 1944. ISA M-4811/4, Document 47.


244 “Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 1944,” 1943-1944. TNA CO 814/16-0035.

245 “Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Annual Report for the year ended March 31, 1945,” 1944-1945. TNA CO 814/17-0006. By contrast, the department estimated that the area under citrus at the beginning of 1944 was around 267,000 dunams, not counting further uprooting during the year that awaited the next planned full grove inspection in summer 1945 to assess the damage. It would confirm that there was further abandonment, neglect, and uprootings, leaving around 250,000 dunams in production at the end of the war.
that government efforts that had been so marginal as to almost be nonexistent throughout most of
the Mandate period.\textsuperscript{246} Although the government finally began to invest funds to support Arab
Palestinian olive culture, the timing could not have been less fortunate, with the expanded
nurseries not expected to have a viable impact until after 1948:

\begin{quote}
Since production of nursery trees in private nurseries has not been meeting the
demand and also because of the high prices charged by private nurseries, it was
arranged to expand the production of nursery trees on Government Stations, at
least for a period of years. \textit{The annual production of budded olives will be
increased from 10 to 50 thousand trees} and miscellaneous fruit trees and vines
will each be increased from 20 thousands to 50 thousand. \textit{The increased output of
olives will not become available for distribution until 1949} . \textsuperscript{247}
\end{quote}

By the next year, 1946, the department’s Nablus Station had in fact been expanded by 150
dunams, most of which was to be used to study problems relating to olive culture. In connection,
around 120,000 olive seedlings along with 116,000 other fruit tree cuttings and seedlings were
planted in the department’s stations.\textsuperscript{248} Owing to the impending instability of the political and
military situation, it is unclear what happened to these trees.\textsuperscript{249} But overall, it was very much a
case of too little, too late.

\begin{table}
\caption{Table of Data}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{246} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{247} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{248} “Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for the Year-ended
\textsuperscript{249} Since they were likely concentrated in Nablus, whose agricultural station was
supposed to begin specializing in olive culture, it is highly possible that the trees later found
homes, or even became homes for the refugees from the 1948 Nakba. Olive groves, in what
would become the West Bank, would provide both employment and shelter for many refugees
after 1948. As the next chapter will show, olive planting and associated terracing of the hills
along the frontier would be a priority of British aid in the early years of the Jordanian state
administration of the West Bank, specifically the British Middle East Office in the first half of
the 1950s — perhaps continuing, in a way, these belated efforts of the Mandate Department of
Agriculture.

253
While the government tended to underestimate olive oil production on an annual basis, al-Taher believed that the government consistently overestimated the area planted under fruit-bearing olive trees, particularly by including non-bearing areas in order to inflate the total area planted. This would accord with attempts to paint the government as responsible for a massive jump in planting, when, in fact, these newly planted trees would not bear fruit for some time. al-Taher explicitly noted, for example, that the figure for trees in bearing for 1937-1938, provided by “the honorable Mr. Azaf Jor Kabir, orchard inspector for the Government of Palestine,” should be reduced by some 30,000 dunam, to just under 490,000 dunam, “in order to correct [yistaqim] the statistic.”

Rounding some of his figures to the nearest thousand to reflect their inexactness, al-Taher provided the following estimates at various points throughout his study of Palestinian olive cultivation under the Mandate:

Table 11. Estimates of area under olives between 1929-1947

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Fruit-bearing dunams</th>
<th>Non-bearing dunams</th>
<th>Total dunams under olives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>360,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>410,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937-1938</td>
<td>490,000</td>
<td>58,000</td>
<td>548,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942-1943</td>
<td>514,000</td>
<td>70,000</td>
<td>584,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>766,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strikingly, al-Taher’s estimates are lower in comparison to the official governmental estimates during the war years, even when incorporating infertile and non-bearing trees. While

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251 Sources: al-Taher, *Shajarat al-zaytun*, 59; 63; 98. al-Taher does not explicate his sources for the figures from 1929 and 1947. The 1942-1943 figures, he explains, are “from a personal investigation of the author after examining all the village notebooks in the different districts of Palestine,” an impressive feat if this was indeed the case.
252 “Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for the Year-ended March 31, 1946,” 1945-1946. TNA CO 814/17-0011 (see Table 12, next page):
conclusiveness remains elusive, the point is that the government’s estimates, as is the case with olive oil yields, are not as definitive as they first appear, and could easily be distorted for a variety of reasons, intentional or unintentional: ideological, political, or technical. The larger point is to highlight yet again the limits of colonial governmentality. Without a census or cadastral survey, relying on a handful of employees, the government’s knowledge was inevitably imperfect.

Yet even more significantly, the statistics, even if inaccurate, reveal a larger narrative that the department sought to project. By spinning the numbers positively, the department sought to claim to have supported and propelled the massive expansion of olive tree plantings and by extension olive production throughout the Mandate. Unfortunately, however, this enthusiasm was short lived, coming too late to have a material impact on planting and production.

Finally, it should be noted that the Department of Agriculture’s newfound enthusiasm for olives was not shared more widely across the government. The final report of the Department of Forests illustrated the continuing influence of the colonial forestation discourse, stemming back to the late Ottoman era:

Palestine is a heavily deforested and highly eroded country with an arid climate and a rapidly increasing population. Reafforestation is therefore an urgent necessity. … It is generally held by foresters that at least 20% of the area of a country should be set aside for afforestation. This should be the target whenever practicable specially [sic] in the Mediterranean region. Although such proportions of “forest lands” have not yet been maintained in Mediterranean countries, Italy has 18% of its land under forest and Spain 14%. In Palestine, out of the 15 million

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1942</th>
<th>1945</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dunams</td>
<td>510,300</td>
<td>571,700</td>
<td>594,400</td>
<td>600,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tons of olives</td>
<td>15,775</td>
<td>35,232</td>
<td>62,708</td>
<td>76,469</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: TNA CO 814/17-0011.
dunums [sic] of non-desert land only some 700,000 dunums, or 4.7% are Forest Reserves and only 80,000 dunums, about 0.2% are Closed Forest Areas, i.e. potential productive forests. It is proposed, subject to financial limitations, considerably to increase the “Closed” Areas in the near future.\footnote{253}{TNA CO 814/17-0013 (also filed as CO 814/40-0004) “Department of Forests. Annual Report,” 1946.}

Putting aside the question of how to estimate total forest lands — particularly the use of percentage-based claims of the total land area that needed to be forested, which other senior colonial official themselves questioned, owing to the fact that there had been “no complete land use survey” for the country\footnote{254}{Roza I. El-Eini, “British forestry policy in mandate Palestine, 1929-48: Aims and realities,” \textit{Middle Eastern Studies} 35:3 (July 1999), 107. Undersecretary D.C. MacGillivray later deleted the percentage asserted by Goor in the 1947 draft annual report, arguing that setting such a figure was wrong without a comprehensive survey of land usage. Also, according to El-Eini, High Commissioner Wauchope had questioned a decade prior why the department sought to devote 15 percent of non-desert land to forestry back in 1936.} — the comparison between “land under forests” in Southern European countries versus “forest reserves” in Palestine is not at all parallel. Note that the forestry department specifically compared the extent of forest reserves and closed forest areas — not the total area planted with trees. These statistics better reflect the limitations of the forestry department, and the government generally, rather than the extent of forestation in the country. And at no point did the forestry department make an argument about why a certain percentage of land being forested was ecologically desirable.

Nevertheless, putting aside these problematic basic assumptions, the invocation of the category of “forest reserves” did not include areas planted with fruit trees. In the same year as the report, a conservative estimate of the area planted with olives was over 600,000 dunams, which by itself would almost double the “forested area” — to say nothing of 110,000 dunums planted
with fig trees, or the 264,000 dunams planted with citrus trees by the end of the war.\textsuperscript{255} Adding just these figures together would bring Palestine’s tree-covered non-desert land to more than 11 percent — at least comparable to the selectively named Southern European countries of the Mediterranean. By ignoring the olive tree, and other fruit trees, the report could paint a picture of dire deforestation, and make an argument for the need to control, close, and seize further lands. In the early 1950s, the British Middle East Office would embrace terracing and olive planting as a way to help the West Bank absorb the influx of landless refugees triggered by the 1948 war, and to prevent soil erosion in the hills to preserve the bearing capacity of the land. The Mandate-era forestry department ignored the option of reinforcing such practices, even if it would have served their aims.

Conclusion

The forestry department was not alone in ignoring the positive role of Palestinian olive culture. For much of the Mandate, governmental dismissal of olive and olive oil commodities (including Nabulsi soap) owed much to a mercantilist view emphasizing export trade in order for Palestine to pay for its own Mandatory Government. Ideally, colonial rule was supposed to at least break even in terms of the budget. The logic of colonialism on the cheap forestalled the numerous large-scale interventions — repeatedly proposed either in the face or in the wake of the crises of the 1930s and 1940s — into the olive industries, and into Arab rural agriculture more broadly.

\textsuperscript{255} “Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for the Year-ended March 31, 1946,” 1945-1946. TNA CO 814/17-0011. At least 15,000 dunams of this total were considered abandoned or neglected as a result of the marketing and shipping disruptions caused by the war.
Ignoring olive groves also served the discourse of deforestation and soil erosion, stemming back to assessments of the impact of World War I on forests and fruit trees, in order to minimize the incredible expansion of olive groves by Arab Palestinian families throughout the Mandate. Based on my conclusions in the preceding chapter of this dissertation, the area under olives by the end of Ottoman rule was somewhere between 150,000-200,000 dunams. By the end of the British Mandate, this area had tripled or quadrupled to between 600,000-750,000 dunams, depending on which statistics one prefers. Over the 30 years from 1917 to 1948, that would represent an average expansion of somewhere between 13,000 and 20,000 dunams per year, again depending upon which statistics one chooses. After examining in detail the typical planting patterns year by year during the Mandate, based on the number of saplings sold by private nurseries (typically around 150,000 olive suckers per year) with potential variations for planting density, I would assert that an annual expansion of olive groves by about 15,000 dunams per year is a reasonable average to assume for the Mandate overall.

Another reason why this success story of Arab Palestinian olive planting has been overshadowed is the impending Nakba or catastrophe of 1948, and the associated dislocation and erasure of Palestinian villagers. The direct impact of Zionist settler colonialism on the olive sector was essentially limited to policies regarding the imports of competing edible oil seeds, and the threat of counterfeit olive oil and olive oil soap. I have shown how those debates were shaped by the committees of 1941 and 1942, representing large Arab and Jewish edible oil producers, but ultimately the exigencies of war and the inability of the government to centralize the olive sector meant that Arab Palestinian olive cultivators were largely left on their own. In short, the story of late-Mandate Palestinian olive culture does not fit the tendency, unintentionally
exacerbated by the relational paradigm, to narrate Palestinian history almost exclusively through the lens of the conflict with the soon-to-succeed Zionist project. Jewish-owned olive groves amounted to less than one percent, and pro-Zionist agronomic and developmental experts concentrated on efforts at import substitution for the luxury product of black Kalamata-type pickled table olives. The Israeli olive sector would increasingly orient toward pickled olives at the expense of oil-bearing olives, as the next chapter will show, with olive oil becoming a controlled commodity (which it hadn’t been even during the war) in order to be reoriented as a raw input for Shemen and other large state-allied factories, while pickled olives were uncontrolled and thus freely marketed at much more profitable prices.

While citrus, which was centralized in the Jaffa area under large Arab and Jewish landholders in roughly equal measure, received nearly all the governmental and research attention, the area under olives was in fact more than double that of citrus, approaching triple the total area, especially after the difficulties for the export-oriented Jaffa orange caused by the restrictions on shipping space imposed by the Middle East Supply Centre and the war generally. Although the secondary literature has claimed in passing that the massive expansion in Palestinian olive cultivation was due to governmental efforts, it was in fact through the efforts of Arab Palestinian planters, since governmental efforts were marginal at best. The Forestry Department, in particular, was more interested in closing off forest reserves, though its operations were essentially defunded, owing to the timing of events like the Great Depression, the revolt of 1936-1939, and the Second World War. Rather than concretely assist the olive industry, the department briefly entertained the encouragement of carob planting in the hills instead, or of expanding olive cultivation in the inhospitable southern areas of Gaza and
Beersheba rather than the traditional heartland in the northern and central Galilean, Samarian, and Judaean hills.

The distribution of olive combs by the Department of Agriculture and Forests, which was a highlight of the mid 1930s assistance to the fellahin, amounted to some 300 combs at a cost of £P.100. Efforts to expand olive planting by the more supportive Department of Agriculture did not come until the postwar period, with the first governmental olive suckers at the experimental station in Nablus expected to be distributed for free to Palestinians in 1949, at which point the British had abdicated the Mandate to the United Nations, the Zionists had triumphed militarily in the war, and the population of Nablus nearly tripled with refugees from the Nakba. A similar example of abortive late-Mandate policy can be found in the area of agricultural education. The Tulkarm Kadoorie School had a limited impact in the first five years after its opening in 1931, after which a student strike in 1936 resulted in its closing for another five years. After 1941 much of its best agricultural land (intended for demonstration plots) continued to be occupied by the military during the war. The population of Tulkarm doubled with the influx of refugees from the Nakba, while the armistice line would cut off farmers from agricultural land to the west as it gradually transformed from a poorly demarcated line on a map into a frontline frontier for skirmishes.

The revolt of 1936 and World War II together illustrated the apex of British ambitions for control of Mandate Palestine. During the revolt, in rural areas, the extension of the military and

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allied Jewish militias marked the high watermark of direct colonial control; however, the resort to repression simultaneously marked both the failure of British policy in general and the total withdrawal of civilian bureaucracy from rural areas, since their safety could not be guaranteed. The crushing of the revolt was followed by a period of relative stability and prosperity for most Palestinians during World War II, as well as an expansion of economic interventions in the rural economy to an unprecedented extent, related to the creation of the Middle East Supply Centre and the provisioning needs of the British military in adjacent theatres. Beyond shipping and export restrictions, wartime bureaucrats attempted to intervene in local markets, though their ambitions typically outstripped their means. Olive commodities, beyond trade controls, were left uncontrolled. Olive presses and groves, though subjected to new levels of supervision, still offered extensive spaces for evasion when it came to inspections, which occurred typically just once per year. Furthermore, as with attempts to implement rationing, the extension of inspections and supervision only increased the colonial government’s dependence on indigenous intermediaries. Unprecedented household economic and nutritional surveys did not encompass most rural villages in the hills. The government was content to count households, enumerated by the local mukhtar and represented solely by the family patriarch. The state could not and did not make intimate incursions into most rural households.

Overall, the need for greater legibility of society and the economy, in terms of statistics in particular, exposed the deficiencies in previous statistical estimates. The more that policymakers sought to control the economy, the more legibility they required. But the growing detail inadvertently exposed further gaps in colonial knowledge and power, and increased the standing
and expanded the role of subalterns. Ultimately, colonial governmentality was an impossible aspiration.

The Departments of Agriculture and Health, under the direction of the heads of government, took periodic interest in reducing the acidity of olive oil and olive oil soap, finally starting to move past the longstanding discourse regarding the irredeemable backwardness of indigenous ways. This had been spurred by the combination of the decline of the Nabulsi soap industry — which the head Colonial Office in London declined to support directly during the Great Depression after it lost its main, longstanding markets in neighboring Arab countries — and by the considerable expansion in olive cultivation that in turn had led to growing surpluses. In the meantime, Palestinians themselves had already begun to mechanize presses and replace older storage methods by importing equipment and tanks from Europe. But since olive cultivation, owing to both its labor-intensive harvest and the marginal impact of irrigation and fertilizers, did not fit the model of modern intensive agriculture, these efforts were often ignored by technical and developmental experts for ideological reasons. However, the marginalization of olive culture during the Mandate could have also simply resulted from the fact that much of the cultivation and processing occurring beyond the eyes of government observers. The most stark example of this occurred during the revolt from 1936-1939, when civilian bureaucrats were unable to visit rural areas entirely. But even at the peak of its wartime control powers in the 1940s, the government still depended on the cooperation of local intermediaries, whether the mukhtar of a village or the individual olive press owner.

The discussion of reorienting the olive sector toward edible oil reflected a shift in priorities caused by World War II: the Jaffa orange was a luxury compared with wartime
materiel, so its shipping space was lost. The priority became domestic supply of food and domestic consumption, again to preserve shipping space. Wartime nutrition in British allies and dominions demanded healthy fats, leading to token efforts to expand exports of olive commodities. However, this priority conflicted with other priorities: shipping space, domestic supplies, and capping consumer prices to limit wartime inflation. For olive producers, global prices spiked to unprecedented levels, incentivizing cultivators to expand, modernize, and otherwise reinvest profits. However, extensive export controls prevented the olive sector from reaping the profits from this moment of opportunity more fully. Producers of specialized products for foreign markets regarded interference by the government in the form of export prohibitions as undue, particularly since trade controls in the form of export limitations remained in place even after the war had ended. This sparked intense protest from Nabulsi and Jaffa olive oil soapmakers and others, whose petitions were largely ignored in the name of domestic consumer protection.

The larger question during the war was how the olive industries, as decentralized as they were, could have been controlled. The government attempted to draw upon its experience and methods of controlling and supervising and supporting the Jaffa orange; however, it quickly discovered that the parallel did not hold for a number of reasons related to the nature of the olive sector. Olives tended to be planted in small, patchwork parcels on difficult-to-access hillsides. On one family plot, individual trees (typically around 9-11 per dunam) could be owned by different individuals, often including women (as a way of divvying up inheritance shares). Marketing methods were sui generis depending on the village or even the villager, with varying degrees of sophistication. But first and foremost, olives were consumed by their producers, with
surpluses bartered or traded in a variety of ways. Regardless of what happened at and after the press, even the planted area under olives remained in dispute. In fact, through the end of the Mandate, the government remained in the dark about basic facts like overall land usage, and the process of real property settlement remained incomplete in much of Palestine’s central hills, which was also the historical demographic center. The government needed special legislation during the war in order to compel press owners to keep logs of how much they pressed annually, yielding the first censuses of the olive oil sector in the 1940s. But the statistical disputes between departments and between specialists like al-Taher showed that disputes remained about annual olive crop yields or even precisely how much land was planted with olives in the first place.

The larger lesson of this and other statistical disagreements is how little the government actually knew about the bulk of its subjects, particularly in rural areas. While the 1936-1939 revolt marked a particularly sharp withdrawal in administrative oversight, even at the high watermark of British control during the Second World War, government statistics remain best interpreted as ideological statements, illustrating what the government and its departments prioritized. In sum, the statistics under interrogation frequently say more about the limits of governmental power, its guiding ideologies, and the image the state desired to project of itself, than anything they were supposed to be measuring.

By the 1930s, crop estimates from the 1920s based on prescriptive tithes had been completely discounted. The paradox of increasing government surveillance is that the more the authorities sought to exert their control, the more potential gaps and possibilities for evasion were opened and exposed. Even at its peak in World War II, the olive press census depended on self-reporting in the form of logbooks kept by the owners of olive presses, which could not be
checked apart from a once-a-year visit. The much-diminished Nablus soap industry offers a potential example of smuggling to evade commodity controls and trade restrictions, as well as tariffs, across the land borders to Mandate Lebanon or Transjordan.

World War II also highlighted the increasing importance of family work chains, as anthropologist Maya Rosenfeld would later identify in the context of the Palestinian refugee camp of Dheisheh near Bethlehem. Male wage labor enabled by wartime military spending supplemented agricultural income, setting a pattern that would continue to intensify across the century: using wage labor to keep the farm going and reinvesting wages back into agriculture, since paid work was frequently seasonal or temporary, related to base construction for example. While Firestone noted the limited emergence of mugharasah contracts in wartime, thanks to the increasing phenomenon of outmigration from villages, the practice seems not to have been widespread enough to come to the attention of the colonial authorities. Regardless, increasingly complex strategies of economic survival by blending wage and nonwage labor to support Palestinian agriculture only became more important after the War of 1948 resulted in the mass displacement of many Palestinians. About a quarter of Palestinian olive groves and their cultivators, concentrated in the Western Galilee, came under Israeli military rule, which will be examined in the next chapter. The other three quarters of Palestinian olive groves, along with the bulk of 1948 refugees, were in what would later be called the West Bank, annexed by Transjordan in 1949, which will be discussed in the fifth chapter.

257 Maya Rosenfeld, Confronting the occupation: work, education, and political activism of Palestinian families in a refugee camp (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014). Rosenfeld was surprised to find that within otherwise conservative families, certain women, particularly the eldest, were willing to forego marriage and thus eliminate the possibility of having children in order to work to support their families. This thereby allowed younger siblings a wider range of possibilities for their life choices, which could include both work and family.
With the establishment of the state of Israel, a quarter of Mandate Palestine’s olives fell under Israeli control. In the early Israeli state period, Palestinians remained subject to continued dispossession and expulsion. In particular, olive trees in the Jaffa, Lydda, and Ramla areas were uprooted, sharing the fate of their owners. In the Galilee — the only area in Israel that retained an Arab majority — olive oil as an almost exclusively Palestinian product was subject to restrictive controls, without enjoying the subsidies and support that Jewish agriculturalists received.

The example of the village of Ramah in the Galilee illustrates the potential for Palestinian resistance, as well as its limits. In the spring of 1952, armed police accompanied by the Israeli military entered the large village of Ramah, less than thirty kilometers east of Acre in northern Israel, attempting to seize olive oil from its stocks. Israel’s food controller had earlier issued a requisition order for the oil at the state-set official price, fixed well below market value on the grounds that the crop had been “frozen” in 1950. After the villagers refused to sell their oil at a crippling loss, the requisition order became an order of confiscation. The police and military who came to enforce the measure met with physical resistance from the men and women of Ramah,

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resulting in injuries on both sides. 44 villagers were arrested and brought before the Military Court in Acre, where they were released on bail pending trial.²

The famed Palestinian lawyer and Communist Party member Hanna Naqqarah — who had in fact been born in Ramah in 1912, and spent the first seven years of his life there³ — took up the case. He filed a lawsuit disputing the legality of the requisition order, and argued the case before the Israeli High Court of Justice. The High Court’s decision found not only the police and military use of force unwarranted, but also the confiscation of Ramah’s olive oil illegal in the first place.⁴ Rebutting the government’s invocation of the (Emergency) Defence Regulation of 1944 in its defense, the court ruled that the legislation conferred no right to use force. In addition to these legal proceedings, Palestinians in Israel mobilized to express their vehement objection to Israeli officials directly. Telegrams and letters of protest in solidarity with the people of Ramah and expressing dismay at the situation poured in from around Israel — and particularly from two of the remaining Palestinian urban centers, Haifa and Nazareth.⁵

The geography of the Palestinians who remained in Israel is important to note here. In rural areas, Palestinians were clustered in villages of the western Galilee and what used to be known as the “Little Triangle,” today simply called the “Triangle” (in Arabic al-muthallath, or haMeshulash in Hebrew). In urban areas, only parts of Haifa and all of Nazareth retained

² Ibid.
⁴ “Situation and treatment of Arabs.” TNA FO 371/98789-0012.
substantial Palestinian populations. Of the roughly 156,000 Palestinians estimated by the new State of Israel to have remained within its boundaries officially, around 80 percent were formerly villagers.

But in the end, the vocal support of other Palestinians and the High Court’s favorable judgment did little to help the villagers who had been arrested: the Acre Military Court paid no heed to the superior court’s ruling and tried the defendants on charges of assaulting and resisting the police. At the conclusion of the trial on 19 August 1952, 41 of the original 44 charged were convicted and sentenced to prison terms of one to six months and to fines of £50 to £200.

In the early years following the establishment of Israel, a number of state-sponsored companies were set up with monopolies on the trade of specific agricultural products. Farmers were compelled to sell their products to those enterprises at government-set prices under requisition orders, and those who failed to comply risked having their products confiscated, as occurred in Ramah. Furthermore, official policy required that Palestinian farmers be paid 16 to

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6 The percentage of Palestinians living in urban localities declined from 36 percent in 1946 to 26 percent in 1951, owing to the destruction or repopulation of Arab Palestinian neighborhoods in formally mixed urban areas such as in Haifa, Jaffa, and West Jerusalem. Charles S. Kamen, “After the Catastrophe I: The Arabs in Israel, 1948-51,” Middle Eastern Studies 23:4 (Oct. 1987), 457 and 463.


8 “Situation and treatment of Arabs.” TNA FO 371/98789-0012.

9 Ibid.

10 Sabri Jiryis, The Arabs in Israel, trans. Inea Bushnaq (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976), 215. According to Jiryis, the dominant agricultural company was Bustan al-Jalil (Garden of Galilee), which had an obvious conflict of interest when purchasing Palestinian goods, since its controlling shares and administration were held by organizations that marketed Jewish agricultural products. Jiryis argues that the monopolies essentially intended to block the
17 percent less for their products than Jewish Israeli farmers, under the pretext that it cost less to
grow food in “Arab villages.”11 Spurred by the debacle over the Ramah incident, the Knesset
took up the question of the confiscation of the Ramah olive oil harvest on 6 August 1952.12 One
week after the Knesset debate, these discriminatory price controls were officially abolished,
although discriminatory practices continued in other, less obvious ways.13

Instead, as this chapter will show, discrimination could work along implicitly racial lines,
rather than explicitly racial ones. The olive sector — a predominantly “Arab” crop — enjoyed
little support from the state in the early Israeli period, especially in comparison to other
agricultural sectors. It was not until the mid 1960s that an olive production and marketing board
was set up, shortly before the Military Administration of Palestinian citizens of Israel ended in
1966. Despite continuous requests for help from Palestinian olive cultivators beginning in the
late 1950s, this separate, parallel institution was not established for over a decade after the
Ramah confiscation, 15 years after the Nakba, at which point the damage to the Palestinian olive
sector had already long been wrought, with trees uprooted and land confiscations made
permanent by post-facto legislation.

development of Arab agriculture, leaving Jewish agriculture to develop while the Arab sector remained “frozen.”

11 The most commonly cited (and disingenuous) justification for this argument was that
Palestinian citizens of Israel paid lower taxes than Jewish Israelis (or no taxes at all). See for
example 7 May 1952, Knesset Debates, 1946, cited in Jiryis, 281 fn 47. Considering that the
state typically provided its Palestinian citizens with few, if any, services at the time, while Jewish
Israelis benefited from state largesse such as goods via ration coupons and various subsidies, the
trade-off was (at the very best) a wash for the Palestinians.


13 Minister of Agriculture Peretz Naphtali, 13 August 1952, Knesset Debates, 2923, cited

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This chapter seeks to bridge the catastrophic rupture of 1948 to the 1950s and the 1960s in order to trace the changing relationship between ordinary Palestinian olive cultivators in the Galilee and the Israeli state. In contrast with studies that center on the continued expulsion of Palestinians and extension of control over land by the state and state-supported actors in the aftermath of the Nakba, this chapter examines those Palestinians who stayed on their land and how they responded to Israeli agricultural and food control policies that they saw as discriminatory to the point of being existential threats. Beyond analysis of Israeli state policy toward olive growers and olive oil producers, I have sought to highlight the voices of Palestinians from the time, preserved in the Israel State Archive. These previously unexamined, typically Arabic-language sources offer examples of Palestinian resistance to the Israeli state’s practices of confiscation and discrimination in the early years; and later they help to illustrate Palestinian strategies of contestation and cooperation as Israeli bureaucrats gradually began to incorporate their “good Arabs” into state institutions.

In this chapter, I seek to answer the following questions: What was the relationship of the Palestinians in the Galilee to their new state, which sought to claim them in some ways while simultaneously rejecting them (whether actively or passively) in others? What strategies did these new Palestinian citizens of Israel use in the face of a discriminatory political regime? What kinds of claims did they make, and how? How successful were these strategies? All of these questions were vital and sensitive throughout the 20th century and remain so today, as the relationships between Palestinians inside the Green Line (marking the 1949 armistice between Israel and neighboring countries) and those outside the Green Line (particularly the occupied Palestinian territories) and beyond (the diaspora) frequently remain tangled and in some ways
tenuous.\textsuperscript{14} The overt political activism of Palestinians inside the Green Line since the 1970s (especially in the face of Israeli government efforts to Judaize the Galilee via settlements in the 1980s) is readily apparent.\textsuperscript{15} But what kinds of subtler, everyday forms of resistance politics did Palestinians in Israel practice prior to demonstrations like the Land Day Protest of 1976?

Using the experiences of olive-cultivating Palestinians in the Galilee as a case study, I examine the fundamental tension between state hegemony and nonstate actors’ resistance to and overall agency in shaping policy. The study of state policy typically focuses on the politicians and bureaucrats that set it. Scholars typically attempt to assess the intentions of state officials, as well as their successes or failures. Israeli policy, particularly that targeting the so-called Arab minority, has been the object of considerable research in recent years,\textsuperscript{16} much of which has suggested that state policy was hegemonic, as thoroughly penetrating all of society, leaving little room for a substantial analysis of resistance.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} See, for example, Helena Lindholm Schulz and Juliane Hammer, \textit{The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland} (London: Routledge, 2003).


\textsuperscript{17} For a concise discussion on the complexities of analyzing Israeli hegemony and Palestinian resistance in the context of the early years of the state, see Hillel Cohen, \textit{Good Arabs: The Israeli Security Agencies and the Israeli Arabs, 1948–1967} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 151. Cohen notes: “The existing scholarship’s overly tight focus on the state’s system of oversight and control ignores resistance to it. This approach is based on a tacit assumption that the Palestinians living in Israel were mainly objects to be maneuvered by the state, without any self-awareness or agency on their part.”
I argue that scholars who work primarily from the state archive—as I do—can often risk falling into what I would call a trap of Foucauldian governmentality: taking at face value the state’s claims to hegemony in the papers of its archives, and viewing the state as omniscient and omnipotent as a result.\textsuperscript{18} My aim is to try to read against the grain of the state’s files, looking for the moments when state policy fails or stumbles.\textsuperscript{19} In its documentation, the state seeks to depict itself as the guard in Foucault’s panopticon: seemingly always watching and thereby transforming its subjects into self-disciplined/governing individuals. Against this strong notion of hegemony, which in historical narratives risks making the state seem like the main or even sole actor with agency, I seek to refocus attention on nonstate actors by adopting a loose, relatively “weak” definition of resistance, with an emphasis on the everyday. My research shows that Palestinians often adopted the standard strategies of evasion outlined by James C. Scott:\textsuperscript{20} foot-dragging and other subterfuges to avoid the state and its control, which were often easier to deploy in rural areas removed from the center of power. The Palestinians of the Galilee, in particular, used long-standing direct and indirect strategies of dealing with the state that would be familiar to scholars of both the Ottoman and the British Mandate periods: namely, they avoided state attention when it served their interests, and occasionally petitioned authorities for help in resolving local issues or for relief from detrimental state policies. And when methods such as petitions or negotiations failed, they defended their property, as the villagers in Ramah

\textsuperscript{18} On hegemony, see Gramsci, op. cit.; on governmentality and the Panopticon, see Foucault, various, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{20} Scott, \textit{Weapons of the Weak}, op. cit.
did, once the state threatened their livelihoods directly. As the Ramah case shows, however, the game was in many ways rigged: in spite of the law being on their side, resisting even manifestly illegal orders was a risky proposition for these Palestinian villagers.

After the war of 1947–48 and the advent of the new state, Palestinians in Israel adapted to their circumstances, articulating their interests and making demands on the new state insofar as its policies provided the space to do so. When their interests were threatened, they resisted in a variety of ways, circumventing or directly protesting policies they viewed as injurious. As this chapter will show, they also pressed the government through both top public officials and local bureaucrats: requesting meetings and permits, writing letters and telegrams, filing court cases, and demanding the formation of Knesset subcommittees or advisory councils to represent their interests. Since the Israeli government offered the veneer of equal citizenship, Palestinians in Israel used their newly bestowed citizen status to press their claims. While many may have found Israeli citizenship distasteful, they soon began to use it as another tool to frame and legitimize their claims and demands, which were mainly about the mundane day-to-day of sustaining oneself and one’s family economically. What becomes very clear in this examination are the ways in which even the basic rules were set without their consultation and how they struggled (and continue to struggle) to change those rules. The example of olive cultivation in the Galilee shows just one way that this struggle has played out in everyday life.

In summary, this chapter deals with the experiences of Palestinians in the Galilee under Israeli rule, beginning first with a brief overview of some of the key Israeli institutional and legal frameworks within which they needed to work as the Israeli state matured and became
consolidated in the 1950s. An examination of the context and aftermath of the Ramah confiscation and protests illustrates the complexities of contestation and resistance, which resulted in open conflict with Israeli security services. This seems to have been the exception rather than the rule. The counterexample of the village of Makr shows how some Palestinians chose to collaborate, especially when their personal interests aligned with the broader interests of their community. Other rural Palestinians drew upon the wide range of evasive tactics that they had long employed against adverse state policies, extending back through the British Mandate and into the Ottoman period, as well as practices of direct petitioning.

Palestinians were not the only ones to draw upon the legacies of the past, however, as the Israeli state and bureaucrats selectively inherited and adopted the laws and regulations of the British Mandate and the Ottoman Empire, often altering them in their application — as the HCJ decision would turn on a technicality in how the wartime defense regulations were supposed to be employed. Effective, resilient Palestinian contestation of policy eventually resulted in substantial changes: the elimination of olive oil price controls in the mid 1950s, and the establishment of parallel state institutions that would theoretically offer support for the olive sector. The last section of this chapter documents the gradual, cautious change in the relationship between many of the Palestinians of the Galilee and Israeli state officials beginning in the late 1950s and culminating in the early to mid 1960s, just prior to the end of military rule in 1966 and the radical changes wrought by the 1967 war.
1. Contextualizing Palestinian olive production: early Israeli labor and food control policy, the 1958 law of limitations, and debates over ending military rule in the 1950s and 1960s

In the period after 1948, two new and divergent categories of Palestinians were created by political events: Israeli Arabs, and Palestinian refugees. The Palestinian Nakba preceded the creation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and thus Palestinian refugees hosted in certain countries have been called “unprotected,” since UNHCR has no jurisdiction to intervene on their behalf. However, just as today, the distinction between internal displacement and displacement across a border left the internally displaced perhaps even more vulnerable than those eligible for UNRWA registration. This was particularly true in Israel, where some internally displaced villagers fought tenaciously for decades through nonviolent protests and the legal system to return to their homes (such as the cases of Kefr Bir‘m and Iqrit), ultimately without success. Internally displaced Palestinians were unceremoniously dispossessed of their rights with the oxymoronic and euphemistic label “present absentees,” while others, especially in the early years after 1948, were simply deported and made outright refugees. Palestinians who

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21 See for example the case of Palestinian refugees hosted in Egypt, subject to a “protection gap” under international law: Oroub El-Abed, Unprotected: Palestinians in Egypt since 1948 (Washington DC: Institute of Palestine Studies, 2009).

22 Shira Robinson, Citizen Strangers: Palestinians and the Birth of Israel’s Liberal Settler State (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 31 and 76, estimates that internally displaced persons (present absentees) constituted between 15-20 percent of the remaining Palestinian Arab population, which she puts at roughly 100,000 prior to the absorption of the Little Triangle. On the problems of Israel’s first census and its manipulation to miscount or skip undesirable and vulnerable categories of the Palestinian Arab population, such as Bedouin in the southern Negev region, see 72-74. Although not a perfectly parallel category, Robinson, 111, estimates that the number of stateless, paperless Palestinians had tripled by the late 1960s to around 60,000 people, around one fifth of the official Arab population.

had managed to remain in their homes within the 1948 armistice lines were subject to a separate military government until 1966. Israeli martial law, and divide-and-rule governance strategies through things like intentionally byzantine systems of permits, fomented divisions, increased dependency on the state, and imposed deprivation on most Palestinians — while the lucky, well-connected few could substantial rewards for cooperating with the state.

All too often, 1948 in effect signals either the beginning or the end of Palestinian history — as if Palestinians simply ceased to exist under conquest and in exile or as if the Nakba heralded their birth, their foundational moment. In particular, 1948 marks the inception of the term “Israeli Arabs,” a classification suggesting that this newfound minority had experienced no history before the creation of the state of Israel. The term, imposed by the Israeli government, does many things, among them to deny the existence of Palestinians and their national aspirations. Paradoxically, it also claims as Israeli citizens those Palestinians who remained on

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23 See Robinson, *Citizen Strangers*.

24 See Cohen, *Good Arabs*.

their land, legitimizing Israeli democracy with the sheen of equality for all, even potentially hostile minorities.  

The year 1948 did not mark the end of what the Palestinians refer to as the Nakba (catastrophe), since their dispossession and expulsion within Israeli territory continued. In the early years of the state, the perpetual threat of expulsion was an oppressive aspect of everyday life for the Palestinians that remained on their land, with Israel successfully expelling many who had not left the country during the 1947–48 hostilities and preventing the return of the greatest number of refugees possible. While the Nakba and the experience of exile are rightfully the primary focus of Palestinian historiography in this era, the set of legislative and legal transformations occurring throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s also deserves attention as Israel sought to make the effects of the catastrophe indelible. One of the many ways to make permanent the purportedly temporary possession of lands seized by force was through the Israeli legal system, which legitimized the claims of Israeli settlers and transformed native Palestinian landholders and tenant farmers into trespassers on what was once their own land. The consensus in the secondary literature is that, with the possible exception of the Galilee, the

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26 Robinson, *Citizen Strangers*, has relabeled what Ben Gurion called a “War on Infiltration” as more accurately a broader “War on Return;” see especially chap. 3, “Citizenship as a Category of Exclusion,” 68–112.
27 Ibid., particularly 74-90.
process of legalizing land seizure was largely complete by 1955, thanks to the Absentee Property Law of 1950 and the Land Acquisition Law of 1953.\textsuperscript{30}

Another method Israel used to make the effects of the 1947–48 war permanent was to either demolish villages or repopulate with Jewish settlers localities whose native populations had fled or been expelled — actions intended to prevent refugees from returning to their homes.\textsuperscript{31} Palestinians displaced in the Nakba took up (what they thought would be) temporary residence in various locations, with many crossing to Jordanian-controlled territory in search of safety. The responses and strategies of the newly made West Bankers in the Jordanian period will be examined in the next chapter.

The early years of the Israeli state saw an initial massive drop in olive production, which reflected broader agricultural and economic trends as Palestinians confronted the loss of crops and land, which Israel appropriated in its struggle to absorb new Jewish immigrants, as well as a state apparatus that vacillated between half-hearted promises of equality and outright hostility toward its newly made Arab minority.

In Israeli-controlled territories, newly landless former peasants faced a process of gradual proletarianization, resorting to wage labor to supplement or replace lost agricultural income. In the spring of 1953, the Histadrut (Israel’s national trade union center) allowed Arabs to join for the first time ever, with the caveat that they had to leave the Arab Workers Congress, associated

\textsuperscript{30} Kedar, “The Legal Transformation of Ethnic Geography,” 949.

\textsuperscript{31} Kamen, “After the Catastrophe I,” 491.
with the communists. Within Israel, groves that fell within closed “security” zones, such as along the armistice line with the West Bank, were harvested by Palestinian wage laborers for the benefit of the Israeli state, which devolved control of confiscated lands to the Custodian of Absentee Property. In some cases, newly expanded kibbutzim paid Palestinian laborers to harvest the olive trees that the same Palestinians had used to own prior to the Nakba. But in most cases, the kibbutzim simply uprooted the olive trees and replanted with other crops that enjoyed better state and parastate support.

In the earliest period of the Israeli state, authorities focused their attention on central areas: Lod, Ramlah, Jaffa, and Jerusalem. Olive orchards taken over by the state in these areas seem to have been subsequently abandoned, ignored, or uprooted — or their production was marginal enough to evade government oversight. The food controller recorded no olive oil production for the “south” or “Jerusalem” areas for the first six seasons of the state. According

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33 Z. Rapaport, Fruit Trees and Vine Department, to S. Zagurski, Custodian of Abandoned Property, Department of Villages, Yafo [Jaffa], “Daily picking of olives in Jerusalem area [in Hebrew],” 15 October 1948. ISA G-2194/21, 97.0.2.1498, “Hanhala – masiq zayt [Management – olive harvest],” Document 5. Around 2,000-3,000 pickers for the “abandoned” groves in areas around Jerusalem were estimated to be required by Halperin and Rapaport in May/June 1949.


35 The Jerusalem area was recorded as producing 68 tons in 1954/1955; the entire south was recorded as producing around 200 tons in both 1953/54 and 1954/55 (see next page for
to the records for olive oil manufacturing maintained by the Israeli state’s food inspectors, the bulk of remaining olive oil production in Israel centered on the Palestinian population centers of the Western Galilee: Haifa, Shf‘am, Acre, and Nazareth. The remainder of olive oil produced in Israel came from the Little Triangle ceded by Jordan under the 1949 armistice, and to a lesser extent the Eastern Galilee (Tiberias and Safad).

**Graph 5. Olive oil annual production in Israel in metric tons, 1947-1955**

In sum, the Israeli food supervision authorities documented around 1,000 tons of annual olive oil production in the late 1940s, and 2,000-3,000 tons annually in the mid 1950s — down to the quarter kilogram, and broken down by village in their extensive files. What this level of detail disguised, however, was that literally tons of olive oil were unaccounted for or produced outside of government supervision entirely. In fact, the increase from the late 1940s level of production to the mid 1950s level is possibly more an indication of the growing sophistication of the Israeli bureaucracy and its penetration of Arab-Palestinian olive producing sectors of the Western Galilee; yet, as with the wartime British statistics, the more that the government sought to document the rural economy in detail, the more gaps and flaws in its hegemony were exposed.

The same bureaucrat who produced the statistics (translated and converted into the above charts), Carmi’ali, had personally led the Ramah confiscation, spurred in large part by rumors of

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Ibid. Both Graphs 5 and 6 created by the author on the basis of the document’s data.
widespread smuggling within the Galilee from villages to urban centers. As the food supervision authorities sought to document the sector in ever greater detail, the more they realized how little they knew. Ultimately, the government would give up on controlling the price of olive oil after years of contestation and complaints by Palestinian producers in particular. In the late 1950s, years of successive droughts left cultivators vulnerable, who increasingly sought state assistance, which would lead to cautious cooperation between Palestinians and state institutions in the early 1960s.

Debate over the 1958 law of limitations: implications for “present absentees” and olive planting

Although the bulk of the land taken by the Israeli state occurred early on, the 1958 law of limitations (which provided statutes of limitations for a wide variety of legal issues) had peculiar implications for landholders. The initial draft demanded 50 years of continuous cultivation in order to prove possession by usage rights (usufruct). 38 A Palestinian lawyer from Haifa named Elias Koussa wrote in protest first to the Knesset legislative committee and then to the minister of justice, noting this law would adversely affect 30 villages in the Galilee and a few villages in the Little Triangle, all with Arab populations, where property rights were primarily based on continuous possession and cultivation rather than Ottoman deeds, which peasants had regarded with suspicion and sought to evade for a variety of reasons, including avoidance of taxes. 39

38 Elias Koussa (Haifa attorney) to Knesset legislative committee, 14 July 1957. TNA FO 1022/6 “Arab minority in Israel” [Haifa consulate correspondence], 1957.
39 Koussa to Minister of Justice, Jerusalem, 23 July 1957, page 1. TNA FO 1022/6 “Arab minority in Israel” [Haifa consulate correspondence], 1957.

On page 3, Koussa listed the villages in the triangle as Umm al-Fahm, Baqa al-Gharbiyeh, and Jatt. In the Western Galilee, he listed [sic] Tamra, Deir Hanna, Kaboul, Shaʿab, Sakhneen, Ṣarrabeh, Jdeida, Makr, Kafr Yaseef, Yanouh, Kisra, Beit Jan, Buqaiʿa, Hurfeish, 282
such cases, the villagers would need to find reliable witnesses; however, to find credible individuals over the age of 70 who would attest to many decades of unbroken tending to the land would be extremely difficult, bordering on “impossible to produce any oral evidence to prove continuous possession and cultivation for the inordinately long period of 50 years, except where the land is planted with old olive trees.” The law was modified and passed in the spring of 1958 with a 15-year stipulation for land with no title, and 20 years required if the title was registered in someone else’s name.

The passage of the 1958 law of limitations caught external attention as well, with protests (likely originating in the Israeli communist press) echoed by the Arab League, which claimed in a memo that 250,000 more dunams of Arab-owned land could be confiscated under the new law. Commentary by the British embassy in Tel Aviv suggested that the picture was not quite as bleak as that; however, the present absentees in Israel had a number of grounds to complain that they were being targeted. Ottoman law, confirmed by Mandatory legislation, had previously limited the prescribed period of continuous cultivation to 10 years. By changing it to 15 or 20 years, depending on the status of the land in question, the new law essentially made it impossible for present absentees to claim the land that they had cultivated since 1948. By the end of 1958, the Israeli development authority had acquired a further 57,000 dunams under the new

Fasouta, Mi‘lya, Tursheba, Deir al Asad, Bi‘eneh, Majd al Kurum, Nahf, Sejour, Al Rameh, ‘Ein al Asad, and Al Bineh.

40 Ibid.
41 Arab League memorandum, “Arab minority in Israel: Israel aims at confiscating Arab-owned lands,” TNA FO 371/142401 “Arab minorities in Israel” VR 1821/1, 1959.

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law, which compounded the difficulties faced by present absentee under the 1953 acquisition of land law.\(^{43}\)

While the 1958 law required the government to offer compensation, it provided a number of specific criteria: the land must be agricultural, it must be the claimant’s main source of income, and the claimant must have no other land. Under these circumstances, the development authority by mid 1958 had paid claimants £4 million (equivalent to 800,000 British pounds sterling at the time) and offered 20,000 dunams of alternative land.\(^{44}\) By March 1960, these figures would not increase much further: 3,000 claims had been settled for a total of £6,750,000 and 28,000 dunams — so less than half the amount of land confiscated by December 1958.\(^{45}\)

Furthermore, the claimants argued that the compensation was inadequate. If there was no mutual agreement on the value of the land, the district court initially passed judgment unilaterally, though later disputes were delegated to public committees. In addition, Palestinian citizens of Israel argued that the land registration system under the Mandate was inadequate to establish title in any case. Thus, the extension (of the period of time under continuous cultivation needed to claim rights under usufruct) did not need to be 50 years as originally proposed. An extension of more than 10 years, as was made law, sufficed in order to extend back into the Mandate period from the date of passage on 27 March 1958 and potentially impede Palestinian land claims. For present absentee, the new law meant that not only would they forfeit their

\(^{43}\) Ibid.

\(^{44}\) Ibid.

claims to the land they cultivated before 1948, but also the land they had cultivated since being uprooted.

**Debates over ending military rule in the late 1950s**

The escalating pressure on present absentees coincided with mounting pressure for the abolition or at least relaxation of the military government over “Israeli Arabs,” to the point that Prime Minister David Ben Gurion during his second term in 1958 had to appoint a special ministerial committee to examine the issue (though a similar step in March 1956 had led to nothing at a lower level, citing the excuse of “security reasons”). Moderates like Teddy Kollek suggested granting exemptions or reducing areas of applicability, in a bow to actual practice. Kollek noted that the pass and curfew system was “largely ineffective” especially in the border villages, claiming that during a visit to a border village near Tulkarm that the streets were full of visitors from nearby villages across the armistice line with Jordan. After 15 months of deliberation, the ministerial committee produced two reports in early August 1959. The majority report composed of ministers of a variety of parties “urged complete abolition of the Military Government” in less than two months, to be replaced with a type of blacklist of “dangerous individuals” and further safeguards against infiltration. The minority report by two

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47 Ibid. Kollek also claimed the same went for Jordan, with the British embassy relaying the following: “Incidentally you may be amused to hear that Mr. Ben Artzi, the Managing Director of El Al, told one of us recently that he had visited Jericho incognito, but in the company of Jordanian friends, only a year and a half ago. He had met his friends abroad and found no difficulty in getting in and out of Jordan on an ordinary airline”
Mapai ministers (representing the ruling party) instead recommended a slight relaxation of travel restrictions, which the Ben Gurion cabinet promptly adopted.

This minor revision retained the military government, still operating on the basis of World War II-era defense regulations, as well as nighttime curfews and required permits for stays away from places of residence. The new exception was to allow “free movement during daylight between the Arab villages in Galilee and the triangle on the one hand, and the neighboring towns, including Acre, Haifa and Tel Aviv, on the other,” though restrictions would remain in place for border villages. The military government remained a regular presence through the early 1960s for Palestinian citizens of Israel, restricting movement and employment. Beyond the elimination of town-to-town passes, little movement toward abolition would occur over the next five years. 49 Thus, more than two decades after the end of World War II, the Israeli state continued to impose wartime-era emergency regulations exclusively on its “Arab” minority.

49 John Beith, British Embassy Tel Aviv, “Subject: the arab minority in Israel: Mr. Eshkol was encouraged toward relaxation of Military Government restrictions governing Arab population; no-one to represent effectively the Arab community point of view; no immediate prospect of a change of attitude toward Arab minority,” 5 August 1964, page 1. TNA FO 371/175854 “Arab minority in Israel” VR 1821/2, 1964. The British blamed corrupt and ineffective political leadership, positing the need for “interlocuteurs valables,” a slogan taken from the French liberals in the 1950s who had called for contact with Algerian nationalists. The British named the (deathly ill) Moshe Sharrett and Abba Eban as Israeli speakers of Arabic who could communicate with the Arab minority. Beith also noted, however, the immediate suppression of El Ard [the Land], an Arab nationalist political party, suggesting the Israeli government was not willing to allow any organized Arab politics with a nationalist tinge.
2. Olive cultivation in the Galilee circa 1948: the legacy of wartime price controls in austerity Israel

It is essential to note that Israeli price control policies also drew on a recent colonial legacy, as Israeli officials would cite British wartime regulations as legal justification for their own measures. As the previous chapter explored, going into World War II the British Mandate government had imposed price controls on agricultural commodities. Olives and olive oil were notable exceptions, which were not directly price controlled; however, they were subject to export restrictions. Government-set prices for other crops initially offered a brief respite to an Arab Palestinian agricultural sector still recovering from the aftermath of the Great Depression, and from the violent suppression of the 1936 strike and subsequent three-year revolt, which had been especially devastating to the countryside.\(^{50}\) With the end of World War II, price protections were lifted altogether, a measure that had double-edged consequences when combined with other wartime instruments such as the export bans that had hurt specialized olive commodity producers.\(^{51}\)

As World War II progressed, the Mandate government banned the export of all commodities deemed wartime necessities. The prohibition meant that olive farmers in Palestine were unable to take advantage of the massive spike in global olive oil prices from about 45 Palestinian pounds (P£) per ton in 1939 to between P£200 and P£300 per ton in 1945.\(^{52}\) This


\(^{52}\) A Survey of Palestine, vol. 1, 314.
export ban overwhelmingly affected Arab Palestinians. As a result of the Mandate’s rationing and price control policies, olive oil producers were mostly unable to take advantage of elevated wartime prices abroad, effectively depriving them of additional potential profits.

Israel embraced the use of certain wartime measures in the wake of the establishment of the state. Resource poor and cash strapped while attempting to absorb waves of new immigrants, the Israeli state went through a period of tsesta, austerity, in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Israeli authorities worried that in the meantime their new Arab minority remained spiritually, culturally, and economically in touch with the Arab world across the armistice lines — thus by extension remaining a potential fifth column — while the newborn state struggled to survive and feed its new people. For example, Israeli authorities complained in early 1951 of rampant smuggling of currency and goods. Specifically, they were concerned that currency was moving out of Israel, while “Arab clothing, coffee and other special commodities which Israeli does not

53 Ibid. For the full assessment of complications and divergent calculations of planted area by the end of the war, please see the previous chapter. In brief A Survey of Palestine noted the olive was the unparalleled and principal fruit tree of Palestine by the end of World War II based on statistics circa 1944/1945, judging by a planted area of 600,000, 90 percent of which was fruit-bearing — that is, productive and under cultivation — and almost 100 percent “Arab”-owned. Non-Arab ownership was given as approximately 1 percent. Assessments by al-Taher covering the post-war years put the planted area considerably higher by 1946/1947, nearing 750,000 total dunams under olives.

54 Global olive oil prices had skyrocketed, especially for the Allies, because almost all of the olive-producing Mediterranean was controlled or occupied by the Axis powers (with the few exceptions of smaller producers like Cyprus, Palestine, and neutral Turkey). Spain, Vichy France, French Colonial North Africa (most significantly Tunisia and Algeria), Italy, and Greece were all under Axis control. Thus, while Palestinian olive producers enjoyed stable prices domestically, they could not export abroad, depriving them of enormous potential profits at the time, though based on al-Taher’s work, it does not seem to have dissuaded a further expansion of planting in the immediate postwar period.

produce,” were being smuggled in. As the next chapter will show, nonviolent crossings of the armistice line were frequent in the early years, constituting well over 90 percent of all such reported border violations. The reason that the authorities objected so vehemently was because Israel had instituted stringent currency and export controls. Israeli production, agricultural or otherwise, that could be exported abroad would thereby generate badly needed hard currency. Illegally moving currency out of while bringing Arab-produced goods into Israel was a multifold threat: Israel lost the currency paid to foreign producers or traders, in the process giving currency to the “enemy,” while suffering multiple opportunity costs, such as smuggled foreign goods forestalling the need for Palestinians in Israel to buy Israeli substitutes. Beyond exports, the other resource immediately available to the Israeli state was formerly Palestinian property.

In the aftermath of the Nakba, the Israeli state established the Custodian of Absentee Property to administer lands seized from so-called absent Palestinians, those that had been expelled or fled during the 1947–48 hostilities. As relayed by the press, in 1949 the Custodian’s office reported that it had taken over 223,000 dunams of formerly “Arab”-owned orchards as a result of the initial Palestinian exodus, including 85,000 dunams of citrus plantations (nearly all of the orange groves around Jaffa were taken over by Jewish cultivators after the Nakba) and 80,000 dunams of olive groves. However, in privately cited statistics, the figures were much

56 K. Helen, British Legation Tel Aviv, to Minister Bevin, “Mr. D. Balfour’s report on treatment of Arabs in Israel,” 5 January 1951, despatch no. 5, page 5. FO 371/91708, “Reports on treatments of Arabs in Israel ER 1016/1,” 1951. The Israelis were particularly concerned about cross-border contact in the Little Triangle. A British official in the embassy in Tel Aviv concurred: “it is a fact that the Arab population as a whole is in touch economically and spiritually with the Arab world outside.”

57 Other kinds of fruit cultivation, such as vineyards and fig trees, comprised the rest. Haaretz, 6 January 1949, cited in Jiryis 259 fn 37. Beginning in the Mandate period, a dunam was standardized as 1,000 square meters.
higher, with the Custodian reporting control of 100,000 dunams of abandoned olive plantations by the summer of 1948, and of more than two-thirds of all citrus and olive plantations by 1951.\textsuperscript{58}

Uncultivated land was subject to an ongoing process of confiscation, legalized piecemeal throughout the 1950s, aided by restrictions on Palestinian movement that was subject to a separate military government. After 1948, Palestinians remaining in Israel were largely immobilized by these restrictions on “Arab” travel through a byzantine system of permits which narrowed life to the individual village or locality, and empowered (and perhaps corrupted) local intermediaries who were willing to cooperate with the new authorities. With “Arab” localities also placed under military administration (until 1966), the restrictions on movement meant that villages could potentially become isolated from one another, and from the outside.\textsuperscript{59} Most Palestinians stayed in their home localities, but in rural areas the mostly subsistence-level villages faced the added burden of hosting a minority of internally displaced refugees, who were now effectively both homeless and landless, since their own villages had been depopulated and either repopulated with Jewish Israelis or razed.\textsuperscript{60} With Jewish settlements illegally appropriating agricultural lands of the remaining Palestinian localities in the Galilee — and the military authorities designating as military areas the lands of depopulated villages whose inhabitants had fled — the amount of land that Palestinian agriculturalists could access for cultivation was still further reduced. In many instances, villagers owned land in several localities but because of the

\textsuperscript{58} Michael R. Fischbach, \textit{Records of Dispossession: Palestinian Refugee Property and the Arab-Israeli Conflict} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 35. The difference between the publicly reported figures and the figures circulating internally in the government reflects the chaotic circumstances of the time, since the Custodian took over so much property all at once, and in many cases the very use of the property was simultaneously changing on the ground, such as when orchards were uprooted and the land repurposed.

\textsuperscript{59} Kamen, “After the Catastrophe I,” 463.

\textsuperscript{60} Kamen, “After the Catastrophe II,” 90.
restrictions on movement, their own lands became inaccessible to them, pushing a growing number to become dependent on wage labor for subsistence. While they were able to make use of the agricultural skills that had provided them with a living before (such as olive-picking), they increasingly no longer owned the land they worked.\(^6^1\) In 1955, approximately 49 percent of Israel’s Palestinian citizens remained engaged in agriculture but by 1971, this proportion had fallen to 22 percent,\(^6^2\) with the result that more Palestinian-owned land went untilled, making it further susceptible to seizure. By 1964, almost two-thirds of the land owned by Palestinian citizens of Israel at the time of the Nakba had been confiscated by the Israeli state.\(^6^3\)

Theoretically, Palestinians in Israel had two legal avenues of recourse against illegal land confiscations: appeals to the relevant bureaucratic authorities — particularly in the form of the short-lived Minorities Minister post, later subsumed under the Prime Minister in the position of his or her Arab Affairs Advisor — and possible recourse to the legal system in the form of the courts. As in the Ramah case, the difficulty was not necessarily in finding a favorable judgment, once the courts were successfully navigated. The real issue, as the villagers of Kafr Bir‘im and Iqrit would find in subsequent decades, was in enforcing the ruling on the ground.

In January 1951, in response to questions about the treatment of the Arab minority in Israel, the Arab Affairs Advisor to the Prime Minister Joshua Palmon quoted to a British

\[^{61}\] Kamen, “After the Catastrophe II,” 91.


\[^{63}\] This figure excludes the unceremoniously seized lands of both 1948 refugees and the internally displaced “present absentees,” as well as the very small number of returnees. Robinson, *Citizen Strangers*, 258 fn 139. The Israeli state had expropriated almost half of all “Arab Israeli”-owned land in 1953–1954 as an intentional “strike at [their] tottering land base.” Ibid., 150, citing Ian Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State: Israel’s Control of a National Minority* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980), 171.
diplomat a recent judgment in favor of a Palestinian seeking restitution of his land. The land in question comprised the central dining room of a kibbutz newly established in the Western Galilee. Palmon’s point was that even the most ideologically sensitive locales would be subject to the rule of law, as kibbutzim were typically designed with the communal eating area at its very heart, at the center of the settlement. However, the British diplomat investigated Palmon’s story, and found independently that the judgment was not carried out, and would likely continue to be ignored with impunity.\textsuperscript{64} In response to questions as to why Arab citizens did not raise lawsuits against illegal practices, Palmon blamed the “supineness of the Arab character, the Arab’s ‘oriental’ conception of justice, and so on” without noting the wide variety of factors inhibiting litigation that the British representative judged to be commonsensical: “the slowness and great expense of litigation, the intimidation sometimes practiced against a litigant or his advocate; and above all the practical impossibility of getting the police to implement a decision involving forcible eviction of Jews from Arab (or indeed any) property.”\textsuperscript{65}

Similar problems arose when it came to price controls for agricultural goods, which the Israeli state reimposed, likewise drawing upon the wartime British Mandate legacy. For many sectors, price controls were meant to balance the needs of both producers and consumers. When it came to olives and olive oil, however, Palestinians suspected that price controls were meant to be another means of destroying their livelihoods and forcing them to sell their lands. The fact that the British had never directly controlled the prices of olive oil, olives, and other olive-derived commodities was neither noted nor followed by the new Israeli authorities.

\textsuperscript{64} K. Helen, British Legation Tel Aviv, to Minister Bevin, “Mr. D. Balfour’s report on treatment of Arabs in Israel,” 5 January 1951, despatch no. 5, page 11. FO 371/91708, “Reports on treatments of Arabs in Israel ER 1016/1,” 1951.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
3. Rationing and food control in the early years of the Israeli state: resistance in Ramah after years of complaints from all sides regarding olive oil price controls

Discontent over the pricing of olive oil — the principal source of income for Galilee Palestinians remaining on their lands after the creation of the state of Israel — began almost immediately in the wake of the establishment of the state of Israel, becoming a persistent and heated issue by the early 1950s. For Ramah, the olive oil crop represented about 90 percent of total agricultural production and income, even more than for most other Galilee villages, where it was typically assumed to constitute a substantial majority, between 70 to 80 percent of the total. In 1949, the state set the price of olive oil at 240 Israeli pounds (I£) per ton, raising it to I£290 in 1950.

Palestinian producers had three objections to this practice: First, they argued, prices were set artificially low, well beneath market rates; second, they claimed that Jewish producers were receiving higher prices, around I£340 per ton in 1949 (some I£100 more than for Palestinian-produced olive oil); third, Palestinian cultivators noted that since it cost close to I£360 to

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66 Despatch from K. Helen, British Legation, Tel Aviv to Foreign Minister Bevin, “Mr. Balfour's report on ‘Treatment of Arabs in Israel,’” 5 January 1951, TNA FO 371/91708.
67 “Mr. Balfour's report on ‘Treatment of Arabs in Israel,’” TNA FO 371/91708.
68 From 1952 until 1982, when the shekel was introduced, Israel’s currency was known in English as the Israeli pound. For the first four years that followed the establishment of the state, the state currency continued officially (if not always in practice) to be known in English as the Palestine pound. I have used Israeli pound abbreviated as I£ throughout for the sake of consistency and simplicity. “Mr. Balfour's report on ‘Treatment of Arabs in Israel,’” TNA FO 371/91708.
69 It should be noted that this particular claim, though supported by Jiryis’s research op. cit., is contradicted by correspondence between the control authorities and a Jewish Israeli producer, cited below. The Palestinians likely either believed this was occurring unofficially under the table or they were factoring in nonmonetary state subsidies or parastate services that effectively functioned as price supports.
produce one ton of olive oil, they were being forced to sell at a massive loss — endangering not just the economy of their village but its very future. While complaints about low official prices for olive oil had become an annual exercise since 1949, in the late summer of 1952 a British consulate official reported hearing villagers discuss the possibility of suspending the olive harvest because the government price controls were causing their economic ruin — a ploy, they believed, to force them to sell their lands and leave the country.  

Israeli authorities, on the other hand, feared the uncontrolled movement of Palestinian olive oil, with smuggling of olive oil internally in the Galilee rumored to be rampant. The raid to confiscate Ramah’s olive oil was triggered indirectly by the complaints of a Jewish Israeli who was renting formerly Palestinian olive groves and olive presses in the Galilee from the Custodian of Absentee Property. In his letters to the authorities, he argued that it was actually discriminatory that Jewish and Arab producers received the same price for olive oil, when Jewish labor cost more — owing to higher standards of living and organizing that resulted in labor protections. By contrast, he claimed that olive cultivators in “Arab” localities like Ramah were circumventing state regulations and laws, pointing to a black market in olive oil in the urban centers of Haifa and Nazareth, and accused the villagers of Ramah of illegally selling their own production on the open market (rather than to Shemen or other state-sanctioned monopolies) right under the noses of the state’s food inspectors and food control officials. In a follow-up, he pointed out that Ramah typically produced 400-500 tons of olive oil a year, yet “mysteriously”

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70 “Mr. Balfour's report on ‘Treatment of Arabs in Israel,'” TNA FO 371/91708.
71 Letter [in Hebrew] from Yitzhak Osherovitz of Migdal to Minister of Supply and Rationing, 28 July 1950, ISA G-221/24, Documents 103 and 103a, 47.0.1.1192, Folder: “Shemen zayt [Olive oil].” Supply and Rationing would shortly thereafter be subsumed by the Ministry of Commerce, which has since undergone a number of name changes.
only 80 tons had been officially sold to the Shemen Company. The complaints prompted an official investigation, which confirmed the gist of it.

The state auditor’s office found that Jewish producers had complied with the 1949–50 requisition order, while “Arab” producers had stockpiled significant quantities of oil, holding out for the following season’s improved price of I£320 a ton. Thus, producers who could afford to do so had not sold their olive oil from the 1949-50 season, hanging onto their stock because of the unfavorably low price of I£250 set by the government. Stockpiling and waiting for the market to improve was a long-established practice among olive oil producers who could afford to sell the subsequent season, as the previous chapters have shown.

However, the larger problem uncovered by the investigation was that the northern district office of the Ministry of Supply and Rationing had issued “licenses to Arabs to transport the olive oil,” and noted that it was such roving middlemen who were likely to have been selling the oil on the open market for I£600 to I£700 a ton. That office defensively allowed that transfer licenses were granted — but merely to transport the oil for sale to village centers and not farther away, to the cities. While the director insisted that the “transported oil” was sold at official

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74 Letter [in Hebrew] from Branch Director for Control of Government Operations and Auditor of Raw Materials to Director of Food Department [Halavi], “Subject: Complaint of Mr. Yitzhak Osherovitz, Tiberias, in the matter of setting the price of olive oil,” 12 December 1950, ISA G-221/24, Document 128.
75 Ibid.
76 Letter [in Hebrew] from Director of Food Department [Halavi], Ministry of Agriculture to Branch Director for Control of Government Operations and Auditor of Raw Materials [State Comptroller], 25 December 1950, ISA G-221/24, Document 129.
prices, at least for the most part, he acknowledged the possibility of some illicit sales at higher prices.

The issue of transfer licenses for Palestinian olive oil traders had been raised repeatedly, because notwithstanding the result of this investigation, the Israeli authorities generally did not issue transfer licenses and then confiscated products transported without license.77 The archives of the era offer numerous examples of individual olive oil traders, almost exclusively men, who petitioned the authorities in Arabic and whose letters were often accompanied by attestations from local officials.78 The myriad requests for transport licenses typically detail their decades of

77 ISA G-221/24, 47.0.1.1192, Folder: “Olive oil [Shemen zayl]” is filled with such requests and complaints from a wide range of individuals, most of which were apparently denied or ignored.

One exceptional request (that garnered a documented reply) came from Selma and Selima AbdIslam Abu Dabbeh, two sisters from the old city of Acre, who had worked as seamstresses in the Galilee villages of Kafr Yasif and Yarka, and had received olive oil as payment in kind for their work. In their letter, written in very neat Hebrew script, which the Ministry of Supply and Rationing received in October 1950, the sisters asked for the release of nine tins of olive oil that they had been transporting back to their hometown, which were confiscated by the Acre Customs Department. The nine tins constituted a substantial amount, with each tin holding upwards of twenty liters of olive oil, representing their wages for a month and a half of work. They implored the authorities to consider the large family of eleven that they supported with such work. Letter [in Hebrew] from Selma and Selima AbdIslam Abu Dabbeh to Ministry of Supply and Rationing, n.d., stamped received 19 October 1950. ISA G-221/24, Document 119.

A Mr. G. Tural replied on behalf of the minister, rejecting the request. “The general explanatory notes in your letter,” he wrote, “are not a convincing argument for the fact that your transfer of the tins of olive oil to Akko [Acre] contravenes the law prohibiting the transfer of olive oil without possession of a license.” Letter [in Hebrew] from G. Tural to Selma and Selima AbdIslam Abu Dabbeh, 23 October 1950. ISA G-221/24, Document 120.

78 See for example: Letter [in Arabic] from Yani al-Yani on behalf of Kafr Yasif Local Council [majlis kafr yasif al-mahhalli] to director of the ration department in the northern district [sic; intended for local officials of the Ministry of Supply and Rationing], 10 September 1949, ISA GL-17022/12, Document 1, 102.0.8.552, Folder: “Marketing olives and olive oil 1949–1965 [shuq zaytim ve-shemen zayt, 1949-1965].” Writing in Arabic in September 1949, the council had asked for the government’s assistance “in the matter of transport to and sale of olive oil in markets.” After noting that olive cultivators were getting the same official price as mentioned in Osherovitz’s letter, the council expressed surprise at the ban “on transporting olive oil” that was
experience as itinerant olive oil middlemen and then plead with officials to consider the needs of large, extended families who relied on their work as roving salesmen. Without government licenses to work independently, some of these individuals would eventually became agents for the Shemen Company (and other state-sanctioned enterprises). Both villagers and bureaucrats would blame such middlemen whenever problems subsequently arose in price negotiations or over olive oil supplies in general.

When the village council for Kafr Yasif raised the issue of olive oil prices and repeatedly requested government intervention in the matter of the transport and selling of olive oil by licensed traders,79 the Arab Affairs Advisor deferred the matter indefinitely.80 Such bureaucratic

imposed without explanation in August, right before the harvest. The letter respectfully continued: “It is also well known that among the most sacred obligations of the government [min aqdas wajebat al-hakuma] is to preserve the standing of the producers and protect their crops,” particularly from the opportunism of independent traders and monopolistic enterprises like Shemen. The council then asked the government to reverse the “prohibition on transport and sale of olive oil, and thus pave the way for Arab producers to transport their olive oil and sell it in Arab markets within the state of Israel.”

79 Telegram [in Hebrew] from Yani al-Yani to the Prime Minister of Israel, 22 September 1949, ISA GL-17022/12, Document 3.


He then replied that the council’s request would be taken up by an interministerial committee “for the Arab region once it is established, and only then will it be possible to reach an opinion that is acceptable to all parties. Until that time, I doubt if we will see fit to deviate from the line laid out and lift the ban.” Letter [in Hebrew] from General Secretary, Ministry of Supply and Rationing to Arab Affairs Advisor, 19 October 1949, ISA GL-17022/12, Document 6.

Ultimately, this Central Council for Arab Affairs would not meet to discuss the issue for another three years. Minutes [in Hebrew] of meeting number three of the Central Council for Arab Affairs [haMoetzah haMarkazit l-anyanai aravim], 14 May 1952, ISA GL-17022/12, Document 7.
inaction, if not outright obstruction, would be typical for the Israeli state when it came to Palestinian agricultural issues, particularly when it came to the olive sector.

Planning and Execution of the Ramah Olive Oil Confiscation

Three months prior to the Central Council for Arab Affairs’ first meeting in May 1952 to discuss the concerns of olive oil producers from Kafr Yasif outlined above, the planning had already begun under Halavi’s watch in February 1952 for the confiscation of Ramah’s olive oil. The main architect of the measure was Mr. Carmi’ali, the Food Department official in charge of the northern region. According to the Military Governor of the Galilee, around noon on 27 March 1952, policemen and Inspection Department officials arrived at the house of Jamil Nakhli,

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81 Letter [in Hebrew] from Director of Food Department Halavi to Director of Inspection Department Leman, Copy to Director of Food Department [for the] Northern Region Carmi’ali, “Subject: Confiscation of olive oil in the Galilee,” 11 February 1952, ISA G-4137/25, Document 1, 48.17.11988, Folder: “Agaf haMazon: hahramat shemen zeyt beKefrim aravim [Food Department: confiscation of olive oil in Arab villages].”

Carmi’ali met with a succession of individuals: the Military Governor of the Galilee; the head of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry’s Inspection Department for the northern region, Mr. Halperin; and representatives of Ramah’s olive oil producers. Although Carmi’ali and Halperin decided to go ahead with the confiscation, the operation was delayed until March owing to bureaucratic infighting over who would pay for it. Memo [in Hebrew] from Secretary General [Ministry of Agriculture] Ari’ali to Director of Food Department Halavi, “Subject: The frozen olive oil in the Arab villages,” 2 March 1952, ISA G-4137/25, Document 2.

The operation ultimately involved not only the Inspection Department, the military, as well as the police, but also the Shemen Company, which was to provide cars, porters, and money in exchange for the oil seized. Shemen, Carmi’ali would later complain, did not deliver on its commitment and the police were not ready to set off at the designated time, which meant that everyone arrived at the village four hours later than had been planned. Letter [in Hebrew] from Food Department, North District (Haifa) [Carmi’ali] to Food Department Main Office, “Subject: The action to receive the frozen olive oil in the village of al-Ramah,” 23 March 1952, ISA GL-17117/14, 102.0.13.621, Folder: “Hahramat shemen zayt rama [Confiscation of olive oil, Ramah] 3–9/1952,” Document 28.
described as “the guiding spirit concerning olive oil in the village.”

82 Nakhli “refused to hand over the oil” and “announced that he would resist its handing over to Officer Shvili alongside a number of other policemen.” There was an altercation resulting in injuries on both sides. The army intervened in a show of force the following day, and Inspection Department officials and the police confiscated about 10 tons of olive oil. Naqqarah, the Palestinian communist attorney, obtained an injunction from the High Court of Justice that forced the inspector and police officials to stop the confiscation and leave the village. The villagers who had been detained because of the altercation were released on bail, while the case was turned over to the Acre military tribunal.

Carmi’ali immediately sought to justify his actions amidst the public outcry. 83 Most revealingly, Carmi’ali noted that the aim was to make an example of Ramah: “I would like to

82 Letter [in Hebrew] from Military Governor of Galilee to Arab Affairs Advisor to the Prime Minister, “Subject: Oil in village of Rame [sic],” 24 April 1952, ISA GL-17117/14, Document 27. (Like Osherovitz, the military governor transliterated the Arabic ta’ marbutah as a yod to reflect the local Galilee accent. Transliterations of Ramah in Hebrew were unstandardized, and in the documents Israeli officials and others often added or dropped Hebrew alefs in place of either one or both of the Arabic alef and the Arabic ta’ marbutah in the village name, for the latter rarely, if ever, using the equivalent Hebrew feminine marker of hey.) This previously classified letter in the name of the Military Governor of the Galilee to the prime minister’s Arab Affairs Advisor detailed the official version of what then occurred. The military governor noted that the issue had been simmering for three years; he cited the efforts of Mr. Carmi’ali to negotiate with the villagers, who had been warned in meetings with him that the olive oil would be forcibly confiscated if it was not handed over at the official price.

83 In a report addressed to the head office of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry’s Food Department, he wrote that in an earlier meeting with the producers, he had demanded that they hand over the olive oil from the previous season at the previous season’s lower price in order to be paid the higher price for the current season’s crop. Carmi’ali claimed that the villagers never responded to this “offer.” Instead, Naqqarah came to negotiate on their behalf, accompanied by one Yusif Abdu, whom Carmi’ali described as a representative of the “communist Arab cooperative.” Carmi’ali asserted that since they too failed to respond to his “offer,” he began making plans to confiscate the oil in question. Letter [in Hebrew] from Food Department, North District (Haifa) [Carmi’ali] to Food Department Main Office, “Subject: The
stress we chose the aforementioned village because to our knowledge this is a most ferocious and unruly village. As such, we were determined to begin the operation [targeting] the village ringleaders and agitators [mesitim].” Despite the operation’s meager results in material terms (with only 10 tons of olive oil confiscated), Carmi’ali pointed out that the action was of broader benefit, to the point of being a “blessing [berakhah],” since it was a way of teaching the people of Ramah and the wider Galilee a lesson regarding law and order:

In the Arab villages, generally, and in the village of Ramah, in particular, contempt for the law and for the authorities is completely out of line, and is in no small part the result of incitement by the communists and their fellow companions, therefore we resolved to take a tough action. All the prolonged negotiations did not come to any positive results, but rather intensified in them the realization that we only talk, and that we cannot and will not enforce the rule of law there. While the practical effects are not much (although they should not be underestimated), behold the result and the great moral impression [which] is immeasurably greater. The echoes and reverberations of this will reach us from every direction. . . . I have reason to believe that if we act without hesitation, within the limits of the law, there seems to be a blessing [berakhah] in that.84

Ironically, the High Court of Justice (HCJ) would find that the operation — whose ostensible justification was to restore the rule of law — was itself illegal.

The aftermath of the Ramah confiscation

Another official immediately contradicted Carmi’ali’s story, stating that he had cautioned Carmi’ali to get legal cover for the confiscation but was initially ignored. He alleged that Carmi’ali “did not agree at first to these proposed measures of legal ‘caution,’” and only consulted with the legal adviser to the government in Haifa “two hours before the operation

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84 Ibid.
In sum, at the very last minute, Carmi’ali had prepared an “order of delivery” (to confiscate the olive oil) on the legal basis of Section 3(a) of the (Emergency) Defence Regulation of 1944, which he and the hastily consulted legal adviser thought would find favor in the courts.

However, the emergency regulations from wartime British rule explicitly prohibited the export of olive oil, which was the basis on which the HCJ would find the confiscation order illegal. During the trial, testimony by Shemen and government officials made clear that the intention had always been to export the olive oil that had been confiscated. The interests of Shemen and the various actors representing the state had aligned when given the chance to sell the confiscated oil in order to accrue hard currency from abroad, minus only the operating costs of the confiscation operation.

The crux of the court decision thus rested on a technicality. The British wartime regulations had been specifically put into place to prevent exports in order to maintain domestic food supplies. It was clearly a violation to invoke those regulations when confiscating olive oil

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85 Letter [in Hebrew] from Halperin, head of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry’s Inspection Department for the Northern Region to Halavi, director of the Food Department, “Subject: The frozen oil in Arab Villages,” 2 April 1952. ISA G-4137/25, Document 6. Halperin had previously fought with Carmi’ali over who would pay for the operation.

Carmi’ali’s response to Halperin’s charge admitted as much, offering no justification for his conduct beyond stating that what was done was done. “I am thinking there is no turning back,” he wrote to Halavi twelve days later. Letter [in Hebrew] from Carmi’ali to Halavi, “Subject: Clarification regarding the actions of the Department of Inspection in Ramah and Tiberias,” 14 April 1952, ISA G-4137/25, Document 8.

Carmi’ali did not clarify whether the last-minute legal consultation was taking advantage of the four-hour delay he said had been caused by others’ lack of preparation — blaming both Shemen and the police for failing to depart on time — or whether he had contributed to the delay by scrambling to cover for his own unpreparedness.

that was intended for export. While Carmi’ali maintained that the action to teach the villagers of Ramah about the rule of law had been taken within “the limits of the law,” the HCJ dissented. After the court handed down its decision, Hanna Naqqarah was able to write to the officials concerned, demanding the return of the confiscated olive oil. The 10 tons of confiscated olive oil were indeed eventually returned after some wrangling between Shemen and the government over who should bear the costs, since Shemen was supposed to have been paid in kind (with the confiscated olive oil) for providing the logistics.

In the meantime, undaunted by legal defeat and Naqqarah’s success in recovering the relatively small amount of confiscated oil, the Food Department began making plans to maneuver around the court decision and freeze or possibly confiscate the following year’s crop. Rather than rely on the defense regulations the next time, Halavi and Carmi’ali immediately began making plans to use a different wartime measure, Article 4(g) of the Food Control Ordinance of 1942. On this basis, Carmi’ali instituted new rules on the operation of oil presses, which olive press owners in Sakhnin, ‘Arabah, Deir Hannah, and Kabul immediately protested and declared “a sword of Damocles hanging over the heads” of Palestinian olive oil producers in the Galilee. In response, Carmi’ali dismissed their claims of persecution, sarcastically stating

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87 Letter [in Hebrew] from Hannah Dib Naqqarah to Director of Food Department, Northern Region, Haifa, “Subject: without causing damage,” 21 July 1952, ISA G-4137/25, Document 10a.
that the presses “suffer” only one day a week, on Sundays — the day when the inspectors visited.\footnote{Letter [in Hebrew] from Carmi’ali, Ministry of Commerce and Industry Food Department of the North Region, to Mr. ‘Azat Tawfiq Nasser al-Dhud of I’billin, “Subject: Work stoppage at olive oil press,” 4 December 1952, ISA GL-17118/42, Document 4.}

Simultaneously, Ramah’s olive oil producers recognized that the problems of the previous season had not gone away. In a long letter handwritten in Arabic, they, as well as mukhtars past and current, laid out what they called the “problem of olive oil” (\textit{mushkilat zayt al-zaytun}).\footnote{Letter [in Arabic] from the olive oil producers in Ramah village to head of government [\textit{sic}; the Arabic letter writers tend to address their letters to \textit{ra’is al-hakuma} rather than a more literal rendering of prime minister, \textit{ra’is al-wazara’}], “Subject: mushkilat zayt zaytun” [problem of olive oil], 22 December 1952, ISA GL-17118/42, Document 6.} First, they argued, the issuance of new regulations by Halavi, the director of the Food Department, violated the spirit of the HCJ decision (92/52), “which states that the supervisory authorities have no right to take olive oil from the possession of its producer by force.” Halavi’s new order, they went on, effectively “forces the producer to sell his olive oil at the press,” in what amounted to a legalistic runaround regarding the definition of “possession.” The new order attempted to evade the prohibition on forcible seizure by emphasizing the location of the goods at the olive press, hence temporarily out of the owner’s direct possession. The Ramah producers argued, first, that even while at the press, the olives and olive oil were still legally in the possession of the grower (not the press owner); second, and even more crucially,

The case [the HCJ decision] clearly stated that the powers granted to the [authorities] . . . are intended to protect the local consumer. The Food Department was unable to prove at the time that the olive oil would truly be used to the benefit of the local consumer. Quite to the contrary, the evidence indicated that it would likely be exported abroad. We do not believe that this stance has now changed, as

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When their initial protest letter in Arabic went unrecognized, they sent telegrams in English declaring a strike. Telegram from owners of olive oil presses to Prime Minister (Jerusalem), 17 November 1952, ISA GL-17118/42, Document 2.
there is nothing to indicate that the olive oil will now be truly distributed to the local consumer. Therefore it is clear that the order issued on 21/10/1952 [Halavi’s] does not serve the interest of local residents. To the contrary, the local consumer will be injured [as] the amount remaining in the local market will be very small (or nil) while the price of olive oil on the black market will spike outrageously [lit. *yertafe’ irtifa’an fahishan*].

Highlighting the legal reasoning behind the HCJ decision, the press owners sought to focus attention on the fact that the authorities were attempting to confiscate the oil in order to export it abroad and generate hard currency. They noted, furthermore, that the price set for the 1952/1953 season, which had more than doubled from the previous year to £700, was still considered insufficient to cover production expenses. While the Food Department apparently refrained from further attempts to seize any more olive oil by force, planning to do so was indicative of its working methods, which included using any means necessary — legal or otherwise — to pursue its agenda.

In conclusion, a striking difference between the Israeli application in the 1950s of the wartime defense regulations and ordinances, versus their original usage in the 1940s, was that the British Mandate authorities had never controlled or set the price of olives and olive oil during World War II. Mandate-era interventions in the olive sector were limited to export restrictions, in order to attempt to reduce prices by increasing domestic supply. Instead, the priority for Israeli state officials in the 1950s was to export products abroad at a profit, which meant that their incentives were to set domestic prices paid to producers artificially low. State-allied actors like Shemen and others would thus procure domestic olive oil cheaply and then sell it abroad profitably.
Whether the prices were set so low as to cause the Palestinian villagers of the Galilee to leave the country, as some feared, is impossible to answer definitively. Perhaps in the earliest years of the Israeli state, some bureaucrats would have seen it as an incidental benefit, though none put it into writing, and it does not seem to have been the explicit goal of either the price setting generally or the Ramah confiscation in particular. Negotiations over the price would continue over the next few years, until the Israelis decided it was best to stop the annual contestation and leave olive oil uncontrolled and largely unsupported by the state.

4. Pricing olive oil in the early 1950s Galilee: ethnicized difference?

In the wake of the Ramah confiscation debacle, the controlled price of olive oil remained a perennial complaint.93 Going into the 1952/1953 season, the Israeli Ministry of Commerce and Industry set the official price for the season’s olive oil at £ 700 per ton; Arab producers had been asking for two and a half times as much, £ 1,800 a ton. The dispute hinged on calculations of production costs.

Rising production costs for property owners were driven mainly by increased wages for labor, which some interpreted as a kind of social flattening occurring in the Arab agricultural community.94 Five years after the Nakba, demand for labor offered the landless increasing

94 Ibid., page 2. The balance of social power was threatening to shift between the landed and the landless, in short. The cost of plowing, for example, rapidly rose, reflecting rising wages for Arab agricultural labor more broadly. A pair of oxen and a plow were said to cost £ 6 per day, reflecting a five-fold cost in the price of cattle; a man in the 1952/1953 season received wages of £ 3 per day of work for picking, while a woman would receive only half, at £ 1.5.
opportunities to market their skills; however, rising wages were largely offset by rising costs for goods.\footnote{Ibid. The sharp inflation in the cost of living meant that the cost of flour had doubled from 1951 to 1952. With bread remaining a staple food along with olive oil for rural dwellers, an increase in the cost of flour from \textsterling} 1.6 per bag in 1951 to \textsterling} 3.5 in 1952 could be ruinous for a laborer. Thus, even with the sharp increase in wages, a day’s work potentially could not even cover the cost of bread.}

The Israeli ministry estimated that a ton of olive oil cost \textsterling} 528 to produce.\footnote{Ibid., page 1. This figure they derived from growing olives at \textsterling} 110 a ton, with 160 kilograms produced per dunam, and a yield rate of 23 percent per ton of olives for the oil. To the \textsterling}480 growing cost they added 10 percent paid in kind as the expense for crushing.} In addition, they argued, olives for pickling sold to the canning industry were uncontrolled, and Arab producers were estimated to sell a quarter of the crop in this way. Jewish cultivators had begun to take an interest in pickled olives during World War II.\footnote{See the previous chapter, specifically the lecture by the horticultural expert Sachs.} Owing to the takeover or expansion of existing pickling olive groves, Jewish Israeli pickled olive production had become a substantial majority of the pickled olive sector in the wake of the Nakba, an advantage that would persist throughout the rest of the century.

The Arab Palestinian complaint was that the ministry’s estimates of olive oil production costs failed to take into account the regular biennial pattern of the olive tree, whose alternating years of failure meant that the production cost should be almost doubled, to \textsterling} 900 a ton of oil, to take this risk into account. While perhaps a little high, the British consular official noted that the Israeli official delegates in Haifa — sent earlier in the season to discuss 1952/1953 season prices with representatives from Ramah, Maghar, and Kefr Yassif — had in fact recommended an official price of \textsterling} 1,337 per ton based on a production cost of \textsterling} 715 a ton. Per these earlier calculations, then, the officially set price of \textsterling} 700 would have meant that the Arab producers
would be selling at a slight loss, rather than at the slight profits that other agricultural commodities enjoyed.\textsuperscript{98}

In late summer 1951, an American diplomat noted that Israeli price controls in general were intended to encourage the production of certain crops over others, without noting the ethnic nature of this favoritism. Thus, under the price controls, vegetables, dairy and poultry products were given generous cost allowances, while the profit margin was much slimmer for olive oil.\textsuperscript{99}

The adjustments for 1952/1953 threatened to leave no profits at all.

The disappointment of producers in major olive growing villages was profound, especially for Ramah and Maghar, where olive oil revenues typically accounted for 90 percent of agricultural income — higher even than the 70-80 percent typical in the rest of the Galilee.\textsuperscript{100}

Worse, the official price applied only to oil with acidity below five percent, with deductions of £10 a ton for each additional percentage of acidity. The pressings from Ramah groves that year ranged mainly between 10-15 percent acidity, such that producers were facing £100 deductions, meaning the state would only pay £600 per ton of oil.\textsuperscript{101}

Beyond a small personal allowance, set at 20 kilograms a head, the rest went into Shemen oil drums for transport to Haifa, under strict government control.\textsuperscript{102}

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\textsuperscript{98} Ibid. Unofficial estimates by village for the season put Maghar’s production at 1,000 tons; Ramah at 700 tons, Kafir Yassif at 600 tons, and Yarka at 500 tons, with a few other villages ranging between 50-250 tons. The total was guessed to be around 4,000 tons for all of Israel, with the authorities claiming an equivalent amount was sold to be pickled.

\textsuperscript{99} George Scott, second secretary of American Embassy Tel Aviv, report on cultivation and price controls, 20 August 1951. NARA RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal File, 884A/20/8/2052.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., page 2.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., page 1.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
the system of control was still strict enough to prevent large-scale disposal of oil on the black market. In addition to the resident controllers, who supervised the crushing and sealed presses overnight but seemed more prone to corruption, traveling inspectors would make visits. The extent to which smuggling and informal marketing occurred is unfortunately unquantifiable, though obviously a source of considerable angst for higher level officials — hence the Ramah raid earlier in the year to strike symbolically at such practices.

Again, Palestinian citizens of Israel were not alone in their complaints toward the government’s system set up in conjunction with large edible oil processors like Shemen. Earlier that year, in the summer of 1952, an American diplomat in Tel Aviv noted that the usually pro-government English language Jerusalem Post had heavily criticized the government’s agricultural labor and price policies, particularly the overwhelming desire to mechanize, which had caused certain crops dependent on manual labor — particularly the olive, as well as others well adopted to the climate and conditions of the lands — to be neglected:

Plantation crops, olives, figs and deciduous fruits have all been neglected since the independence of Israel because hand labor is needed to care for the trees. In the case of olives, approximately 1% of world olive oil production was contributed by Palestine before the Second World War, while Israel's production in 1951 was less than 500 metric tons.\(^\text{103}\)

In the view of the Jerusalem Post writer, neglect of olives was not a politically motivated targeting of Palestinian cultivation, but an ideologically motivated obsession with modernization and development in agricultural practice: “... time honored methods (in agriculture) which are well adapted to the conditions of the country have been quickly discarded or not fully

\(^{103}\) O.T. Jones, first secretary of American Embassy Tel Aviv, commentary on 4 April 1952 article in Jerusalem Post on crops, 3 June 1952. NARA RG59 General Records of the Department of State, Central Decimal File, 884A.20/6-352, page 1.
exploited.”\textsuperscript{104} In particular, the article continued, the single-minded focus on mechanization was the source of the problem: “The neglect of figs and olives results from the wish to introduce mechanization everywhere. But picking and tree-tending is built on careful manual labor as are many other branches of agriculture.”\textsuperscript{105} Indeed, but so was the other dominant fruit-bearing tree of Palestine: citrus, particularly orange cultivation around Jaffa.

The \textit{Jerusalem Post} article failed to note that olive cultivation remained largely associated with Palestinians within Israel, in sharp contrast to the coastal orange and citrus groves that the state had taken over when their owners were displaced and made refugees. By December 1954, the rehabilitation of “abandoned” citrus orchards had been nearly completed, with the per dunam yield of citrus groves rented out by the Custodian of Abandoned [sic] Property finally nearing that of privately owned growers.\textsuperscript{106} Thereafter, the report noted, with the previously Palestinian properties restored to full production and value, the Custodian had begun to discharge its holdings of “abandoned” citrus groves, which were being sold to “individual owners, cultivation companies and collective settlements.”\textsuperscript{107} Yet olive groves had not reached the same state, with the reason cited being “insufficient labor … available at the wage rate paid.”\textsuperscript{108} The prices set for olive oil were simply too low. Extensive, expensive interventions on the part of the Israeli government via the Ministry of Agriculture in the early 1950s to assist in

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., page 2.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
the modernization and development of Palestinian olive cultivation in the Galilee were not forthcoming.

The question remains: Was the lack of such assistance politically or economically motivated? As with the perennially low official prices of olive oil, the answer, thanks to the contrasting example of the rehabilitation of citrus groves, seems to be both. The lack of development assistance for olive groves as well as the continued debate over the official pricing of olive oil, subject to government control, illustrate two of the ways that ethnicized difference and privilege could be enacted and reinforced in subtler, implicit ways.

Olive culture in Mandate Palestine had been almost exclusively Arab Palestinian before 1948; Jewish Israeli cultivation of pickled olives had begun during World War II and expanded after the Nakba thanks to governmental incentives, the expansion of kibbutzim, and the availability of cheap groves rented from the Custodian of Absentee Property, “abandoned” by their displaced Palestinian owners. Pickled olives, which were uncontrolled, had become dominated by Jewish Israelis, who controlled about 75 percent of this smaller subset of the broader olive sector. Only a fifth of the olives produced in Israel were estimated to be consumed either pickled or fresh. Pickling and canning held opportunities to mechanize, in line with the economic ideology of modernization, and edible olives faced no organized indigenous Palestinian competition. Palestinians typically used traditional methods of pickling leftover olives for familial household consumption. While Palestinians could use inherited olive oil presses, they lacked access to capital to establish canning facilities. Furthermore, the types of olives that Palestinians planted tended to have higher oil content and be better suited for
pressing, meaning there were significant structural reasons forestalling a full reorientation from olive oil to pickled olives.

The question of fruit tree rehabilitation illustrated differences in how the state viewed citrus versus olive production. Orange groves around Jaffa, and citriculture in general, had been evenly split between Jewish and Arab Palestinian cultivators before 1948. “Abandoned” formerly Palestinian citrus groves, with extensive governmental support, had been reclaimed and rehabilitated by the state, and then sold to private Jewish Israeli owners. In the meantime, olive groves were regarded by even pro-government sources like the writer in the *Jerusalem Post* as neglected by contrast. Parallel support for olive cultivators was not forthcoming. Low prices for olive oil, if not intentionally targeting Palestinian cultivators, had the ultimate effect of doing so in practice.

5. A counterexample of cooperation: the village of Makr

The village of Makr presents an example of a different approach to the Israeli authorities, one based upon respectful language and cooperation, rather than legal and physical confrontation as had occurred in Ramah. What makes this potential counterexample especially interesting is that, despite their different tactics in dealing with Israeli bureaucrats, the villagers nevertheless found much the same results: their pleas for legal recognition of local practices involving olive cultivation were ignored and overruled by Israeli authorities.

The Kiyal family of Makr took the lead, in particular one Sa`id Mahmud Kiyal, in seeking help with the village’s various problems: access to water, the resettlement of present absentees, and issues regarding the village’s olive groves and olive oil presses. The village
hosted an unspecified number of present absentees, leading to growing tension over time between the original residents (whom Kiyal termed “cultivators [muzar‘in]”) and the resettled IDPs (whom he called “refugees”).

Kiyal further drew distinctions between internally displaced persons doing things by the book, versus those manipulating the system. In correspondence with the Arab Affairs Adviser at the time, Palmon, Kiyal offered to inform on “infiltrators,” smugglers, and communist sympathizers in exchange for help.

A group of the present absentees had been renting and cultivating olive groves in the village; however, when the IDPs sought to formalize the arrangement and secure their rights, the local representative of the Custodian of Absentee Property in Haifa informed them that there was nothing available to rent, and offered lands in other villages instead.

While the Arab Affairs Adviser waited for a reply from the Military Governor of the Galilee about the issues raised, Kiyal took his complaints public, leaving out the offer of collaboration, writing an op-ed in an Arabic language newspaper in which he presented himself as the defender of the rights of the resettled population.

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109 Kiyal to Palmon [in Arabic], 10 October 1951. ISA GL-17035/7, 102.0.8.816, correspondence concerning the complaint of a resident mukhtar, olive groves refugees leasing, selling olive oil 1950-1964, Document 9.

110 Kiyal offered to provide information about growing communist popularity in the village and information about absentees involved in smuggling and infiltration, as a kind of quid pro quo exchange. Letter from Kiyal to Palmon [in Arabic], 13 September 1951. ISA GL-17035/7, Document 3. Translation to Hebrew, Document 4. Kiyal to Palmon [in Arabic], 2 October 1951, ISA GL-17035/7, Document 5. For the Hebrew translation, see Document 6.


public property, viewing the groves as properly belonging to the state. While it is unclear whether Kiyal’s complaints were in fact to support or discourage the rights of present absentees — perhaps both, at least initially offering a quid pro quo regarding illicit activity on the part of some in order to secure the rights of others working the system — his complaints seemingly resulted in no tangible support from either the Haifa custodian or the Galilee military governor in the matter. In other cases, however, it seemed as if the Kiyals were more successful in getting the Israeli authorities to intervene in local matters to their benefit, concluding one missive with the respectful appeal: “We refugees are content to live under your great state and we remain trusting in the embrace of Israel that is responsible for our lives and how we make our living [...].”

This quotation illustrates the tightrope that Kiyal was attempting to walk, by appealing to the authorities for help, both privately and publicly.

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114 These words followed a complaint that in response to the request from the prior year to provide nearby land to the IDPs, the Haifa custodian had given rocky, uncultivable plots. Petitioner Sa‘id Mahmud Kiyal, Secretary of the Council of Arab Refugees in Israel, Village of al-Makr, “Seeking: Guarantee of lands to refugees from al-Birwah residing currently in the village of al-Makr totaling 250 souls [in Arabic],” to the prime minister c/o Arab affairs adviser, 6 January 1952. ISA GL-17035/7, Document 19. According to this new complaint, six of the total of 250 internally displaced persons from al-Birwah had been working land owned by absentees. Five of the six were then confirmed in their claims by the Committee for Land Certification (the original Arabic uses the term tadhim [certification or valuation], while the Hebrew translation uses the term for “leasing [lahachcarah]”) as having worked the land for the past year. The claim of the sixth, named Assad Mohammad Mulhim, was rejected as a fabrication, and the other large cultivators testified that he had not cultivated the land; yet the custodian gave him 65 dunams anyway, to the grave disappointment of Kiyal and others concerned, seeming to give official backing to the deception.

In reply to Kiyal’s petition, the local custodian agreed with Kiyal, conceding that Asad Mulhim had not been a tenant; nevertheless, Mulhim was allowed to remain for the year, since he had already seeded the land, and the punishment would be delayed until the following year (when the custodian said Mulhim would not be allowed to lease anything). Levital, department of villages Haifa branch, to Palmon [in Hebrew], 20 January 1952. ISA GL-17035/7, Document 20.
Issues relating to the present absentees (IDPs) renting the land of absentees (refugees now exiled abroad) continued to be a particular source of contention.\textsuperscript{115} In the spring of the same year, a different issue arose regarding absentee property in the village, specifically the sale of a motorized olive oil press to a buyer outside the village. Kiyal and notables including the mukhtar asked that the present absentees (IDPs) be allowed to buy it instead.\textsuperscript{116}

The Military Governor of the Galilee reported that the custodian had neither informed the people of the village that the press was offered for sale; nor had the custodian published a notice in Arabic, only one in the Hebrew press. One offer was submitted and accepted, and the military governor felt he had no jurisdiction to cancel the sale after the fact.\textsuperscript{117} Palmon chastised the Custodian of Absentee Property, a Mr. M. Shatner, and chided him not to do so again in the future for similar cases, adding that the failure to consult with the military governor compounded the damage to the government and its reputation, which could be accused of conducting the sale

\textsuperscript{115} Later that month, on 22 January the custodian offered to rent them 108 dunams in the depopulated village of Mi’ar, which Kiyal complained was both too far away (over 2.5 hours away by foot), and too expensive to rent at the exorbitant price offered. Letter [in Arabic] from S.M. Kiyal to Palmon, 3 February 1952. ISA GL-17035/7, Document 24. A week later, Kiyal again noted a number of local issues involving “infiltrators,” as well as personal requests to rent absentee land from the custodian. Kiyal to Palmon [in Arabic], 11 February 1952. ISA GL-17035/7, Document 28.

\textsuperscript{116} Telegram [in Arabic] from Kiyal, notable Mohammad Ahmad Ashahadah, and mukhtar Naif Salim al-As’ad to Palmon, 3 February 1952. ISA GL-17035/7, Document 23.

The three followed up with a typed letter in Hebrew a few days later, emphasizing the entire village’s need, there being no similar press nearby. Shahadah, Kiyal and Mukhtar al-As’ad to arab affairs adviser [Palmon], “Subject: A request to allow us to purchase for the benefit of all the residents of the village olive juicing machine [in Hebrew],” 5 February 1952. ISA GL-17035/7, Document 25.

\textsuperscript{117} Lieutenant Colonel Naaman Stavi, military governor Galilee, to Arab affairs adviser [in Hebrew], “Olive extractor,” 26 February 1952. ISA GL-17035/7, Document 30.

The office of the Arab Affairs Adviser had asked the military governor to look into it. Anavi to military governor of the Galilee [in Hebrew], “Subject: olive oil extractor in Makr village,” 10 February 1952. ISA GL-17035/7, Document 27.
essentially in secret from the people of the village.\textsuperscript{118} The custodian’s functionaries came up with a variety of excuses for the sale after months of internal investigations, amounting to that the 13 “abandoned” olive oil presses of the Galilee had been gathering dust since 1948, were assumed to be defunct, and had been assumed to be primitive presses outmoded by newer ones installed in larger olive oil-producing villages like Ramah and Kafr Yasif.\textsuperscript{119} Taken together, the custodian evinced no inclination to assess the presses previously owned by Palestinian refugees prior to putting them up for sale. But the fact that the presses were left abandoned and neglected for three years hardly squares with such urgency to sell them, once they had been put on a list by a subdepartment. Lastly, it is difficult to believe that the presses were as antiquated as the custodian assumed, since they had never been inspected.

In summary, the initial excuses offered by the custodian were contradictory and further contradicted the department’s next step, which was to sell the equipment itself.\textsuperscript{120} Thus the ostensibly antiquated machinery from the absentee press had been judged valuable enough to be removed and then moved to a new location for further use. Although complaining that it was only after the sale price had been paid that the notables of the village organized the people of the village to oppose the removal of the equipment — likely the first they had heard of the sale — the local representative for the custodian met with the people of the village, who agreed to purchase the equipment of the olive oil press.\textsuperscript{121} Yet the matter did not immediately end there.

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\textsuperscript{118} Palmon to Shatner, custodian of absentee property [in Hebrew], “Subject: sale of the oil wringer in Makr village,” 6 March 1952. ISA GL-17035/7, Document 31.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{120} This is precisely what happened with the press equipment, which was bid for by one Mr. Rapaport of Haifa, after it had been advertised for sale exclusively in the Hebrew press. Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121} The official was Levital, the director of the department of villages branch in Haifa for the Custodian. Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
Another group from the village claimed there was no consent to the settlement, stating that the village negotiators (Kiyal, the mukhtar, and the other elites) did not represent them. But in the end, a deal with the notable interlocutors was struck — perhaps owing in no small part to Kiyal’s involvement and his by-then-longstanding relationship with higher-level authorities.

There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from the story of this deal. As early as 1952, the Custodian of Abandoned Property felt entitled to sell the equipment from the presses of absentees, as opposed to continuing to rent it out, and to do so in such haste that it would accept bids without a site inspection. This contrasts with orange and other citrus groves, whose rehabilitation the state invested in, prior to selling the land into private hands beginning in late 1954. The lack of inspection of the facilities is somewhat telling in other respects: the haphazard supervision and potentially arbitrary power of local bureaucrats in everyday life, subject to periodic review by central authorities who prioritized maintaining their connections with local intermediaries. It is remarkable that the notables positioned themselves as representatives of the village and were successful in negotiating with the central authorities. In this case, like the earlier disputes involving “absentee” property, it seems that the notables mixed their personal interests with the broader interests of the village, engendering at least temporary pushback from some others in the village, who did not buy their public positioning as their representative champions.

In conclusion, regarding the overall relations between Palestinians in the Galilee and the variety of bureaucrats representing the Israeli state in the years immediately following its founding, outright resistance, such as in Ramah, may have been the exception rather than the rule. But contestation in a variety of forms was commonplace in the late 1940s and early 1950s,
as relations between Palestinians and the Israeli authorities were marked by, at a minimum, mutual suspicion. Some Palestinians, such as the notables of Makr, used the central authorities for personal gain or for resolving local disputes in their favor, in the process potentially helping some of the internally displaced in their village (known as present absentees). But both the present absentees and the original inhabitants, the hosts who defined themselves as “cultivators” in contrast to the internally displaced “refugees” they were hosting, freely availed themselves of absentee property, whether in the form of cultivable land or of agroindustrial sites like olive oil presses.

Regardless of whether neglect of the olive sector was a conscious, intentional policy formulated to oppress remaining Palestinians economically and force them to leave, the state was clearly not interested in developing or assisting olive cultivators, who were predominantly Palestinian, thus resulting in an ethnically biased outcome. It was not until the late 1950s that the Israeli state considered establishing parallel institutions to support the olive sector. And in the meantime, the conditions of military rule had the potential to breed predatory practices and corruption, with the state simultaneously coopting and in turn becoming dependent on cooperative local leaders.

6. A shifting relationship in the late 1950s and early 1960s between Palestinians and the Israeli state

The founding of the Israeli olive and olive oil advisory committee in the wake of decontrol in the mid-1950s

In 1957, the Israeli government finally began to take steps to form an olive and olive oil advisory committee, long a source of resentment of Palestinian producers who felt that their
products were intentionally excluded from government deliberations and government support.\footnote{122}{Halavi, director Food Division, to minister of Commerce and Industry [in Hebrew], 3 July 1957. ISA GL-6044/21, 48.0.6.2062, “Food Division – the advisory committee on olives and olive oil,” Document 1.}

This step, however, was at least initially more a means of cooption by rewarding cooperative Arab leaders allied with the ruling Mapai party. The Arab representatives who were nominated were well connected, such as Elias Nakhleh of Ramah, who would later become a member of the Knesset running on the various ad-hoc ruling-Mapai/Labour-party-allied Arab satellite lists.\footnote{123}{The committee was initially supposed to be split between four Arab and four Jewish Israelis, with two Arab farmers and two Arab olive oil press owners, one Jewish farmer, one representative of “national orchards [presumably “absentee” property managed by the state via the custodian],” and two Jewish factory owners. Suggestions from Carm’iali were ignored in favor of names proposed by the Arab affairs adviser, who suggested ʿAbd al-Latif Hassan Saleh Jabarah from Ta'ibe (Triangle) and ʿAbd Allah Khair of Abu Snan for the two olive oil press owners, and Nimar Abu Zidan of Mughar and Elias Naklah of Ramah for the two owners of olive orchards. Arab affairs adviser to Halavi [in Hebrew], 6 August 1957. ISA GL-6044/21, Document 6.}

In fact, the Arab members had actually been suggested to the Arab Affairs Adviser by the military governor of the Galilee.\footnote{124}{Arab affairs adviser to Military Governor ‘Anef, “Subject: committee for olive oil affairs [in Hebrew],” 23 July 1957. ISA GL-17022/12, 102.0.8.552, “Marketing olives and olive oil 1949-1965,” Document 20. The adviser requested the names of two Arab orchard owners and two Arab olive oil press owners. In reply, the Military governor’s office supplied the names of the eventual invitees. Moshe Tadmor Bh’q [licensing officer from the Makr file] to Arab affairs adviser [in Hebrew], 2 August 1957. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 23.}

The advisory committee met for the first time on 20 October 1957,\footnote{125}{Minutes from first meeting of advisory committee for matters of olives and olive oil [in Hebrew], 20 October 1957. ISA GL-6044/21, 48.0.6.2062, “Food Division – the advisory committee on olives and olive oil,” Document 10.} but the initial meetings had little substance.\footnote{126}{An additional four governmental representatives were added to the committee composition. The invitees were the four Arabs suggested by the Arab Affairs Adviser above, plus Carm’iali (food inspector for Haifa and the north region), Mazur (director of the department of oils and soap), Riinitz (export branch, division of foreign trade, Gan (economic department of}Further reports to the committee focused on refined olive oil for
export, which was almost exclusively confined to the Jewish sector, with state orchards selling their produce to the factories.  

After the Ramah confiscation, relations between Palestinians in the Galilee and the authorities remained contentious; however, with olive oil uncontrolled beginning in the mid-1950s, the relationship began to shift. The most important change was that the state switched to price floors rather than price setting, meaning that the authorities offered a certain level of support through guaranteed minimum prices. Farmers could potentially receive a good deal

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126 The first, for example, focused on estimates of a meager crop for the 1957-1958 season, expected to be just 15 percent of the prior year, with prices in Arab villages already approaching £2,000. Minutes from first meeting of advisory committee for matters of olives and olive oil [in Hebrew], 20 October 1957. ISA GL-6044/21, Document 10.

127 Mazur to committee [in Hebrew], various reports in the matter of refined olive oil production for the coming season, estimating crop of 3,000 tons of olive oil that would be refined to produce 1,000-1,500 tons of refined oil. ISA GL-6044/21, Document 20.

128 For the 1955-1956 season, the department of oils and soap in the ministry of commerce estimated a crop of 25,000 tons of olives, of which 5,000 tons would be pickled, and the remainder of 20,000 presses to yield 4,000 tons of olives oil (a reasonable 20 percent estimation). Of that total, 650 tons were from the “groves of the nation,” presumably absentee property transferred to the custodian. Director of department of oils and soap [Y. Mazur] to director of division [hativat] of food [Halavi], ministry of commerce and industry, “Subject: sum of season of olive oil 1955/1956 [in Hebrew],” 20 October 1957, page 1. GL-6044/5 48.0.6.2056, “Food division – olive oil,” Document 1. The Israeli bureaucratic terminology in Hebrew continued to change; previously in the early 1950s the food controller (Halavi) had been the head of the food department (agaf), now termed a division (hativa).
more than the price floor.\textsuperscript{129} Furthermore, the government began to consider setting aside money to modernize and establish new olive presses for Arab villages.\textsuperscript{130} Additionally, Israeli agricultural officials began to express interest in multinational cooperation,\textsuperscript{131} particularly in the scientific and technical arenas.\textsuperscript{132} In the late 1950s, estimates of the olive oil crop and prices had stabilized around 4,000 tons of average annual production with prices between I£ 1,100-1,400.\textsuperscript{133}

Both on the local and the national levels, Palestinians continued to press for their rights and advocate for themselves within the relevant Israeli state institutions. In a memorandum to the Knesset economic council, the village council for Ramah expressed disappointment and dissatisfaction with both local and national food control officials, who had washed their hands of

\textsuperscript{129} For the 1955-1956 season, for example, the minimum price for olive oil with 5 percent acidity was set at I£ 1,100 per ton, but farmers were estimated to receive I£ 1,300-1,500 per ton. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid, page 2. While the government had ostensibly been funding the rehabilitation of olive groves in the early 1950s, the impact of those funds (let alone where and whether they were actually disbursed) was never clear; if it did have an impact, it was likely not substantially in support of Palestinian farmers.

\textsuperscript{131} ISA GL-6026/7 48.0.6.1814, “Development budget: olive oil [in Hebrew],” contains extensive correspondence between Z. Rapaport in Hebrew, English, and French, identifying himself as directeur de la division de l'arboriculture fruitière et de la viticulture (ministry of trade/commerce and industry), with multinational institutions: in particular, the Tunisia-based Fédération international d'Oléiculture as well as the UN conference on olive oil, 1957-1959. Rapaport attempted to provide statistical evaluations of the olive sector in Israel, but the numbers are extremely low and should be considered unreliable when compared with later, more detailed information.

\textsuperscript{132} For example, the Israelis collected extensive French scientific research reports regarding the testing of olive oil for potential adulteration. A. Mazur, department of olives and oil, ministry of commerce and industry, “Subject: Forgery detection in olive oil,” GL-6044/5 48.0.6.2056, “Food division – olive oil,” Document 10.

\textsuperscript{133} A. Halavi [division of food], Meeting notes (held 10.5.58 about olive crop of coming season) [in Hebrew], 16 June 1958. GL-6044/5 48.0.6.2056, “Food division – olive oil,” Document 6.
continued problems with the marketing of olive oil. Two conclusions can be drawn from the
details of the complaint. First, the government’s minimum price in the mid to late 1950s may not
have been as effective as officials portrayed it. Second, issues persisted with marketing
mechanisms specifically because of Shemen’s outsized role in the market as the officially
sanctioned olive oil monopolist. Similar complaints from the same Jewish Israeli (Osherovitz,
who had previously prompted the Ramah raid), confirm both conclusions. In sum, this

134 Following up on a meeting in al-Mghar (also transliterated as Maghar or Mughar) two
months prior, the village council wrote in Arabic in November 1958 to dissent from the food
control officials who now contended that since olive oil was now free (and therefore not price
controlled,) farmers could market their goods as they saw fit. In the letter, they explained: “Yes,
olive oil is free; however, this does not mean that a certain company is starting to monopolize
olive oil and exploiting cultivators by imposing rock-bottom prices for the commodities.” They
went on to explain that the farmers had held onto their goods, leading to hardship and debts for
both the farmers themselves and the local council that had its own tax obligations. They
suggested an imposition of “a minimum price… befitting the expenses of production and the
rising cost of living, in order to enable the producer to make a living from his production,
something you all promised in the aforementioned meeting.” Majlis al-ramah al-mahalli [Ramah
local council] to head of members of the economic council of the Knesset and the Ministry of
Commerce and Industry, “Subject: problem of olive oil and its marketing [in Arabic],” 5

135 In his letter, he specifically stated that the factories were only willing to pay a
maximum of I£ 1,250 per ton for the 1958-1959 season. Yitzhak Osherovitz, 27 Michal St.
Kiryat-Bialik [northern Haifa suburb] to Mazur, director of oils branch, “Subject: price of olive
oil for 1958/1959 season [in Hebrew],” n.d. [likely late October, early November], GL-6044/5,
Document 19.

Unsatisfied by the official response that olive oil was no longer controlled, in a follow-
up, Osherovitz continued to object on the grounds that the gap between wages for Arab and
Hebrew labor had narrowed to such an extent that Osherovitz was paying Arab workers in
Ramah I£ 100 a ton, and Jewish workers in Safad I£ 120. On this basis, Osherovitz wanted a
minimum between I£ 1,700-1,800. Furthermore, he complained that when he tried to sell to the
factories, one factory owner named Yitzhak Libovitz apologized that he could only buy 12 of
Osherovitz’s 50 tons of olive oil at the guaranteed minimum price. Osherovitz to Halavi [in

Osherovitz further complained that “Arabs” sent their olive oil to Izhar in exchange for a
promissory note for payment within three months, while Shemen “refused to release even a
single empty barrel for storing olive oil at the olive oil presses for a deposit in cash,” again at
least obliquely blaming Shemen.
suggests that the price floor was insufficiently funded to function as the government portrayed it. The switch from supervision to decontrol was also still recent enough that an official felt the need to reiterate that the government no longer set the prices.\textsuperscript{136}

The Ramah council continued to press their demands throughout the first half of 1959, this time over acidity requirements.\textsuperscript{137} The food division director offered the same response: supervision of olive oil had been suspended years previously at the request of the farmers; the government was willing to support a price floor for olive oil for export; and the farmers were free to sell their olive oil locally for higher prices.\textsuperscript{138} Halavi did not mention what, precisely, the Palestinian olive cultivators should do when local prices collapsed, or what would happen when the government had failed to budget enough to offer sufficient subsidies to factories like Shemen to purchase the country’s domestic olive oil surplus at the price floor.

\textsuperscript{136} In a reply to the Ramah municipal council, Halavi began by reiterating that olive oil was not under supervision, and noted that even with the price of olive oil in foreign markets falling to £720 per ton, the government would maintain the price floor at £1,250 by offering a subsidy to the factories for the difference, “considering that the olive oil sector constitutes a livelihood for a wide stratum of agriculturalists in the land of Israel.” A. Halavi to al-Ramah local council, “Subject: olive oil [in Hebrew],” 23 November 1958. GL-6044/5 48.0.6.2056, “Food division – olive oil,” Document 21.

\textsuperscript{137} Writing again to the economic committee of the Knesset in January 1959, the council reported that the issues associated with the rising cost of living were being compounded by the five percent maximum acidity requirement to obtain the full price support for their olive oil; the Ramah producers reported that weather issues relating to the lack of rain and a heat wave and high temperatures had resulted in higher acidity and lower yields than usual, as the “fruit had dried up on the tree” before picking, compounding the economic shock. Ramah local council to economic committee of the Knesset, “Subject: marketing olive oil [in Arabic],” 13 January 1959. GL-6044/5, Document 25.

\textsuperscript{138} The head of the economic committee of the Knesset forwarded a translation of the Ramah council’s letter into Hebrew to the food division. Head of economic committee to Halavi, 20 January 1959, GL-6044/5, Document 26; Halavi to Avniel [Economic committee head, Knesset], 26 January 1959. GL-6044/5, Document 27.
The head of the Ramah local council, Shafiq Dib, continued to press officials on these issues, writing to the ministry of commerce and industry in April 1959, then following up with the military governor in mid May.\textsuperscript{139} In the meantime, the Ramah villagers tried a new strategy, having established an olive oil cooperative, called “al-Zeytunah.”\textsuperscript{140}

This seems to have represented a turning point in the relationship, as Halavi concluded with an offer of official assistance in establishing a modern pickling facility and more advanced olive oil presses (to reduce acidity).\textsuperscript{141} In fact, Ramah representatives had been pushing for that

\textsuperscript{139} Q. Qadish, citizen affairs on behalf of Israel Defense Army Military Governor to Mazur, “Subject: Olive oil crop [in Hebrew],” 17 May 1959. GL-6044/5, Document 29. Following up on a phone call of 15 May, the memo forwarded a copy of a translation into Hebrew of a letter from Shafiq Dib, head of local council of Ramah, addressed to minister of commerce and industry, “subject: olive oil crop,” dated 24 April 1959, regarding economic difficulties caused by plummeting prices. In reply, Mazur claimed that the factories had bought 50 tons of oil intended primarily for “mixing to improve the taste [of refined oil] for export,” and that Arab producers received £1,300 per ton, more than the guaranteed minimum price.

\textsuperscript{140} The name was based on the root in both Arabic and Hebrew for olive, and their bilingual letterhead identified it in both Arabic and Hebrew as a “cooperative association for consumption and marketing.” The Zeytunah cooperative wrote to Halavi directly in Arabic, asking for an appointment to meet and “look into the issue of marketing our produce of olive oil and olives,” since the “livelihood of hundreds and thousands of people depends on this issue.” al-Zeytunah, cooperative association for consumption and marketing, al-Ramah to director general of the ministry of commerce and industry, Dr. Halavi, “Subject: Meeting request [in Arabic],” 19 May 1959. GL-6044/5, Document 31.


\textsuperscript{141} Halavi followed up in late June to both the April letter from the Ramah local council and the meeting with the cooperative that had been held on 1 June. In it, he again summarized that there was no longer price setting for olive oil, and the ministry had bought only 75 tons of the season’s crop. Similarly there was no price set for pickled olives, of which the government had bought even less. He noted that the factories would be subsidized to purchase “any and all olive oil of 5 percent acidity for £1,250.” Halavi to Rama [sic] local council, “Subject: olive oil and olive crop [in Hebrew],” 22 June 1959. GL-6044/5, Document 35.
very kind of support since July 1957, protests which had helped to spur the creation of the ineffective advisory committee.\textsuperscript{142}

The Ramah local council wrote again in the spring of 1958: “The end all and be all for al-Ramah is production of olives and olive oil. The economic situation of the people of al-Ramah and the level of their wellbeing depends to a great extent on the performance of olive production and the prices that they obtain.”\textsuperscript{143} With unfavorable crops in back-to-back seasons of 1956/1957 and 1957/1958, indebted farmers were at the mercy of intermediary traders. The current situation, they continued, was marked by a “massive financial deterioration and the introduction of terror and desperation in the souls of the people, making them view their dark future with eyes full of worry.”\textsuperscript{144} The council decried the fact that prices were so low that many could not obtain basic necessities, and were no longer able to provide food for their families and children; now with banks demanding repayment, it had become an existential matter. The letter culminated in a series of rhetorical questions:

\textsuperscript{142} Secretary of the [Ramah Zeytunah olive] Association to economic committee of the Knesset, “Subject: Protest [in Arabic],” 11 July 1957 following up on meeting held 2 July. Of the eight demands, the first six revolved around issues in the relations between Halavi representing the government and the association representing Galilee olive oil producers. The seventh demand was for government assistance in industrializing olive pickling, and the eighth was to voice support for Arab MK Massad Qasis’s proposal for a committee representing both government and producers. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 18.

In reply, Halavi had impugned the quality of Arab pickled olives, but noted for the first time that the government was ready to help interested growers in establishing a plant to pickle and pack the olives, as well as the use of government laboratories for quality testing. However, Halavi contended that it was unpracticable to implement a minimum price for pickled olives as they had for olive oil, without further explanation. Halavi, Food division of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to Secretary of the Cooperative society “Al-Zeytuna,” al-Ramah [in Hebrew], 31 July 1957. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 21.


\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
How can one be starving, with goods in his house, in a state that [not only] calls day and night for, [but also] guides and encourages the people to plant and cultivate everywhere! What is the use of improving an olive tree that the Ministry of Agriculture takes growing interest in day after day, whereas its produce … obtains nothing or next to nothing in terms of price? How it is fair or reasonable that a kilogram of olives can be sold in the markets for two lira and cultivators cannot find someone to purchase from them for pennies [see footnote] … The call of the people is a cry for help to your honors to solve this economic crisis and offer succor [lit. introduce assurances] to their souls, by finding an outlet for the goods of their people and improving their prices.\footnote{Ibid. The original Arabic used the word “brutat,” rendered as prutot in the official Hebrew translation. Elsewhere in the letter, the council claimed that for a kilogram of olives Ramah farmers were receiving only 4 gharoush, equivalent to 40 pruta at the time, which was prior to the introduction of the agorot in 1960.}

The terse official response was again that olives, like olive oil, were uncontrolled in price.\footnote{To this impassioned plea, Halavi responded a month later that it had fallen on him to reply, noting that “our office cannot force factories that pickle olives to pay certain prices for olives for pickling.” He repeated that he would not set a minimum price, and suggested that the price discrepancy claimed in the letter was the result of comparing green (i.e. unripened and unprocessed olives) versus processed, pickled olives. He further suggested using the olives for olive oil instead, specifically to reorient their olive oil production for export and sale abroad. Halavi to Ramah local council, “Subject: olives [in Hebrew],” 22 April 1958. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 29.}

Ramah residents remained concerned about other adverse governmental policy, especially upon reading in trade publications in early 1959 that the government had issued licenses to import olive oil.\footnote{Shafiq Dib, chair of Ramah local council, to Ministry of Commerce and Industry, “Subject: Importation of olive oil [in Arabic],” 23 April 1959. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 34.} Dib, the chair of the Ramah local council, wrote that they were astounded by this news for a wide variety of reasons: olive oil was available domestically in excess of demand, with prices collapsing below production costs. Furthermore, they noted that increasing wages of workers was resulting in unprofitability of olive production:

\texttt{\textcolor{red}{[C]}ompletely ignoring olives or uprooting and planting other crops instead have become preferable. It is clear that with the present economic situation, people have completely stopped planting new olive saplings. The evidence for this is that the Jewish colonies and kibbutzes have no interest in cultivating and producing}
olives, because it is much more profitable to direct their attention to other agricultural products.

The village council found it especially bizarre that the government would spend hard currency for a good that could be produced domestically. Rather than subsidize or offer price supports, they maintained that the Ramah villagers could “only view this as an act intended to destroy our economy, and as a result, eradicate our very existence.”148 Without subsidies or an effective price floor, Dib warned, if nothing was done urgently, “the results will be very dangerous for us, because even now we have not disposed of our produce from the past year, and the people of this village face economic destruction, pure and simple [lit. be-kul m’ana al-kalemah].”149

With one exception, the relevant Israeli officials including the Arab Affairs Adviser remained unmoved.150 The end result of extensive, internal deliberations over the next year was a

148 Ibid.
149 Ibid. Atypically, the archives did not preserve a direct response to this missive.
150 Later that year, David Zacharia, the director of the Arab Village Section of the Ministry of Agriculture, began to take up the issues regarding the marketing of olives that had been raised repeatedly by the village of Ramah and others. Zacharia wrote to the Arab Affairs Adviser in late December 1959, noting the need to establish a council to encompass both growers in the Arab community and government representatives. David Zacharia, Arab village section of Ministry of Agriculture, to Arab Affairs Adviser (office of the prime minister), “Subject: Marketing olives – Ramah [in Hebrew],” 24 December 1959. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 35.

The duplication of previous efforts involving the economic council and the advisory committee went unremarked upon. Zacharia invited the Food Division of the Ministry of Commerce, the Economic Department, the Department of Orchards, and his own section to meet to discuss the question comprehensively. The meeting did not occur for three months, and evidently no Arab representatives were invited to attend. In conclusion, after these discussions among the various Israeli state official stakeholders, the Arab Affairs Adviser recorded in early March 1960, “the situation of marketing olives and olive oil is not serious as to justify the adoption of special measures.” Arab Affairs Adviser, “Subject: summary of meeting on the issue of marketing olives held in the offices of the adviser Mon. 29.2.60 [in Hebrew],” 2 March 1960. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 38.

Zacharia nevertheless remained concerned about the future of the Arab olive sector, and investigated complaints about taxes, specifically excessive assessments for olive groves, and the
promise to take into account drought in order to reach fair tax assessments that would possibly offset lower olive yields — basically the equivalent to long-standing Ottoman tithe relief practices continued by both the Mandate and Jordanian authorities as well.

The Ramah local council followed up the next olive season, in late November 1961, with a heartfelt and poetic expression of their grievances, on behalf of all Arab olive cultivators in the country, “about the injustice, neglect, and prejudice toward our production owing to (1) the lack of protection (2) lack of marketing (3) reasonable pricing in line with expenses and outlays.”

The residents of al-Ramah, considered the issue one of “life and death, because the living of the vast majority of the residents is based on the production of olives and olive oil,” yet the government remained indifferent. Taxes and the cost of living continued to rise, while their goods remained stored at home, “awaiting the justice and fairness of the government or for mercy to fall on him from out of the sky. Honorable [Arab affairs] adviser, the common saying goes ‘scream as much as it hurts’ and we are hurting deeply… our issue is one of right and possibility of tax relief due to drought damage. Arab affairs adviser Liskovski to Zacharia [in Hebrew] 7 March 1960. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 40.

Other officials were still unconvinced of the need for intervention. The director of the Department for Exports of Oil and Food Production reported as much in late spring 1960: first, he dismissed any concerns about imported olive oil as meager amounts of a luxury commodity that should not compete directly with domestic production; second, he acknowledged a lack of subsidies, but contended this was the trade-off for olive producers to enjoy a fair free-market price for olive oil; third, he concluded with a denigration of Arab pickled olives, the quality of which was so poor that there was no chance of mass demand for the product. Y. Mazur, director of department for export of oils and food production, report dated 25 May 1960 [in Hebrew], forwarded by Zacharia 13 June 1960. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 43.


Ramah local council to Arab affairs adviser, “Subject: the problems of olive oil production in the country [in Arabic],” 20 November 1961. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 47.

Ibid.

327
justice… and we believe therefore there is a sick policy aimed at killing our production….”

The first and most important point was how Palestinian olive cultivators had been hurt by price controls, and now were hurt, in their view, even more by the lack of government support, particularly the lack of credit for loans and the lack of marketing mechanisms. The producers of Ramah again raised the issue of imported olives, and asked once again for support in developing domestic olive pickling. In conclusion, they asked for the same encouragement that the government gave to other agricultural sectors, to increase domestic production, in order to offer the cultivators “safety, security, and stability.”

Elias Nakhleh, by then a Knesset member (elected as an Arab ally of the ruling Mapai party), used his role to amplify the concerns of his constituents, drawing particular attention to the unacceptable prices paid for olives, now £1,400 a ton when production costs amounted to £1,600. These costs were attested to by the councils of both al-Ramah and al-Mughar, two of the largest olive-producing villages in the Galilee. This problem of disproportionate

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154 Ibid.
155 “When olive oil was controlled, the department of food placed [restrictions and took the surplus] … and deprived us of our production and handed it over all of it to the press at rock-bottom prices. After demanding the lifting of controls [lit. supervision], marketing stopped … and [the government] stopped providing loans … like al-salf, the advance contract to hand over olives — and the result is neglect of marketing and the companies conspiring against us …[.]” Ibid.
156 Ibid., page 2.
157 Ibid.
158 He translated the detailed cost breakdown of olive production that had been enclosed in the letter from Ramah to the Arab affairs adviser, from Arabic into Hebrew, along with a cover letter in Hebrew. Elias Nakhleh to Arab Affairs Adviser, 21 November 1961. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 48.
159 The Arabic original from the local councils of al-Mughar and al-Ramah was addressed to the adviser to the head of government for minority affairs, “Subject: Expenses of one dunam of olives [in Arabic].” The total cost of £1,600 per ton of olive oil was derived from the following math. The costs of cultivating one dunam they calculated by adding up plowing (£9),
production costs paired with unlivable sale prices also threatened Kafr Yasif, Yarka, Julius, Abu Snan, ʿArraba, Sakhnin, Deir Hanna, and ʿEilabun.160

These difficulties were compounded by a hike in the arnona, or property tax, the next month. Although the Ramah local council welcomed “paying taxes within the limits of the law and of justice … ,” they argued that the tax hike would only lead to “impoveryishment, desperation, and apostasy from all regulations and laws.”161

Unlike previous issues, the complaints about the arnona tax hike found sympathy from the authorities. The Arab Affairs Adviser, Dr. Pollack, forwarded the letter to the property tax authorities, asking them to reconsider the increase in taxation on olive orchards, noting the difficult crisis of the olive sector, particularly the issue of marketing when the products found only limited demand domestically, leading to a dire situation for olive cultivators.162 The arnona

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161 Reiterating the disparity between production costs and market prices, the Ramah council noting in addition that “a large portion of the produce from the 60/61 season remains stored in [our] houses without marketing.” Ramah local council to director of finance and arab affairs adviser [in Arabic], 8 December 1961. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 49.
162 Arab Affairs Adviser Dr. G. Pollack to Mr. Solmon, director of haArnona [in Hebrew], 20 December 1961. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 50.
managers complied, and reduced the tax on Arab olive crops by 40 percent in comparison to the tax on Jewish-owned olive groves.\footnote{D. Staub, aide, Management of Property Tax and Compensation Fund, to Dr. G. Pollack, Arab Affairs Adviser to the Prime Minister, “Subject: property tax on olive groves [in Hebrew],” 2 January 1962. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 52.}

The sympathetic response from the authorities seems to have marked a true turning point in the relationship between village leaders and the relevant authorities. The next month, in January 1962, the al-Mughar local council asked for the government to send experts to validate and help to explain the poor yield of the unexpectedly desiccated and unfruitful crop.\footnote{Al-Mughar local council [majlis al-Mughar al-mahhalli] to general inspector for minority affairs in the commission of the department of income taxation, Haifa, “Subject: Survey of the production of the fruit of the olive trees for the season of the year 1961 [in Arabic],” 11 January 1962. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 54.} Of course, the reason they sought help was to revise tax estimates accordingly, but for a village council to ask for the presence of inspectors was something new entirely.

In addition to finding a sympathetic ear in Dr. Pollack, the complaints of Arab Palestinian olive producers in the Galilee in the early 1960s were repeatedly noted by the military government, which noted deep resentment in the region after meeting with the heads of the Ramah, Kafr Yasif, and Mughar village councils.\footnote{Military governor [signed on behalf of head of unit 50] to Arab affairs adviser, “Subject: deep resentment in Ramah over lack of options for marketing olive oil [in Hebrew],” 23 January 1962. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 57.} The major olive oil producing villages continued to send telegrams and letters to both the military governor and the Arab affairs adviser in early February 1962, noting that two consecutive seasons of production were stored for lack of outlets.\footnote{Ramah local council to Arab affairs adviser [in Arabic], 2 February 1962. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 60; al-Mughar local council to Arab affairs adviser [in Arabic], 12 February 1962. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 61. Ariah Catz RM’N, general military governor}
From contestation and criticism to cooperation and collaboration: the evolution of the Council for Olives and Olives Oil into a parallel department of the council of fruits acting as a production and marketing board

The range of villages communicating with the authorities in a constructive manner suggests at a minimum a change in the tenor of the relationship of Palestinian in the Galilee to the relevant government authorities by the early to mid 1960s. While frequently critical of governmental policy, the complaints of these Palestinians in Israel found increasing responsiveness from a number of sympathetic individuals representing the state — including, most critically, the offices of the military governor and the Arab affairs adviser to the prime minister. These villages, such as Ramah and Mughar among others, encompassed some of the largest producers of olives and olive oil in Israel.

It is hard to say what played the primary causal role in the shifting of dynamic, from one of hostile contestation, with Palestinians seeing all policies as existential threats, to one of...
cautious cooperation. Perhaps it just took time: it had taken more than a decade after the peak of
the clashes, epitomized in the 1952 Ramah confiscation, and 15 years after the Nakba, for both
sides to reach a modus vivendi. Perhaps it was more a change in personnel in the Israeli state
bureaucracy; many of the same officials involved in the earlier clashes such as Carmi’ali and
Mazur remained in prominent roles through much of the 1950s, but by the early 1960s, a new set
of officials had become involved in the form of individuals like Pollack and Zacharia. Military
and security officials remained deeply involved in relations with the “Arab” minority, though
perhaps their attitudes had changed as well. Since it was, in the end, a dynamic between multiple
parties, the shift was likely mutually constitutive, driven by increasing acceptance of and
receptiveness toward the other, caused by the accumulation of experience. The building of
relationships over time through both contestation and cooperation seems to have resulted in a
tone of mutual, grudging respect. However, other factors should not be discounted, such as the
desperation of Palestinian Arab cultivators after a particularly bad set of years beginning in the
late 1950s, owing to both weather and difficulties in marketing. Neither can this particular
relationship be severed from the broader relationship of Palestinian citizens of Israel to the
government, with the gradual relaxing of restrictions on Arab Israelis that eventually culminated
in the official abolishment of military rule within the Green Line in 1966.

An example of this shift can be seen in the coordinated complaints of the Ramah council
and MK Nakhleh over two persistent issues: first, governmental acidity requirements for olive oil
subsidies; second, importation of pickled olives. In and of themselves, the nature of these
complaints highlights a shift in the expectations of the government. Rather than accuse the
government of either intentionally persecuting them, as Ramah had in the early 1950s, or suggest
governmental neglect and indifference, as they had in the late 1950s, the representatives of Ramah suggested that while the government was helping, they were not quite helping as much as they possibly could.

Thus while acknowledging the increasing support from the authorities for the olive sector, the Ramah council complained in early 1962 about the imposition of acidity requirements, which depressed the prices offered for olive oil that the factories would then export (with the help of government subsidies).\textsuperscript{167} This issue of price reductions to account for high acidity was not new. In the early 1950s, Ramah’s missives accused the authorities of discrimination and ethnic persecution; now, they merely asserted that the government was failing to live up fully to their promises to help the olive cultivators.

The culmination of exchanges such as these in the early 1960s resulted in the establishment of an effective committee dealing with olives, for the first time, which would

\begin{flushright}

The official in charge of price setting for export replied that there was no room for negotiation. Y. Mazur manager of department of exports of food products and adviser for matters of oils, division of foreign trade, ministry of commerce and industry to head of local council Ramah, “Subject: price of olive oil [in Hebrew],” 24 May 1962. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 69.

The Ramah local council followed up to elaborate that the stored oil already had higher degrees of acidity for a variety of reasons, which could not be rectified after the fact. “Your decision to acquire quantities of olive oil from producers via the companies has had a very good effect [al-ather al-tayyeb wa-al-hassan] on our souls, but we were stricken with disappointment and pain with respect to the pricing … .” A reduction of £30 per degree of acidity would substantially reduce their incomes, with acidity ranging between 10-16 percent resulting in prices between £1250 and £1400: “Stated plainly, the prices set are less than the cost of production and this is a grievous loss for all producers.” Linking the pricing to degree of acidity would neither ease the difficulties for producers, nor enable them to live in “assurance and peace.” al-Ramah local council to minister of commerce and industry, “Subject: pricing a ton of olive oil [in Arabic],” 15 May 1962. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 70.
\end{flushright}
became very active in the mid 1960s. The establishment of what was initially called the Council for Olives and Olives Oil (later called a “department” in Hebrew, alternatively termed a Production and Marketing Board in English translations) involved not only the Arab Affairs Adviser and the Ministry of Agriculture, but the police and the Shabak (internal security services, also known in English as the Shin Bet) as well, who vetted potential members.

The appointment process, including the vetting by security officials, reinforced the roles of established intermediaries like Elias Nakhleh — potentially alienating other members of the community, and even reinforcing sectarian divides. Four Druze residents of Ramah, for example, wrote that they were initially gladdened to hear of the formation of a council for marketing of olives, as owners of olive trees “who have lived through much hardship … however, we were

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168 Ministers of agriculture and industry to secretary of the government, “Subject: the council for producing and marketing fruits (temporary council) – expanding its activities to olives [in Hebrew],” 6 April 1962. The temporary council nominally began 15 May 1960 with the proposed addition of 10 members; however, it does not seem to have been officially established until mid 1962. Office of the adviser for matters of the councils for production and marketing to Arab Affairs Adviser Pollack [in Hebrew], 3 June 1962. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 71. Even then, vetting continued for almost two years thereafter, and the question of whether the council would oversee olive oil as well as olives was not settled until the council finally began meeting regularly in mid 1964.

169 The former identified potential villages and their representatives to be members of the council, which were then forwarded to the security officials. D. Zacharia, ministry of agriculture Nazareth region to Arab Affairs Adviser “Subject: members of the department [sic] of olives [in Hebrew],” 30 January 1963. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 81.

The police noted for example that one nominee had been fined in 1960 for the “illegal possession of contraband” and for the breach of a court order in 1962. Police of Israel, National Headquarters, Investigations Branch [Department of Special Investigations] to Arab Affairs Adviser, “Subject: department for olives [in Hebrew].” ISA GL-17022/12, Document 83.

The Shabak identified this same individual as one of two “known nationalists” among the nominees. Although further specifics were withdrawn from the Israeli state archival files, the Shabak ultimately dropped their objections to the inclusion of the two “known nationalists,” though noting they would “continue to monitor them.” Head of Unit 490, Sharut bitahon kelali [General Security Services, commonly abbreviated as Shabak or Shin Bet] to Arab Affairs Adviser, “Subject: Department for olives [in Hebrew],” 12 May 1963. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 85.
astounded and taken aback when we heard” that the village representatives would be Hanna Mwuis and Elias Nakhleh — thus no Druze from Ramah would be represented on the council.¹⁷⁰

In December 1964, an individual named Shoukry Khazen sent a telegram from Haifa in English to the prime minister, condemning Nakhleh and other intermediaries for corruption: “Strongly protest the behaviour [sic] of olive oil agents including Elias Nakhleh member knesset,” further accusing him and others of using their positions to monopolize the olive oil trade, profiting off of the villagers by pressuring them to sell low and pocketing the difference.¹⁷¹

Many of the villages in the Galilee expressed concern about the proposed committee’s effectiveness, specifically its powers to combat monopolistic practices by the larger factories like Shemen. This concern was extremely understandable, considering the experience with previous committees formed in the late 1950s, which had no practical effects on marketing.¹⁷² The

¹⁷⁰ Youssef Salih Farah, Mohammad Qassem Hassan, Najib Ismail, and Salman Qassem Farhud to Mr. Shlomo Kinarti, chair, council of production and marketing of olives, district office of agriculture – Nazareth [in Arabic], n.d. received 5 June 1964. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 124.

¹⁷¹ Khazen concluded: “I implore you all stop this corruption and treat us and our clients on bases of equity and justice.” Telegram from Shoukry Khazen, Haifa, to Prime Minister, Jerusalem, 31 December 1964. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 129.

¹⁷² Yarka villagers wrote with their concern that the committee might only deal with olives, excluding olive oil, which was logical considering the umbrella council concerned only fruits, which may partly explain why the council/department/production and marketing board for olives and olive oil was ultimately constituted separately from the umbrella council for fruits. The Yarka olive cultivators praised the step of establishing the council, but worried that it might deprive the council of the “right to intervene in matters of olive oil, a matter which leaves us in the same miserable state subject to smaser [brokers, middlemen, speculators] and monopolists.” Cultivators of olives in the village of Yarka to the Arab affairs adviser, “Subject: Authority of the council of marketing olive oil and olives [in Arabic],” 12 June 1963. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 86.

Kinarti responded to Yarka on behalf of the ministry of agriculture, noting that olive oil would fall within the purview and would be taken up in due time. Kinarti, ministry of agriculture to cultivators of olives in Yarka village [in Hebrew], 27 June 1963. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 89.
possibility that it would be spun off under a “separate but equal” rationale, akin to the Histadrut’s Arab section, was also a logical fear, considering the dominance of Palestinians within the olive oil sector. Villagers from Kafr Yasif echoed the language of Yarka, calling the move “a blessed step,” but warning it could become useless without full authority over the olive sector. The villagers therefore regretfully accused the ministry of commerce and industry of making it a “superficial [suwwarian] committee,” unequal in standing with other such sectors. The cultivators asked for it to be made permanent, official, and to oversee both olives and olive oil.

The larger significance of these missives is to illustrate the continued shift in relations with the authorities. The Palestinian villagers in the Galilee insisted on their equal rights as citizens, using those rights as a basis to make claims on the government and to spur the construction of government institutions in the form of advisory committees. Whereas in the early

173 Olives, they noted, were essential to the “livelihood of thousands of citizens in this country. This general economic branch suffered and continues to suffer crises,” which the government met only with what it called “laughable reforms” [al-murajʿat al-maskharah, lit. farcical revisions]. This same phrase appeared in the Yarka letter above as well (document 86). 22 villagers from Kafr Yasif to minister of agriculture, minister of trade and industry, arab affairs adviser, speaker of Knesset, council of fruits, and Mr. Zacharia [in Arabic], 12 June 1963. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 87.

174 They also demanded help in marketing and protection from “local exploitation by corporations and monopolists.” Ibid.

Villagers from Deir al-Assad and al-Biʿina penned a similar letter, signed by more than a dozen of the cultivators from the two villages. Olive cultivators from the two villages of Deir al-Assad and al-Biʿina to minister of agriculture [in Arabic], n.d. received 1 August 1963. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 90.

In a blanket reply to these villages as well as to Sakhnin, a government official signaled that they would be responsive to these demands in assisting with the marketing of olive oil by absorbing-surpluses through fair compensation, and that the government would heed the recommendations of what it had now begun calling the “department of olive oil” (as a committee created to stand separately but alongside the council of fruits), which would negotiate olive oil pricing in the coming season. Spitz to local committees of Yarka village, Kafr Yasif, Deir al-Asad village, Biʿina village, and resident of Sakhnin village, “Subject: olive oil [in Hebrew],” 10 July 1963. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 92.
1950s they had merely wanted controls lifted, by the early to mid 1960s, after a stretch of deleterious years, the olive producers actively sought government help. They not only wanted help in price setting, but also wanted to ensure that the new committees were effective and expansive in their regulatory power to intervene in the uncontrolled market.

Statistics and assessments of the Spiegel committee on the “olive branch [anf]” of Israeli agriculture, 1948-1962

In the intervening years between the announcement of the olive council and its effective establishment as an active department/board (pertaining to production and marketing of olives and olive oil), the concerned government officials met without any cultivator representation, establishing yet another committee with a slightly different name but effectively the same purview: “the committee for matters of the olive oil branch,” headed by one Dr. Spiegel, which conducted extensive research into the recent past, present, and future of the sector. At the first meeting in July 1963, a variety of government officials met to discuss the issue of Arab olive oil. While they did not explicitly refer to the years of petitions from cultivators, they effectively focused on the source of cultivator resentment by marking their primary intent as ensuring profitability for olive growers. The new committee sought to research and make recommendations concerning three crucial questions: estimation of olive crops, estimation of uses of the crop (the division between pickling and pressing for oil), and potential price setting to

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175 Deputy director general Kinarti, ministry of agriculture to Mr. Roman, office of the adviser for minority affairs (office of the prime minister), Mr. Artul, department of olives, Mr. Caspi, ministry of commerce and industry, Haifa, and Dr. Spiegel, “Subject: committee for matters of the olive oil branch [in Hebrew],” 3 July 1963. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 91.
aid in securing the profitability of the sector. Unlike the marketing department/board involving Palestinian cultivators, which took years to establish and become operational, the government officials met almost immediately in late July, and the committee completed its work in a matter of weeks. The Spiegel committee sought to estimate the current year’s crop and look into “suggestions for actions to secure the profitability of the branch in the Arab sector.” The Spiegel committee would generate the first extensive assessment of the olive sector in Israel, covering 1948-1962.

The Ministry of Agriculture’s 1963 “report on the olive branch [anf] in the Arab Economy” largely summarized data from the Central Bureau of Statistics to give baseline indications of then-present trends. According to these statistics, the surface area of olive orchards in Israel in 1961 was 122,000 dunams, of which 39,000 were classified as in the Jewish sector, including state “orchards of the nation,” leaving 83,000 dunams of olives in Arab hands.

Effectively, then, the total dunumage of area under olives in Israel had remained the same since 1948, with Jewish Israeli cultivation expanding at the expense of Arab Palestinian ownership. Production had remained essentially the same since 1948, hovering between 9,000-10,000 metric tons of olives on an annual basis, or a per dunam production of 112 kilograms.

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176 Ibid.
177 Dr. Spiegel to Artul, Caspi, and Roman. “Invitation to meeting for committee for olive oil affairs, Monday 22.7 11am, Ministry of Agriculture in Jerusalem, Melisandre Rd. [later renamed Rehov Heleni Hamalka], room no. 104, Beit Sergei (Russian Compound) [in Hebrew],” 15 July 1963. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 93.
178 Ibid.
180 Ibid.
(though the consensus was that a more accurate figure was 150 kilograms, if one excluded marginally producing area that were decreasingly cultivated). Roughly 80 percent of the olives were pressed for oil, with the remaining fifth pickled. Arab production, broken out in the Israeli CBS statistics beginning 1952, continued to be oriented toward oil production, while Jewish production was largely oriented toward pickling and canning table olives. There was a slight increase in Arab table olive production over time. The pressing yield (percentage of the weight of the original olives versus the amount of the resulting oil) was 21 percent, which officials and cultivators agreed could be rounded up to 25 percent.

Table 13. Olive crop and oil extraction in tons for the years 1949–1962\textsuperscript{181}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>All economies</th>
<th>Arab economy</th>
<th>Jewish economy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total olive crop</td>
<td>Olives for picking</td>
<td>Olives for oil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>10,700</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>8,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>3,800</td>
<td>2,650</td>
<td>1,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>2,700</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>14,500</td>
<td>4,550</td>
<td>9,950</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>21,500</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>2,800</td>
<td>2,050</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>25,000</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>4,050</td>
<td>2,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>17,900</td>
<td>5,400</td>
<td>12,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>8,000</td>
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<td>1961</td>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>4,800</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average 1952-62</td>
<td>13,780</td>
<td>4,445</td>
<td>9,335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-year average 1952-61</td>
<td>12,964</td>
<td>4,386</td>
<td>8,578</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., page 2. Translated by the author from the original Hebrew into English. The two bottom rows with the averages have been corrected. The penultimate states in the Hebrew original that it covers 1952-1961; however, in checking the figures I discovered that it actually includes 1962. The last row in the Hebrew original claims that it is an average for 11 years; however, there are only 10 years from 1952-1961. Sources: [Israeli] Central Bureau of Statistics
Even these statistics showing, effectively, stagnation since 1948 may be a bit rosy. American reports relying on the same sources (the Central Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Agriculture) from the same period show a gradual reduction of dunumage in the early 1960s, reflecting the risk of neglect as the sector remained under threat, particularly after the lean years of the 1950s. The abrupt reduction reflected the challenges to olive cultivators throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s discussed earlier in this chapter. Successive reports from different American agricultural attachés to Israel in the mid 1960s help to highlight the continued, slow decline in area planted through 1965:

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183 While noting in 1962 the news of the impending establishment of an olive production and marketing board, the American agricultural attaché at the time noted the various difficulties threatening olive orchards: “The continued reduction in area is a result of the neglect which the olive groves suffer and consequent uprootings. So far there have not been any serious efforts at organizing olive growers and very little has been done toward encouraging exports.” The American agricultural attaché did not note the political reasons why this had been the case since 1948. Ibid.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Area (hectares)</th>
<th>Production (metric tons)</th>
<th>Pickling (metric tons)</th>
<th>Oil (metric tons)</th>
<th>Production (metric tons)</th>
<th>Exports (metric tons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>13,000</td>
<td>2,800</td>
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<td>750</td>
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<td>25,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>4,200</td>
<td>604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>7,000</td>
<td>4,050</td>
<td>2,950</td>
<td>550</td>
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<td>13,000</td>
<td>17,900</td>
<td>5,400</td>
<td>12,500</td>
<td>2,900</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>5,400</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>500</td>
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<td>4,800</td>
<td>3,800</td>
<td>1,000</td>
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<td>71</td>
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<tr>
<td>1963</td>
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<td>13,000</td>
<td>7,400</td>
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<td>12,000</td>
<td>21,000</td>
<td>8,300</td>
<td>12,700</td>
<td>2,850</td>
<td>60</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: [Israeli] Central Bureau of Statistics 187

Regardless of the precise statistics, the larger point is that the Israeli olive sector had essentially stagnated since 1948, with Palestinian holdings declining sharply in the early years and reducing gradually thereafter. But even this could be considered something of a Palestinian success, owing to cultivator tenacity and political contentiousness over the intervening decade and a half. Palestinian steadfastness in agriculture was largely in spite of governmental policies,

187 A dunam is a decare or a tenth of a hectare, so for example the late 1950s figures (as noted in footnote 182 above) of 13,000 hectares are equal to 130,000 dunams. Please note these statistics only cover olives utilized for olive oil, and trailed by a year in order to be finalized. The Ministry of Agriculture’s forecasts, by contrast, which were made in advance each year, had become increasingly pessimistic in the early 1960s, predicting larger reductions in planted area than the ICBS would ultimately record as the final tally. The official statistics from the ICBS kept the area under olives as stable for 1965, though the crop dropped in half to 10,500 tons for the 1965/1966 season, with just a slight rebound to 12,000 tons forecast for 1966/1967. Hougen (FAS), “Subject: Israel: fats and oils,” 3 March 1966; Hougen, “Subject: Israel: olive production 1966,” 10 October 1966. NARA RG 166 170/73/03/01-07, Box 34, Folder: Israel: Grains+Feeds – Finance 1966.

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which privileged a smaller subsector of pickled table olives at the expense of olive oil producers — implicitly, but effectively, on ethnic grounds.

The Spiegel committee marked a stunning reversal of such policies, which had been driven by subtly discriminatory politics. The Spiegel committee expressly endorsed nearly all of the demands that Palestinian olive cultivators had been making over the previous 15 years:

There is one fundamental premise that should be addressed, which is that we have an interest [in the fact] that the Arab farmer makes a living nowadays from the olive sector [lit. branch, anf] that will continue and will be the basis of agriculture in his village. Since the olive sector in the Arab economy is a rainfed [bʿal] sector, and in most cases there are no better alternatives for the use of land already planted with olives, he should be ensured a decent [raviah] income. In this case the same principle of guaranteed income should be applied as in other agricultural branches, that the state has an interest in dealing with them [so that] they will continue to be [engaged] in agriculture. 188

In short, the guiding principle of the Spiegel Committee was to make the olive sector equivalent to all other agricultural sectors. This amounted to an admission that equality and ensuring support for the “Arab” farmer and the “Arab” agricultural economy had not been the priorities previously. The Israeli government’s chief interests were fiscal solvency and the absorption of new immigrants in its earliest years. Support for other types of agriculture had been assured, but not for the Arab-dominated olive sector. Even within the olive sector, different commodities had been treated differently by the government throughout the 1950s, with Jewish-Israeli produced pickled olives marketed freely, while Palestinian-dominated olive oil had been subject to severe price controls that benefited the large, state-allied factories at the expense of small producers.

188 Moran Roman, “Proposals to secure the profitability of the olive branch in the Arab sector [in Hebrew],” prepared for the Spiegel Committee, July 1963. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 95.
Continuing in expounding the guiding principles of the work, the committee emphasized that the income from olives must cover all expenses, specifically in order to prevent the further abandonment of groves — or neglect of agriculture in general in favor of other, alternative work. The committee thus acknowledged, again implicitly, that price setting had been insufficient to cover planting and cultivation and marketing expenses. Furthermore, the guiding principles for the Spiegel committee explicitly noted that income from pickled olives and olive oil must be intrinsically linked, thus any body dealing with the industry would need to be able to intervene in the marketing for both products and potentially fix prices for both as well, “in order to ensure maximum profitability in the sector [lit. anf or branch] as a whole.” The Spiegel committee therefore dismantled the separation between pickled olives and olive oil, and made a linkage that Palestinian cultivators had been insisting upon for over a decade.

While the state had previously left pickled olive prices free while olive oil prices were controlled, Palestinians could not easily reorient their production for two crucial reasons. First, pickling and canning require capital in order to set up new facilities to achieve the types of standardization, packaging, and quality mandated for sale abroad. Funding and capital were in short supply generally in Israel, and particularly for Palestinians, who were not likely to receive state subsidies or rations more broadly. Second, olive types fall along a spectrum of suitability for picking versus pressing, relating to things like color, texture, size, taste, and oil content. Most of the types of olives traditionally grown by Palestinians had higher oil content, which made them better suited for pressing into olive oil. True reorientation from pressing to pickling would require uprooting groves and replanting them with other types.

189 Ibid.
190 Ibid.
In all, the guiding principles of the Spiegel committee were to ease the differences in how olive commodities were treated compared to other agricultural products in Israel, in order for olive cultivators to be able to sustain themselves. The committee therefore also sought to focus on practical steps to increase income, such as professional training through agricultural extension, credit and subsidies for modernizing equipment, intervention in marketing for the products, and government price supports.\(^{191}\) If the olive committee could guarantee an effective price floor for the relatively small quantities produced in excess of household demand — to which most production was oriented (with auto-consumption averaging around 2/3 of olive oil production in the official’s estimate)\(^{192}\) — then the market should normalize and stabilize. In connection, the committee hoped, this guarantee to purchase surplus oil would effectively eliminate the scourge of middlemen and dishonest brokers, who were scapegoated for lowballing cultivators.\(^{193}\)

Taken together, the committee’s proposals showed a newfound responsiveness to Palestinian citizens demands, especially in forcing the state to live up to its promises of supporting agriculture. What remains elusive is the reason for the timing. The committee proposed all of this in 1963, when there had ostensibly been a price floor in place since decontrol in the mid 1950s. These proposals suggest that whatever mechanisms had been put into place

\(^{191}\) The committee argued that improved quality through the reduction of acidity by improvements in various steps during the process of creating olive oil would lead to increased demand and improved marketing possibilities. Moran Roman, “Proposals to secure the profitability of the olive branch in the Arab sector [in Hebrew],” prepared for the Spiegel Committee, July 1963. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 95, page 2.

\(^{192}\) Ibid, 3.

\(^{193}\) The existing marketing arrangements had the additional problems of causing uncertainty and delays in processing. In particular, farmers would sometimes sell in panic at low prices, while other times they would withhold their goods if they could to wait for improved prices. Ibid, 2.
were ineffective, or never truly operational. While there was no direct participation of growers on the Spiegel committee, it is remarkable to see how nearly all of the points raised in protest over the preceding decades had been accepted as the committee’s fundamental principles. At the very least, the relevant Israeli bureaucrats now understood the problems of the sector, particularly the variety of ways that it had been differentiated and not supported by the state. The crux, as always, would be the follow through, particularly funding.\footnote{In the summer of 1963, the four officials on the Spiegel committee for olive affairs sent a 10-page report to Kinarti, the deputy director general of the ministry of agriculture, concluding that the price floor for a ton of olive oil with four percent acidity should be set at I£ 2,100. Dr. Spiegel, Roman, Caspi and Artul to Kinarti, Ministry of Agriculture, “Subject: Report of the Committee for Olive Affairs [in Hebrew],” 30 July 1963. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 100, page 2. The committee proposed limiting the subsidy to the 1963/1964 crop only, and with no price guarantees for olive oil at 10 percent acidity or more. The committee proposed adjustments for acidity in the 3-9 percent range, between a high of I£ 2,140, down to 1,900 at the low end for nine percent acidity. The previous price floor set in 1961 had been I£ 1,650. The committee estimated that they would need to subsidize I£ 500 for each ton, and that 500 tons would constitute the olive oil surplus on average, proposing an annual budget of I£ 250,000, plus an additional I£ 100,000 to subsidize pickled olives (Ibid., 5-6).}

In the meantime, the constitution of the olive production and marketing board, which had made no progress since 1962, finally began in the fall of 1963.\footnote{The committee was not made official until May 1964. “Establishment of council for production and marketing of olives (a temporary council) [in Hebrew],” 5 May 1964. ISA GL-17022/12, Documents 115-116.} Initial proposals gave the
government and Jewish growers a slim majority on the committee (13 of 25);\footnote{Adviser for affairs of councils for production and marketing, ministry of agriculture, to Dr. Y. Arnon, director general, ministry of finance, “Subject: olives – founding committee for production and marketing [in Hebrew],” 5 September 1963. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 102.} however, ultimately when the olive marketing committee was finally established in the summer of 1964, it became the 12th of its kind if Israel, but the only one with a slight majority of Arab members.\footnote{Pettipaw, “Subject: Israel: Olive production and marketing board established,” 3 June 1964. NARA FAS 170/72/33/01-07 Box 181, Folder: Olives & Olive Oil. Pettipaw noted that since olive groves were predominantly owned by Arabs, 13 of the 23 members were Arab (joined by Jewish growers and processors as well as government officials from the ministries of agriculture, commerce and industry, and finance). The American agricultural attaché also noted that the head was Arab, though Pettipaw did not name him. Based on Israeli sources, it seems he was not a citizen grower but an Israeli governmental official in the ministry of agriculture named Mr. ‘Artul from Nazareth, who was also involved in the Spiegel committee. That would mean that nongovernmental Palestinian Arab participation was likely 12 of the 23, and thus still a slim majority. However, the continued, parallel existence of the Spiegel committee and its involvement in calculating and setting prices suggests that the board did not call all the shots. “Difficulties in marketing olives out of Arab villages [in Hebrew]” al haMishmar, 23 December 1964. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 130; “Arabs and Druze find it difficult to market olives due to increased crop [in Hebrew],” haaretz, 23 December 1964. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 130; “Shortage of olive harvesters [in Hebrew],” haaretz, 6 January 1965. Document 131; “The market is glutted with olives [in Hebrew],” haaretz, 11 February 1965. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 134.} The olive marketing committee became most active in attempting to deal with the glut of the 1964-1965 crop, contending with a number of difficulties related to a spike in prices for labor and a drop in prices for olive oil.\footnote{Y. Pikar, Ministry of Finance, to Kinarti, Ministry of Agriculture, “Subject: Absorption of olive oil [in Hebrew],” 13 January 1965. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 132.}

The state had promised to subsidize the purchase of 1,000 tons of olive oil in order to aid the sector, which was now estimated to cost the government £1,000,000 — almost seven times the Spiegel committee’s original projections.\footnote{Government officials ultimately purchased about 650 tons of olive oil, noting that “[u]nfortunately the oil factories are refusing to absorb additional quantities of olive oil claiming that they do not see any way or how they could market...”}
Producers, such as Yusef Sliman Mola in Yarka, blamed the committee for production and marketing of olives, particularly the Arab head of the committee from Nazareth named Mr. ʿArtul (who was a ministry of agriculture official fluent in Hebrew), for the failure to purchase the promised quantities. ʿArtul and the committee had just days prior requested an emergency meeting with other government officials, though with no apparent results.

One potential cause for this failure was the relatively meager quantities that the factories were able to market abroad in the mid 1960s. About two years later, the factories had been able to dispose of less than half of the amount that the government had subsidized them to absorb from 1964/1965. No mention was made of what happened to the subsequent years’ crops, though subsidies for production appear to have remained in place only for pickled olives. Thus, the

200 M. Cohen, Director of oils and soap section, ministry of commerce and industry, to MK Elias Nakhleh [in Hebrew], 21 February 1965. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 138.
201 Typing in Hebrew (unusual, as most documents from Palestinian citizens were handwritten in Arabic), Mola stated that ʿArtul had promised to accept 500 tons of olive oil, but only purchased 50. On this basis, he accused ʿArtul of exploitation, abuse of powers, and discriminatory and preferential treatment in favor of other Nazarenes that he named in the letter. Mola concluded by demanding ʿArtul’s replacement. Yussef Sliman Mola to Ministers of Agriculture and Commerce, “Subject: Mr. ʿArtul, director of the committee for production and marketing of olives [in Hebrew],” 18 February 1965. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 140.
202 Telegram from executive committee of the olive committee to the office of the Arab affairs adviser [in Hebrew], 15 February 1965. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 142.
203 The executive committee sent another telegram much later that spring asking for help in resolving the problem of absorbing the excess olive oil production. Telegram from ʿArtul on behalf of executive committee of olive council to arab affairs adviser [in Hebrew], 12 April 1965. ISA GL-17022/12, Document 144.
204 For example, by the end of 1966, 15 tons of raw olives had been exported to Italy for pickling, but only 381 tons of olive oil had been exported, 88 percent of which went to the United States. This was equivalent to roughly 1,700 tons of olives, all of which had been picked during the 1964 glut. Hougen, “Subject: Israel: olive production 1966,” 10 October 1966. NARA FAS 170/73/03/01-07, Box 34, Folder: Israel: Grains+Feeds – Finance 1966.
205 Hougen noted that the supported prices for the 1966/67 season were £ 880 for green olives and £ 780 for black olives. Ibid.
linkage between olive oil and pickled olives may not have lasted through the first crisis faced by the Spiegel committee and the olive production board.

**Conclusion**

The Ramah incident in 1952 and the establishment of the olive production and marketing board in 1964/1965 bookend the story of the changing relationship between Palestinian citizens in the Galilee and the Israeli authorities, with a move toward a modus vivendi after years of contestation. The relationship was facilitated and largely carried out by male Arab Palestinians intermediaries that sometimes benefited personally from their relationships with the government, who frequently positioned themselves publicly as champions of their communities, but occasionally faced pushback and accusations of corruption from those they claimed to represent.

The Ramah confiscation and its aftermath illustrated the adversarial nature of the early relationship between the Palestinians of the Galilee and Israeli officials. Despite their tenuous position in the new state, with many at their most vulnerable in the immediate aftermath of the Nakba, Israel’s Palestinian citizens could offer resistance and “make an utter shambles” of governmental policies.²⁰⁶ By bringing in Palestinian voices, I have tried to show that state capacity, competency, and resources do not necessarily determine a policy’s success, and that viewing nonstate actors solely from the perspective of the state risks missing the spaces, however small, from which Palestinians were able to resist or at a minimum assert their agency in the face of state hegemony. To confront existential challenges, Palestinians in the newly established Israeli state deployed a diverse array of strategies to hold onto their lands and assets, and to

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maintain their connections to their homes: protests and petitions by telegram and letter; meetings and negotiations with government officials; foot-dragging and evasion; lawsuits and legal actions; and when all else failed, self-defense of communal and individual property. Cooption, corruption, and collaboration certainly occurred throughout the “Arab” Galilee of the late 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, as this chapter has shown in a variety of examples, including a member of the Knesset from Ramah who faced such accusations. But the example of Ramah remains representative — in kind, if not in degree — of the multifaceted resistance that Palestinians could present to disrupt government attempts at total control and surveillance when mobilized.

By the late 1950s, a decade into Israeli state control, the relevant bureaucrats in the state apparatus appeared to have softened their stances somewhat toward Arab olive cultivation; simultaneously, Palestinians began to seek state assistance, in effect attempting to force the state to make good on its promises of equality when it came to agricultural supports. Perhaps they had also been worn down by years of bad crops; they were also likely encouraged by finding more sympathetic bureaucrats in the various state apparatuses. There had been some interest in experimenting with olives starting circa 1960 by Israeli agricultural scientists, with involvement in international exchanges and multinational institutions.\textsuperscript{207} These attempts would increase substantially after 1967, likely in connection with the occupation of the West Bank, the

\textsuperscript{207} See ISA G-4481/14, 97.0.3.555, “Management, Orchards Branch - Olive [hanhala, agaf haMataim – zeyt],” 1960-1963 (Spiegel and Rapaport were interested and connected with multinational technical conferences on olives and international oleiculture research); see also ISA G-4481/15, 97.0.3.556 “Management, Orchards Branch - Olive [hanhala, agaf haMataim – zeyt],” 1963-1965 (international correspondence with experts in Spain, Greece, California and elsewhere, facilitated through international agricultural engineering networks of scientific expertise); for interest in international oleiculture agreements and research, beginning May 1958, see also ISA G-4491/6, 97.0.3.658, “Orchards branch – olive and olive oil [agaf haMataim – zeyt ve-shemen zeyt].
Palestinian olive heartland. The early attempts in the late 1950s focused on pickled olives, which was the focus of Jewish cultivators, rather than olive oil, in connection with the need for hard currency at a time of severe economic pressure on the new state. Although the Spiegel committee had explicitly sought to help both olive oil and pickled olive producers, their interventions and the work of the olive production and marketing board quickly ran into funding problems, as previous efforts to help Arab rural agriculturalists had under the British Mandate.

Nevertheless, in the 1960s, shortly before military rule would be abolished in 1966, Palestinian protest and cooperation with the authorities resulted in the establishment of parallel state supports for olive cultivation, though not without some caveats. State subsidies for the olive sector were late in coming, still insufficient compared to ever-rising production costs, and certainly less comprehensive than state support for the other sectors of Israeli agriculture. Aid in response to the 1964/1965 glut was expensive for the state, and appears not to have outlasted this first crisis. But, at the very least, relevant bureaucrats appeared to finally grasp and seek to the rectify the problems Palestinians had been raising for years.

What triggered this changing relationship? Similar to the Ramah case, it was not, I would argue, a unidirectional effort on the part of bureaucrats to coopt Palestinians, though the relevant state officials certainly seemed more sympathetic to and understanding of the variety of problems that Palestinians faced. The relationship between the Israeli state and its Palestinian citizens has typically been examined through the lens of collaboration. In the case of Palestinian olive cultivation, however, I would characterize the relationship as one of contestation and eventually grudging cooperation, born out of recent experiences of frequent conflict over policy.

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In contrast to the outright hostility toward “Arab” olive production in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Israeli officials began to be concerned with the Arab agricultural economy of the Galilee, centered on the olives trees, beginning in the late 1950s, though practical steps were not taken until the mid 1960s. Throughout, Palestinian citizens from major olive producing villages like Ramah, Maghar, Yarka, Kefr Yasif and others made increasing demands on the government. While in the early 1950s, Palestinian citizens had wanted price controls lifted, by the early 1960s they were demanding government price support. The Ramah confiscation was intentionally punitive, intended to provoke resistance and then crush the ringleaders, in order to demonstrate the government’s authority. By the early to mid 1960s, concerned government officials finally began to take the claims of Palestinian citizens seriously, acknowledging and accepting the complaints regarding monopolistic factories and opportunistic traders. Furthermore, Palestinian citizens pressed the government to provide equal support for the olive sector as it did for other agricultural branches.

The actual impact of government support appears to have been minimal, and mainly benefiting the already well-positioned elites, such as the members of Knesset elected on Arab satellite lists (who functioned as proxies for the ruling Mapai party). While the battles of politics and policy raged, the statistics show that Palestinian olive production in the Galilee under Israeli rule remained largely static, but began to suffer a slow decline starting around 1960. The fact that olive cultivation remained at all is a testament to the tenacity of the cultivators. In the next two chapters, the study will conclude with the increasingly diverging case of Palestinian olive cultivators in the West Bank, first under Jordanian rule, and then under Israeli occupation.
CHAPTER 5

THE PALESTINIAN OLIVE SECTOR IN THE JORDANIAN WEST BANK, 1948-1967

With the annexation of the West Bank, roughly three quarters of Mandate Palestine’s olive groves came under Jordanian rule. The Jordanian period of rule over the West Bank is popularly castigated by both Israelis and Palestinians alike as one of de-development and exploitation, as human and financial resources were reallocated out of the West Bank and the government began to prioritize the development of the East Bank. In many ways, assessments of the Jordanian period resemble the “imagined barrenness” of the Ottoman period in both Israeli and Palestinian nationalist historiographies.¹

This “imagined barrenness” has translated into assumptions of political, economic, and social stagnation of the West Bank under Jordanian control. These assumptions have persisted in no small part because in comparison to both the previous British Mandate period and the subsequent period of Israeli occupation, the history of the Jordanian West Bank between 1948 and 1967 has been understudied.² Part of the reason for the lack of historical research has been a dearth of archival documents. But the difficulties in accessing Jordanian governmental sources

¹ On the common ground in both Israeli and Palestinian nationalist historiographies regarding the Ottoman period as one of decline, see Beshara Doumani, “Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine: Writing Palestinians into History,” Journal of Palestine Studies 21:2 (Winter 1992) 5-28. On the “imagined barrenness” of the post-Nahda Arab culture, which I have paraphrased to summarize views of society and politics as well, see Tarif Khalidi, “Palestinian Historiography: 1900-1948,” Journal of Palestine Studies 10:3 (Spring 1981), 59-60.
have recently been rectified to some extent, thanks to newly available sources in both Israeli and Jordanian archives.³

Nevertheless, the received image of the Jordanian period of rule over the West Bank has remained something of a blank canvas, onto which subsequent generations have projected their feelings toward the politics of the time, colored by the failings of Arab Nationalism, the biased policies of the Hashemite Kingdom, and the gradual emergence of the Palestinian nationalist movement. But the period is more complex than these recollections allow. Certainly, Amman over time began to favor itself and the East Bank in distributing foreign aid, with the sole exceptions being the holy sites in Jerusalem and to a lesser extent Bethlehem.⁴ Development priorities were often set by the central government more to cultivate loyalty in the East Bank than to alleviate the dire conditions of refugees in the West Bank. Palestinian political aspirations were allowed few if any outlets. In lieu of research, these restrictions on political activity and industrial development have been assumed to apply across the board to the economic and social conditions of the West Bank.

In conducting fieldwork in the West Bank and in Jordan, I interviewed a number of Palestinian and Jordanian agricultural engineers who specialize in olives.⁵ None knew of firm data on changes over this nearly two-decade period, and thus understandably assumed that little had changed in the olive sector. But in fact this chapter will show that there was gradual

³ In Amman, the Jordanian Department of the National Library has undertaken digitization efforts. In Jerusalem, the Israel State Archive controls Jordanian municipal records seized in 1967 from the major urban centers like Jerusalem, Nablus, and Tulkarm.


⁵ Interviews conducted at the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Olives, Ramallah, West Bank; Agricultural Directorate, Tulkarm, West Bank; Fares Fadl al-Jabi, Nablus, West Bank; Jordanian Ministry of Agriculture, Amman, Jordan. May-June 2014.
expansion and development of the olive sector under Jordanian rule, not stagnation. Assumptions of stagnation when it comes to planting and production instead have reflected the broader impressions of the period, as one of imagined barrenness.

The broader questions I seek to answer in this chapter are how the influx of refugees from the Nakba affected West Bank villages outside of UNRWA camps, and how the relationship between Palestinians of the West Bank and the central government in Amman changed over time. I use the olive sector as a lens for understanding efforts made by local Palestinians and bureaucrats in Jerusalem and Amman to cope with these radical changes after 1948 and make the West Bank, then known as “Arab Palestine,” a stable, self-sufficient entity that would not depend entirely on foreign aid for the daily survival of its inhabitants. Then, in turn, I look at the developments within the olive sector itself to assess the effectiveness of these policies and their subsequent impacts on the refugees and villagers of the West Bank coping with their new circumstances.

The British, though bankrupted by the war, felt responsible both for their clients in the Hashemite Monarchy and for the catastrophe that had befallen the Arabs of Palestine after ignominiously relinquishing the Mandate. Thus on the elite level, there was a strong continuity between the late Mandate period and the early Jordanian period in the strength of British influence. Experienced Mandate bureaucrats, such as Palestinian olive expert and author Ali Nasuh al-Taher, sought and often found employment in the newly invigorated Jordanian state after 1948.\(^6\) Taher was the Jordanian undersecretary of agriculture in the 1950s and held a variety

\(^6\) This occurred perhaps most frequently on the lower levels of experience in the realm of education. See the forthcoming work by Hilary Falb Kalisman, presented in progress as “Learning Exile: Palestinian Students and Educators Abroad 1940-1957,” Middle East Studies 354
of other high-profile policy positions involving development, as well as the ambassadorship to Tehran in the mid 1960s. In addition to the bureaucratic continuities within the Palestinian and Jordanian cadres, British colonial bureaucrats moved to Jordan as “advisers” who were often essentially in control, at least until the Suez Crisis in 1956 led to a severing of diplomatic ties and the expulsion of these British advisers. Prior to that point, the British Middle East Office (BMEO) in particular emerged as one of the primary arms for development initiatives in the postwar period.

This chapter will examine one of the British Middle East Office’s more significant projects: a scheme to encourage agriculture along the Israeli-Jordanian armistice line through the reclamation and terracing of hills to support the expansion of olive production. Although the project eventually ran into problems relating to funding and conflicts between British advisers and indigenous bureaucrats, it sparked an impressive expansion of olive cultivation in the early 1950s in some of the most vulnerable “frontier” or “frontline” villages that had been doubly impacted by the Nakba: losing agricultural land within the Green Line, while absorbing newly landless refugees. The work of reclaiming hillsides for agriculture through stone terracing had a range of benefits. It increased the absorptive capacity of the territory by expanding cultivable land. It meant sustainability, by reducing soil erosion. It offered paid employment to some refugees. And it began the process of reorienting the West Bank agricultural economy from


7 Perhaps most iconic of these expulsions was the departure of the commander of the Arab Legion, John Bagot Glubb (Pasha). For a detailed study of the impact of the military on the formation of the Jordanian state, see Joseph Massad, Colonial Effects: the making of national identity in Jordan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), especially chapters 3-4 centering on the role of Glubb Pasha.
subsistence agriculture focused on grains to a more volatile but potentially more profitable cash-crop basis. All of these carried the underlying assumption that the refugees would be staying for good, and that the West Bank needed to change and be developed in order to absorb the newly landless, additional population.

The focus on the frontier villages was not a purely humanitarian effort, though the advisers were in many cases sympathetic to the plight of the refugees and their host villagers. It was in part a recognition of the economic hardships caused by the political events of the late Mandate, above all the displacements and disruptions of the Nakba. And it was politically motivated, as part of the efforts to deescalate the conflict between Israel and neighboring Arab states over the continued movement of Palestinian refugees across the armistice lines. Throughout the period between 1948 and 1967, but especially in the leadup to Suez in 1956, the phenomenon of “infiltration” has received attention from a variety of scholars, particularly infiltrators and fedayeen from Egyptian-administered Gaza.\(^8\) While the Israeli state argued at the time in a variety of forums that infiltration was primarily a threat to state security, one with potential existential consequences, extensive reexamination of the records of border incidents has decisively illustrated that the vast majority of incidents — upwards of 90 percent — were nonviolent.\(^9\) Early on, many Palestinian refugees crossed the poorly demarcated armistice lines to harvest their crops or retrieve tools and other implements they had left behind. Some displaced cultivators took olive tree saplings, which they replanted by their new homes. For example, when the Israeli Police Inspector-General shared statistics with the British on all recorded incidents of

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“Egyptian” infiltration — meaning Palestinians in Gaza — through the first six months of 1955, olive trees stand out as some of the most expensive items reported stolen. In one incident, the total value of the plants taken was estimated at £1,500, with the tracks of seven people noted at the scene. In another incident, on 29 December 1955, the local Israeli press reported, though without official confirmation, that 450 olive tree saplings had been taken by infiltrators in the Gaza Strip area, near the Nirim kibbutz. Thus as the borders hardened in the 1950s, some Palestinians at least implicitly acknowledged these changes and gradually put down roots, both figuratively and literally. These efforts were encouraged by foreign aid, which focused on integration, resettlement, and self-sufficiency. The BMEO frontier villages terracing scheme offers a prime example of these priorities in practice.

But outside of this example, in the early years of the Jordanian state the government was largely consumed with constituting itself and developing its bureaucracies. The state’s limited activities outside of traditional charitable arenas in urban areas, like education and health care, reflected its slow-developing capacity and lack of basic information about its own terrain, especially in rural areas. Assessments of agricultural production, for example, required the development of a broad range of institutions and information-gathering mechanisms. Thus the government had to begin a cadastral survey of the West Bank in the 1950s, and to develop its own statistical apparatuses to conduct agricultural and demographical censuses. These developments finally began to bear fruit by the mid-to-late 1960s, as the Jordanian government

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10 Arab-Israeli relations: Copy of statistics for past six months from files of Inspector-General of Israeli police on Egyptian infiltration, 1955, TNA FO 371/115898-0004
11 Weekly Lists of Border Incidents, 1955, TNA FO 371/115896
exhibited increasing knowledge and capacity over the territory it claimed to govern — just before losing the West Bank to Israel in the 1967 war.

This chapter is organized thematically, with each section proceeding in chronological order. In the first section, I begin by examining the responses of Palestinian refugees to their displacement through the phenomenon of “infiltration,” and the effects of the Nakba on the frontier or frontline villages of the West Bank. In the second section, I examine the BMEO terracing scheme, which was initiated in response to these problems. In the third section, I briefly discuss the broader relationship of Amman to the West Bank, before moving to the fourth and final section assessing the development of the olive sector in the West Bank from 1948 through the mid 1960s. The question of Jordanian state capacity was integrally tied to the statistical analyses and assessments of agricultural development that form the primary sources of this section. These statistics help to not only illustrate the development of the East Bank-West Bank relationship, but also to contradict the “imagined barrenness” of rural agriculture in the Jordanian period.

1. Palestinian refugees, “Jordanian infiltrators”

For the refugees displaced or expelled to the neighboring Arab-controlled territories of Gaza, Lebanon, and the West Bank, the early 1950s saw the gradual transformation of what were initially informal armistice lines into more thickly defined borders. While for the first few years of their exile Palestinians naturally continued to think of “home” as where they lived before 1948, Israel sought to sever any continued linkages between the refugees and their property. Arab states were often complicit in this policy to varying degrees. The role of the Jordanian army
was particularly complex. One of the few avenues of contact between Israel and the neighboring Arab states was through the Mixed Armistice Commissions, sponsored by the United Nations Truce Supervisory Organization, which posted military observers to liaise with local area commanders and was set up to support the post-1948 armistice agreements. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan/Israel Mixed Armistice Commission or HKJI MAC adjudicated hundreds of incidents of every year, including exchanges of gunfire between the militaries, until Israel withdrew in protest in 1954. The Jordanian Arab Legion seemed to take pride in its role as defenders of the Palestinian and unified Arab cause. Yet, likely out of an eagerness to avoid involvement in another disastrous war, the Jordanian army increasingly attempted to prevent infiltration. Israel had no such equivocation. Israeli policy was to prevent refugees from returning, as it built up its sovereign capacities to retain the spoils of 1948. As part of what Shira Robinson has called its “War on Return,” Israel labeled all crossings of the armistice lines by displaced Palestinians as “infiltration.” Doing so conflated a diverse set of practices — from retrieving possessions, to harvesting crops planted themselves, to stealing from new Jewish settlements, and finally, toward the mid 1950s, fediyin attacks — in a monolithic category, with infiltration framed as a security issue. Therefore, a farmer returning to harvest his crops became cast as a threat to effectively the same degree as an infiltrator who murdered a kibbutz watchman. And it should be noted that, as with exchanges of gunfire between the respective militaries, some border crossings involved violence. But the vast majority did not.

Of complaints submitted to the HKJI MAC (meaning the incidents had not been settled in subcommittees or by local commanders on the ground), for the period from June 1952 to June

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12 Robinson, *Citizen Strangers.*
13 Feldman, “Home as a Refrain.”
1953, close to 40 percent were trespassing or “simple infiltration,” 17 percent “simple theft,” about 4 percent smuggling, and 2 percent illegal cultivation.\(^\text{14}\) By contrast, 21 percent were armed clashes or attacks, close to 9 percent gunfire across the armistice line, 5 percent airspace violations, 3 percent armed robbery, and about 1 percent sabotage. Split roughly, then, about two-thirds of incidents could be considered nonviolent, while a third were violent, most of which involved the Israeli and Jordanian armies (not Palestinian infiltrators). And this period was more violent than usual, as Benny Morris has estimated that overall about 90 percent of crossings of the armistice lines (including Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria in addition to Jordan) were nonviolent.\(^\text{15}\)

These incidents show that after the expulsion, the initial rupture circa 1948 was not always a total severance. Ilana Feldman has documented the changing relationship of refugees in Egyptian-controlled Gaza to their land and property. Initially, refugees would cross the armistice line to retrieve possessions, in the belief that the situation was merely temporary; however, “as time went on and a full return continued to be impossible, Palestinian refugees in Gaza began to cross the armistice line to retrieve their possessions and, especially, to harvest their crops.”\(^\text{16}\)

Even though the refugees risked being turned away or shot, not only by Israelis, but also by the Egyptian border guards, people continued to cross and return to their homes. Feldman collected the testimonial of a man named Abu Nizar from the village of Hamama, who noted that in early 1949, despite the risk of settler ambushes, people sought to bring back cereals and olive oil, in

\(^{14}\) Arab Legion report on June 1952-October 1953 border incidents. TNA FO 371/104791, ER 1091/459. See pages 60-86 for extremely detailed comparison of complaints to the Mixed Armistice Commission from both Israel and Jordan. See appendix B for statistics.

\(^{15}\) Morris, *Israel’s Border Wars.*

\(^{16}\) Feldman, “Home as a Refrain,” 28-29.
order to avoid starvation: “[p]eople had fled and left everything behind. … So, [after four or five months] we started to go home to our villages … to bring grain, flour, wheat and oil in order to eat.” Such crossings, compelled by necessity, were dangerous, but still possible. In this very early period, the refugees in exile did not necessarily think of themselves as exiled. In a very concrete way, since some could continue to subsist off of their land and their crops, this was true.

Individual or small group crossings of the armistice line were not the only ways that the new refugees maintained their connection to the land. In official forums like the HKJI MAC, Jordanian representatives repeatedly raised the issue of Israeli appropriation of the olive crop on no man’s land temporarily ceded under the Rhodes agreement to form a demilitarized zone as a buffer. However, at an October 1949 meeting, Israeli representatives postponed the matter again, despite previously promising to provide an answer by that date. In November, Hugh Dow, the British consul-general in Jerusalem, protested the lack of Israeli cooperation regarding, among other issues, the question of whether Palestinians could harvest the olive crop on lands that happened to fall within neutral zones. While the Jerusalem DMZ was the most contentious, particularly over issues regarding the Mount Scopus enclave, the question of harvesting crops in the neutral zones particularly affected the areas surrounding the Latrun Salient (southeast of Ramlah overlooking the route between Jaffa/Tel Aviv and Jerusalem). Dow concluded: “Israel has now successfully stonewalled a decision on this until the time of harvesting has arrived, and

18 “Survey of Jewish affairs, Nov-Dec 1948 and summaries of political developments in Arab occupied Palestine January-November 1949: Summary of events in Arab Palestine during the month of October, 1949,” TNA FO 371/75329-0006
19 Ibid.
will probably continue to do so until the time is over.”\textsuperscript{20} The Israelis essentially delayed answering the matter until after the harvest — in effect, confiscating the 1949 crop on those lands. The olives were either left to rot or illegally harvested and sold. Despite the continued claims of the Palestinian owners to their crops, and to their lands, these connections were increasingly subject to challenge, through an accumulation of Israeli actions as small as blocking the harvesting of olive crops. By doing so, Israeli authorities could eventually declare the land abandoned and confiscate not only the olives, but also the land itself.

While Israeli Arabs faced a number of challenges in maintaining a hold on their lands, Palestinians now suddenly residing in a different country faced uncompensated losses for their lands now in Israel, confiscated as enemy property. \textit{The Times} of London reported on 26 May, 1951, that “some 80 Arab villages are severed from their village lands by the demarcation line, across which their inhabitants see their fields being tilled and their orchards being picked by Israelis, while they themselves are workless and hungry.”\textsuperscript{21} The article noted the various reasons why villagers crossed the Israeli-Jordanian armistice line, such as to visit relatives still living in Israel or to “steal” their own belongings, such as animals and crops. The article anonymously referred to “a typical border village near Jerusalem,” with a population of 2,000, where more than 90 percent of the village lands and its well lay in either no-man’s land or in Israeli-occupied territory, such that “the villagers hunger while their fields, olive groves and orchards lie untended.”\textsuperscript{22} While the author may be exaggerating the extent to which every village could

\textsuperscript{20} “Palestine Conciliation Commission: Re-opening of access to Mount Scopus, 1949,” TNA FO 371/75354-0023
\textsuperscript{21} “Article in ‘The Times’ (26th May) gives the Arab version of recent border incidents, 1951,” TNA FO 371/91379-0005
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
actually see its lands across the armistice line lying fallow, the point remains that the temptation to cross, despite very real dangers, was understandably strong.

While Palestinians inside Israel used the legal system to attempt to contest confiscation, Palestinians outside Israel used other means to challenge the increasing hegemony of the Israeli state. One such key avenue was “infiltration,” a phenomenon that Israeli authorities exaggerated by portraying all crossings of the armistice lines as grievous threats to national security.\textsuperscript{23} The intentional conflation of a number of different practices under a single label helped the newborn state to portray itself as an aggrieved and defenseless victim of senseless Arab violence. But as illustrated above, most crossings were nonviolent and motivated by the destitution of refugees exiled to neighboring territories, who sought just to feed themselves from their own crops or to recover their own property, now declared “abandoned” and confiscated by Israel. As the years passed, however, crossing became more difficult as Israel marked and fortified the armistice lines, transforming them in effect into borders. And with their crops and possessions now appropriated by Israelis or other Palestinians still in Israel, some Palestinian refugees began crossing the border to steal from nearby settlements on an ad hoc basis, which was an implicit claim to their “home” in Palestine, still in such close proximity.\textsuperscript{24}

Israel labeled Palestinian refugees to the West Bank as “Jordanian infiltrators.” Some of the most valuable of the myriad items reported stolen were uprooted olive trees and olive saplings, which the “infiltrators” intended to transport across the armistice lines and replant. On 2 February 1954, for example, the Israeli army spokesman reported that a local watchman near the moshav Bar Giora, west of Jerusalem, had captured “three Jordanian infiltrators,” accused of

\textsuperscript{23} Kamen, “After the Catastrophe I,” 463.
\textsuperscript{24} Feldman, “Home as a Refrain,” 31; 34.
“uprooting olive trees in Israel and transporting them across the border.” In doing so, Palestinians were literally putting down roots, perhaps an acknowledgment that their temporary residence was becoming a longer-term form of exile, since olive trees take a decade or two to reach maturity. Furthermore, appropriating a perennially producing fruit tree like the olive would reduce or eliminate the need for further crossings, which were becoming more difficult and risky than before.

In late May 1954, the new British ambassador to Amman, Sir Charles Duke, visited the West Bank to report on “the Jordan Israel frontier situation.” While the border in the northern West Bank had finally been demarcated, it remained in many places an imaginary line. The “border” at Qalqilya, for example, consisted of white blazes installed at intervals by the Israelis, sometimes just a few yards from the homes of the villagers. “The lands and orchards of oranges and olives now on the Israeli side of the line are clearly visible from the houses of Qalqilya,” Duke noted. Likewise, at Tulkarm, the same white boundary posts wove haphazardly around the houses, through plots of cultivated land, “but nothing to stop man or beasts from wandering from one field to another across the border.” The populations of both towns had roughly doubled in 1948 with the influx of refugees, who were still residing in Qalqilya and Tulkarm in

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25 “Various documents including: Weekly reports on border incidents and infiltration, 1954,” TNA FO 371/111098-0001
26 “First Impressions of the Jordan Israel Frontier Situation by Her Majesty’s Ambassador at Amman, After a Short Visit to the Area,” Mr. Duke to Mr. Eden, from Amman, 1 June 1954 (No. 89 Confidential, received 8 June) Confidential Print, Jordan, Further Correspondence, Part VI, 1954, TNA FO 437/6 VR 1077/3 No. 8.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
1954.\textsuperscript{29} This was consistent with the overall demographic shift caused by the Nakba: the population of most areas in the West Bank doubled, tripling in the cases of Nablus and Hebron.\textsuperscript{30}

According to British Ambassador to Jordan Duke, the burden of landless refugees on the original dwellers was compounded by the loss of the villagers’ best lands: “At the same time most of the villages lands—and the richest parts, with their well-developed orchards—are now lost to them.” Duke continued: “[W]hile they now live in considerable hardship under great economic pressures, they have the daily spectacle before their eyes of what they naturally regard as their own land a few yards away from them being cultivated and enjoyed by an invading enemy.”\textsuperscript{31} The villagers responded, in his view quite encouragingly, by bringing new areas under cultivation, “instead of merely brooding continuously over their losses and planning revenge.”\textsuperscript{32} The most important development, according to Duke, was the planting of a number of small new orchards, as a long-term means of supporting the much-increased population. “Orange and olive trees represent a considerable capital investment which is immovable,” Duke noted.\textsuperscript{33}

Duke considered the planting of new orchards to be an important means of reducing the phenomenon of infiltration. During his visit, Duke questioned local officials, particularly the two subdistrict commissioners of Qalqilya and Tulkarm as well as the mutassarif of Nablus, about the issue of infiltration, who all reassured Duke that the “problem of ‘infiltration’ by Jordanians

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{30} Jericho’s population increase was the most staggering, from 3,000 in 1946 to an estimated 100,000 in 1951, 95 percent of whom were refugees. Hebron increased from 26,400 to 80,000; and Nablus from 24,700 to 70,000. American legation to Amman, “Subject: Annual Economic Report [Jordan] 1950,” dated 5 September 1951, page 4. NARA RG 166 170/72/26/01-07 (Narrative reports of special agents, consular officers, and agricultural attaches, 1950-54), Box 301, Folder “Economic conditions 1946-1953.”

\textsuperscript{31} Duke, “First Impressions of the Jordan Israel Frontier Situation,” TNA FO 437/6.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
across the border into Israel territory … was very greatly reduced,” crediting governmental pressure, especially the imposition of prison sentences for up to three years, which were harshest if the crosses were considered “professional” thieves.34 Duke, however, concluded his confidential report by noting the essential need to provide “more cultivable land” to the villagers, “who are primarily agricultural people,” in addition to establishing a “more natural” line of demarcation, in order to solve conclusively “the problem of this frontier.”35

More significantly, efforts by refugees to recreate their tradition of self-sufficient agricultural production indicates a type of resistance to their classification as helpless objects of intervention by state and non-state aid agencies. These refugees sought to reassert their agency by providing for themselves. Of equal importance, the appropriation of olive trees can also be seen as an act of resistance to their dispossession. If the refugees had not actually owned the trees appropriated, they likely justified their actions as at least partial compensation for their losses. Finally, the movement of olive trees across the border meant they were putting down roots, both literally and figuratively, connoting a shift in the refugees’ relationship to home — encompassing both lost land and lives in Palestine, as well as new places of refuge.

This in part reflected the fact that as the years passed, crossing became more difficult as Israel marked and fortified the armistice lines, transforming them in effect into borders.36 By transporting the trees across the armistice lines and replanting, Palestinians were literally putting down roots, perhaps an acknowledgment that their temporary residence was becoming a longer-

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 In fiction, an artistic reflection of this shift was dramatized in the increasing difficulties faced by the character of the guerrilla fighter Yunes in Elias Khoury’s novel Gate of the Sun who must cross the Israeli-Lebanese armistice line in order to visit his wife in their northern village. Ilyas Khuri, Bab al-shams: riwayah (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1998).
term form of exile. Olive trees, after all, take a decade or two to reach maturity. Furthermore, appropriating a perennially producing fruit tree like the olive would reduce or eliminate the need for further crossings, which were becoming more difficult and risky than before. These uprooted olive trees were intended to supply a new livelihood by starting a new grove, wherever the displaced had found refuge, connoting a shift in the refugees’ relationship to home. Home was no longer just their lost land and lives in Palestine, but the places where the refugees had found refuge as well, which they likely still hoped would be temporary, at least in the long term, if no longer the foreseeable future.

2. Aiding the “Frontier Village”: the British Middle East Office development scheme for terracing and olive planting expansion

The demographic shift in the West Bank triggered by the expulsion and exodus of Palestinians in 1947-1949 was radical. Somewhere between half and two-thirds of the 700,000-800,000 Palestinian refugees found temporary refuge in the newly created Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, uniting the East and West Banks. But it was not until early 1952 that the British completed the first comprehensive assessment of the impact of 1948 on what they called “Arab Palestine,” now known as the West Bank. Of the 485,000 residing in the West Bank prior to the conflict, 420,000 depended on agriculture. The report estimated one quarter of this preexisting

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population was destitute and at risk of starving, primarily due to the loss of land in Israel, especially in Jerusalem and the towns and villages along the frontier. Of the 460,000 refugees in Jordan, 376,000 were in the West Bank, with 70 percent estimated to be living in ordinary houses (as opposed to camps). Because of these refugees from 1948, the population of the West Bank had nearly doubled. Then a disastrous harvest due to winter drought during 1950/1951 coincided with the depletion of savings, resulting in distress for the vast majority depending on agriculture, and a growing need for UN assistance.\textsuperscript{38}

Considering the growth in population density, the 1952 assessment from the British Consul General in Jerusalem argued that cereal cultivation should be eliminated in favor of fruit trees, particularly olives. This is precisely what would happen gradually, accelerated after 1967 by Israeli agricultural policies that strongly discouraged Palestinian field crops, which were barred from being marketed inside the Green Line and faced increasing obstacles blocking export to Jordan, and ultimately could not compete with Israeli subsidized intensive cultivation whose products could be dumped at cheaper prices in the occupied territories. The consular report estimated that if half of the land under cereal was terraced and planted with olives instead, “the gross income of farmers could for instance be almost doubled in twenty years;” however, this would still leave the cultivators barely at subsistence level.\textsuperscript{39} In their estimates, olives constituted half of the value all agricultural production (£3,300,000 out of £7,500,000).\textsuperscript{40} One problem with the olive-planting plan was that the West Bank would need other markets and outlets for surplus production, preferably in Israel, though the West Bank markets would rapidly

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., page 3.  
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 3-4  
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., page 14. The report gave the dunumage under cereal as about a million, with a gross yield of only £2 per dunam, compared to £15 for olives.  
368
reorient after 1948 to market agricultural surplus to the East Bank and to a small extent other neighboring Arab countries. But the principal problem would be the length of time it takes olive trees to bear fully and regularly, close to two decades, with smaller initial yields after 8-10 years. Thus farmers would continue to need aid or loans until the trees developed. The difficulty created by the lengthy time horizon would compound the fiscal cost, not to mention secondary difficulties related to the system of land tenure, indebtedness to moneylenders, the lack of cooperative societies, and the general “conservatism of the farmer and his fears about the future.” The British advisers proposed possible land redistributions to compensate for lands lost in Israel, and “a carefully planned expansion of trained staff, research and agricultural station facilities,” the latter of which would gradually occur throughout the Jordanian period.

In the short term, British Middle East Office agricultural advisers turned their attention to relief for the frontier villages in the West Bank in order to alleviate the threat of starvation. Largely concurring with the assessment of the Jerusalem consul general, agricultural adviser of the British Middle East Office J.C. Eyre reported in depth after touring an extensive number of villages along the armistice line in the late spring. He noted the desperate conditions in many villages:

41 Ibid., 17. This arrangement lasted through years of Israeli occupation, until the East Bank olive sector developed to the point of rivaling the West Bank’s; the Palestinian territories once again confronted a potentially dire lack of marketing during and after the intifada in the late 1980s and early 1990s.
42 Ibid. Initial estimates were that a dunam could be terraced and planted for under £3, though triple that amount turned out to be more realistic.
43 Ibid.
44 L’ambassadeur de France en Grande Bretagne (Londres) à Robert Schuman, “Situation économique de la Palestine Arabe,” 17 June 1952, No. 1035/AL, enclosing Jerusalem no. 302, 27 May 1952, forwarding original report by J.C. Eyre [note: in the documents shared with the French, his last name is spelled Eyrem, but I have changed it to the spelling in the BMEO
In almost all the frontier villages I visited the people are living on the borderline of starvation. The men were lethargic and many did not look fit for hard labour and the children were listless and appeared to me to be very undernourished. I saw large numbers of peasants out in the fields collecting wild plants to use as food, especially wild vetch, the season for which will soon be over. Large quantities of movable property such as furniture and beds, and in one village, even some of the doors and windows from the houses have been sold to obtain cash to buy food.

Some of the lands were ploughed too late and in some villages lands were not ploughed and planted at all because ploughing animals were sold last year because of the need to buy food, and of the severe drought and, where land have been lost to Israel, of the restricted areas for grazing animals.45

Despite these dire straits, Eyre noted the resilience of the population: “The efforts which the people are making to help themselves are most impressive. New terracing and land reclamation work is to be seen in all areas,” though Eyre made a special note of hillside terracing in the Bethlehem and Hebron areas.46

In order to overcome the issue of the lengthy time horizon for new olive planting, Eyre suggested temporary work in the form of terracing, in order to prepare new areas for planting with olives (as well as vines in the southern areas). Eyre estimated that of the 300,000 dunams in the West Bank that could be terraced and planted with olives, about half or 150,000 dunams could be reclaimed through terracing in the areas of the frontier villages, at 10 Jordanian Dinars

documents obtained directly from Kew for the sake of consistency], Agricultural Adviser, British Middle East Office, “The ‘Frontier’ Village of Arab Palestine,” 5 May 1952. CADN 294PO/2/58, Renseignements P-12 1951-1952. The tour conducted by Eyre in late April encompassed Qalqilya, Nablus, Heit, Surik, Beit Iksa, Biddu, El Qubeiba, Qatanna, Bethlehem, Beit Safafa, Battir, Wade Fukin, Jerusalem, Ramallah, Beit Nuba, Imwas, Yalu, Saffam Beit Sira, Hebron, Dharhariya, and El Burj.

46 Ibid., 2.
(JD) per dunam.47 While again noting that the increase in production of olives, figs, or vines would take a few years time, Eyre suggested that the territory would become more valuable, productive, and able to support the increased population resulting from the refugee inflows. The project would succeed well beyond Eyre’s expectations.

**Table 15. Population and land in frontier villages: Summary [circa 1952]**48

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subdistrict</th>
<th>Population (excluding refugees)</th>
<th>Original area of sub-dist. (in dunams)</th>
<th>Fruit &amp; Olive Plantations Cats 6-8</th>
<th>Cultivable land Cats 9-15</th>
<th>Noncultivable land &amp; forests Cat. 16.</th>
<th>Villages built on area. Cat. 4</th>
<th>Total area of land remaining</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NABLUS DISTRICT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jenin</td>
<td>10260</td>
<td>311110</td>
<td>9262</td>
<td>30436</td>
<td>74016</td>
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<td>16407</td>
<td>88810</td>
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<td>JERUSALEM DISTRICT</td>
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<td>8896</td>
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<td>187</td>
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<td>95230</td>
<td>377875</td>
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<td>3682</td>
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</table>

In order to begin the terracing and planting scheme, Eyre suggested in early May 1952 setting up a committee of the Jordan Development Board to be called the Frontier Village Loans Committee, funded by £400,000 to be set aside from the second British loan to the kingdom.49

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47 Ibid., 4. Eyre suggests a total budget of 1,500,00 JD. The math is based on a daily wage rate of 250 fils per day; the per dunam cost is derived from an average of 100 meters of terrace, with the stone as one cubic meter.

48 Ibid., Annexure II. Note that these statistics exclude both urban areas and 19 frontier villages that in Eyre’s view “lost only a negligible proportion of their good land.”

49 Ibid., 7.
By September 1952, the project began under Eyre’s careful supervision. He frequently complained of meddling by his Jordanian colleagues, whom he saw as threats to obstruct the project and divert funding to other areas for political purposes (particularly for reinforcing loyalty of East Bankers to the government). The scheme was organized out of the Jerusalem office of the development board, and constituted in October 1952. About 190,000 JD out of the Second British Loan to the Jordan government was committed, with the bulk of the development money going into terracing. The Jerusalem office gave out microloans between 20-80 JD each, to fund the terracing of 3-10 dunams. Eyre received innumerable farmers and notables that came to the Jerusalem office, who were often disappointed that their applications were not approved (evidently, many applicants did not understand the project, and had applied for grants for things like purchasing tractors).

By the end of February 1953, £140,000 had been committed to terracing and land rehabilitation, with the expectation of distributing a total of 2,500 loans. The project had thus become operational in less than a year, with the bonus that some villagers that not yet received any funding had begun terracing lands in the hopes of securing future loans, while those who had received loans were likewise spurred to terrace more land than the loan would cover — thus

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51 Ibid.
53 Ibid., page 3.
54 Ibid., page 5.
55 TC Rapp, Development division BMEO, British Embassy Beirut, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Office, 24 February 1953. TNA FO 957/166.
compounding the impact of the grants.\textsuperscript{56} An \textit{al-Difa} article published earlier that winter, based on a tour of the frontier villages of Beit Surik and Beit Ikса, reinforced the impression that the development projects financed by the British loans had reenergized the farmers along the frontier.\textsuperscript{57} The regional head of the BMEO congratulated Eyre heartily for his efforts, particularly the speed and efficiency of the work of the local development office, such that by 5 February 1953, 42 of the 62 frontier villages had been given loans.\textsuperscript{58} The Beirut office proclaimed to Foreign Minister Eden that the project was an exemplary demonstration of British influence — essentially soft power, decades before the term was coined — by showing that the British were not only willing but also able to help the “neediest Arabs,” despite “the steady decline of our prestige in the Middle East,” and the fact that “[w]e can no longer command respect because of apparent military and economic power.” Development schemes could potentially not only offset the diminished British presence and role in the region, but also “sow the seeds of a new respect for British technical skill and goodwill.”\textsuperscript{59}

By mid 1954, the office of the Jerusalem development board had spent 245,048 JD on terracing in “West Jordan” frontier villages, and had allocated 689,000 JD more in order to expand its purview to interior villages of the West Bank and some in the East Bank as well.\textsuperscript{60} The amount spent covered more than 8,000 loans for terracing and planting with olives, the bulk

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., page 2; page 4.
\textsuperscript{57} “The projects financed by the British loan. A tour in the Jerusalem airport and some frontier lines villages. The energy of farmers and their love of work demand increased assistance [in Arabic], ” \textit{al-Difa}, 22 December 1952. TNA FO 957/166.
\textsuperscript{58} Rapp, BMEO to Eden, FO, page 4. TNA FO 957/166.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Eyre, Jerusalem Development Board, to Beirut Embassy, 8 October 1954, pages 1-2. TNA FO 957/180, “Agriculture: frontier villages development scheme; Jordan west bank.”
\end{footnotesize}
of the work being done by refugees.\textsuperscript{61} Thanks to the loans, about 30,000 dunams had been terraced and planted, with an estimated 2,500 kilometers of stone terracing constructed, some by farmers not receiving loans but spurred by neighboring examples or the hopes of securing future loans.\textsuperscript{62}

The project, having proved its worth, seems to have subsequently been a victim of the growing independence of the Jordanian government, and the decline of British influence in the mid 1950s — trends irrevocably solidified by the severing of bilateral relations with the 1956 Suez Crisis. It is also quite likely that Eyre moved on to another post or left government service entirely, and the project suffered for the loss of its guiding architect. In 1953, the UK had offered cooperation for a five-year project of reclaiming and terracing an additional 150,000 dunams, at a cost of 0.10 JD per dunam for the stonework, for a projected total cost of 1.5 million JD.\textsuperscript{63} In the meantime, Eyre continued to complain about issues with a Jordanian colleague and had to contend with the politicized diversion of funds to the East Bank around election time. Facing obstruction by their advisees, and increasingly outstripped by American aid, the British Middle East Office’s development efforts were already in retreat by the time Suez severed relations altogether.

3. State control: relations between the capital of Amman and the districts of the West Bank

The Government of Jordan had not surveyed the West Bank into the early 1950s. In many ways, the West Bank was left to its own devices. Jordan lacked a land registry for the West

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., pages 3; 11.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., page 2.
\textsuperscript{63} “Jordan’s Land Problem,” original file number 26 128/53/1 G4/321, TNA FO 957/166.
Bank, making it impossible to make the first step toward a cadastral survey. This had significant taxation implications. An inability to assess individual property taxes meant that the government remained dependent on estimated crop tithes, just as the Ottomans and British had. According to the Jordanian Department of Lands and Surveys, the Jordanians first began to do a basic survey of the West Bank in 1951.\textsuperscript{64} The department’s 1952 report gives the results of these basic estimates, which put the amount of land under fruit trees other than citrus, which would have been mostly olive trees, at 631,000 dunams.\textsuperscript{65} These estimated figures came from the work of Sami Hadawi, perhaps the foremost expert in rural land classification during the Palestinian Mandate period. The administration also began work on a land registry for the first time, centered around the cities of Jenin, Tulkarm, Nablus, Jerusalem, and Hebron.\textsuperscript{66} While the government had begun to undertake a cadastral survey of the East Bank, amounting to barely more than 10 percent of the total land, the West Bank remained largely unsurveyed from the perspective of the central government in Amman.

The nature of land tenure in the West Bank — a densely tree-planted patchwork of small parcels — had little in common with the broader, easily demarcated fields of the East Bank, which significantly slowed the property settlement process in the West Bank.\textsuperscript{67} By 1967, only 150 — less than half — of the 338 towns and villages in the West Bank had been settled, though

\textsuperscript{64} US legation Amman, “Subject: Land Reform Policy in Jordan,” 17 April 1951, NARA RG 59 (Department of State Central Decimal Files), 250/41/10/4, Box 5465, original designation 885.16/7-1251; Department of Lands and Surveys [Jordan], “Annual Report for 1951,” NARA RG 59, 250/41/10/4, Box 5465, Department of State Central Decimal File 885.16/7-2152.

\textsuperscript{65} Department of Lands and Surveys [Jordan], “Annual Report for 1952,” NARA RG 59, 250/41/10/4, Box 5465, Department of State Central Decimal File 885.16/5-1253.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 5.

in others the process had been partially completed. A state-centric analysis would see this state of affairs as a weakness of the central government’s capacity to govern. And indeed, the downside was a sense of neglect in West Bank communities facing crisis (apart from exceptional projects like the BMEO frontier village terracing scheme); however, the potential upside was that there was significant space for the refugees and local communities themselves to work out how best to cope with the situation.

The integration of the West Bank into Jordan was essentially de facto for the first three years of the union, meaning for example that people could move uninterrupted, but that the political relationship remained more theoretical than actual in many ways. During that time, from 1948-1951, Palestinian elites repeatedly pushed for state support and at least partial funding out of the massive loans from the UK to fund the state budget for the construction of modern edible oil refineries in Nablus, though one project to build a modern olive oil refinery and olive oil soap factory with Italian involvement was opposed by other Nabulsi elites because of the threat of competition with the traditional, artisanal olive oil soap factories. A variety of other projects were also proposed and funded, including the BMEO frontier village terracing scheme, which had been partially completed.

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68 Ibid., 501.
69 US legation Amman, “Subject: Monthly Economic Report – Jordan (00M62), April 1950,” 16 May 1950. NARA 170/72/26/01-07, Box 301, Folder “Economic Conditions 1946-1953.” Union was legislated on 24 April 1950, when the parliament voted unanimously in favor of unity; integration was then to occur gradually over about a year. The groundwork had previously been laid through networks of West Bank notables, who had declared in favor of unity at Jericho through public acclamation — though other diplomatic sources would later dispute the extent to which this cheering session was representative, particularly in light of the assassination of King Abdullah by a Palestinian in Jerusalem in mid 1951.
70 C. Boeglin to Quai Branly, “Objet: raffinerie d’huile d’olive,” 6 August 1951, pages 2-3. MAE La Courneuve, 369QONT Jordanie 1944-1952, Box 445 “Questions économique et financiers novembre 1945-décembre 1951,” L 79 4. The project was nourished by (as the French called him) Nassouhi bey Taher, though by early August it had been declared “failed [écarté],” with the Italian delegation leaving the country “strongly discontented.” The project was expected to cost around 140,000 Jordanian dinars, with the Italian investment covering about 40 percent.
food oil factory projects in the early 1950s failed to come to fruition, though a vegetable oil refinery would be built circa 1960 with government support.

The one institution in which Palestinian local politics could perhaps be conducted was the local chamber of commerce, industry, and agriculture. In August 1949, the Jordanian parliament dissolved the old, inactive Amman chamber established under Ottoman law, passing a new law to govern chambers of commerce, which a French diplomat considered to be a clear demonstration of Palestinian influence. The newly reconstituted Amman chamber was assumed to be atop the hierarchical pyramid, and it remained unclear how much independence the West Bank city chambers would have, considering that overt Palestinian political activity was not to be allowed. Jordan sent representatives from Amman, Irbid, Hebron, Jerusalem, Nablus, and Tulkarm to the first conference of Arab chambers of commerce held in Alexandria, Egypt in May 1951. In addition to these four West Bank and two East Bank chambers, there were at least three other West Bank chambers for Bethlehem, Jenin, and Ramallah created at the time. In February of the same year (1951), prior to the May Cairo conference, the West Bank chambers held a conference in Jerusalem, gathering most of the chambers of commerce of “Arab


Palestine” (including the Nablus, Ramallah, Hebron, Tulkarm, Jenin, and Jerusalem chambers); the Amman and Irbid chambers were invited, but rejected the invitation as a threat of “decentralization” to Amman’s central position in the hierarchy.  

The top priority for the new chambers of commerce in “Arab Palestine” (also known at the time as West Jordan, now known as the West Bank) was to modernize the olive oil soap factories in Nablus and to develop olive oil pressing and refining into a possible olive oil export industry. The Nablus soap output was estimated to remain around 4,000 tons annually, from 31 soap factories. The number of olive oil presses was put at 204, thus comprising the bulk of light industrial development in the West Bank at the time. But by 1961, the number of active soap factories in Nablus and Jerusalem had dropped in half to 15 — a dozen in Nablus, two in Ramallah, and one in Jerusalem, according to a preliminary industrial census. Thanks to a host of reasons, notably the prioritization of East Bank development and the centralization of power in Amman, as mentioned previously the sole success of efforts in this area was to create a vegetable oil refinery in Nablus by 1960, which one olive oil producer saw as uneconomical.

73 American Consulate Jerusalem, “Subject: Conference of Chambers of Commerce of Arab Palestine [Jerusalem],” 14 February 14 1951. NARA RG 166 (Foreign Agricultural Service) 170/72/26/01-07 Narrative reports of special agents, consular officers, and agricultural attaches 1950-1954, Box 301 [Jordan], Folder: “Econ. Cond. – International Agreements.”


75 Ibid., page 2.


77 Ibid. There were 120 carpentry shops and 53 flour mills, with all other types of commercial industry numbering in the single digits.

78 American Consul Jerusalem Lucien L. Kinsolving, to Department of State, despatch 159, 24 May 1961, page 2. NARA RG 59 150/423/3-4, Department of State Central Decimal File, 1960-1963, Box 2798, Folder 884.00/5-2461 HBS.
(though more likely a threat to his established interests). Even if power had been devolved to the West Bank chambers, however, it is unlikely that they would have propelled the development of modern factories, considering that the chambers were constituted by the business elites, who would have most likely used the institution to reinforce their own economic interests in the status quo.

The distribution of Point IV aid to Jordan can give an indication of the disparities in foreign investment between the West and East Banks. In the wake of drought, in the summer of 1960, of half a million dollars allocated for hydrological development (mainly meaning agricultural irrigation) about $300,000 went to Amman, $80,000 to Nablus, $93,000 to Jerusalem, Bethlehem and major neighboring villages, and $50,000 to Ramallah and Bireh.

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79 Ibid. The producer concerned named by the American consul was Hamdi Kanaan, who was appointed the mayor of Nablus in the Jordanian period and was integrally involved in olive oil soap production.

Strangely, Kanaan is blamed by a local amateur historian from Nablus for introducing the production of “green” (rather than pure white) soap, which used vegetable oils rather than more expensive olive oil. al-Sharif in San’at al-Sabun al-Nabulsi [Making Nablus Soap] reported that the change had happened around 1952, based on an interview with one of Kanaan’s descendants (pages 25; 38).

Interestingly, the Jordan Vegetable Oil Industries Co. involved substantial Dutch technical assistance; the Dutch were also active in supplying soybean oil to Palestinian refugees from 1948 until the early 1960s, when they were supplanted by American donations via PL-480 (Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954, known as “food for peace”) under the Point IV Program, as an outlet for surplus American soybean production. “Dutch concern at loss of UNRWA Edible Oils Market,” dated 20 February 1962; and “N.V. Vereenigde Oliefabrieken v/h. H. Spits & Zoon en H. de Hann & Zoon, letter of May 3 1963 in regard to donations of soybean oil in the Middle East,” NARA RG 59, 150/69/30/04, Director of the Office of Near Eastern and South Asian affairs, Office of the Country Director for Israel and Arab-Israeli Affairs (NEA/IAI), Records relating to refugee matters and Jordan water 1957-66, Box 10, Folder “Ref - Refugees & Migration, Care & Maintenance Middle East UNRWA, Jan-June 1963.”

80 M.C. de Sainte-Marie, Consul Général de France à Jérusalem to MAE (de Murville), “A.S. Aide du Point IV à la Jordanie en vue de remédier aux conséquences de la sécheresse,” no. 553, 15 June 1960. MAE La Courneuve, 368QONT (Jordanie 1953-1965), Carton 938
From 1955-1960, American aid to Jordan (not including military aid) was $182 million. In return, Jordan privileged certain American imports such as cars and refrigerators, as well as grains, in the early 1960s. Foreign aid, first mainly British and then mainly American, thus helped to reinforce the supremacy of Amman in the state hierarchy.

What makes this somewhat surprising is that British and Palestinian officials transferred from the Mandate were basically running things in the early years of the Jordanian state, until the political tension and uncertainty caused by the Suez Crisis.

In late May and early June 1949, Sir William Strang reported to Secretary of State Bevin on the results of his tours across the Middle East. He mentioned in particular Sir Herbert Stewart, agricultural adviser to the British Middle East Office and Sir Huge Dow, “both eminent ex-Indian administrators and former colleagues,” who were conducting a survey of agriculture in what he called “Arab Palestine,” subsequently to be known as the West Bank. The British officials “emphasised [sic] that both in Jordan and Arab Palestine the land, such as it is, is well cultivated. Every yard of soil is used and the cultivators are skillful and hard-working.” This assessment


81 For the sake of comparison, UK aid over a substantially longer period of 1948-1962 (and including military aid) was about $260 million; much of this figure was likely delivered before 1956. “NOTE: A/S. Aide à la Jordanie,” 4 March 1963. MAE La Courneuve, 368QONT/938.

82 Jean Coste, le conseiller commercial près l’ambassade de France au Liban, to MAE affaires économiques, direction des relations économiques extérieures, no.50 Jordanie. 6 March 1962. MAE La Courneuve, 368QONT/938.

83 This was particularly true in the economic and industrial development fields. TNA FO 371/82721, Economic reports on Jordan ET/1101, 1950.


85 “Sir William Strang’s Tour in the Middle East (21st May-18th June, 1949), report to the Secretary of State [Bevin],” E 8752/1052/65 No. 2, dated 4 July 1949. TNA Confidential Print 380
represented a fairly startling reversal of the pro-Zionist logic of the Mandate period.\textsuperscript{86} Perhaps more importantly, the presence of British officials, who oversaw the agricultural survey in the early Jordanian period, further illustrates the continuity with the Mandate, as British advisers carried out many of the development and economic functions of the state in the early 1950s. Officials like olive expert Taher moved to places of prominence in the Jordanian government, while others like the former head of the Jerusalem Agricultural Directorate, Tawfiq Zind Irani, similarly sought jobs in the Jordanian government by submitting petitions directly to the king.\textsuperscript{87}

Despite the transfer of officials from the Palestine Mandate, whatever transferable knowledge they had was of limited utility without commensurate institutions. Basic statistics regarding population and land usage in the West Bank remained uncertain in the 1950s as the Jordanian state sought to extend its effective control over the newly annexed territories. While Amman gradually redirected development aid to the East Bank, many West Bankers were essentially left to their own devices. A closer examination of the West Bank olive sector shows what Palestinians could do in the absence of effective state support.

\textsuperscript{86} In the Mandate, reports on agriculture and development often cited the positive example of Jewish colonization efforts for Arab cultivators. Here, instead, Strang wrote that it would be a mistake to think that the Israelis could teach Arabs how best to use the land, noting in particular both the lack of ready, experienced agricultural labor in Israel, as well as the derelict land now in Israel that had been cultivated by Palestinians before 1948: “Many of the citrus plantations in the coastal plain are going to waste through lack of labour or lack of funds to water the trees or gather the fruit.” Ibid., page 13.

4. West Bank olive tree planting and olive cultivation

Transjordan had not been a significant producer of olives. East Bank olive cultivation circa 1948 was estimated at around 50,000 dunams, with an annual harvest averaging 10,000 tons; surplus olive oil would be exported to the Hauran in Syria.\(^8\) By summer 1950, East Bank planted area had budged up by just 3,000 dunams, in total producing on average 500-600 tons of olive oil a year, yielded from pressing an average annual total of 4,000-5,000 tons of olives.\(^9\) This meant that Nablus produced more olive oil soap by weight than the East Bank produced in raw olives. The annexation of the West Bank added somewhere between 400,000-450,000 dunams of olives, yielding 10,000 or so tons of olive oil on average each year.\(^10\)

Planting by Palestinians in the early Jordanian period continued at nearly the same rate as the Mandate period. The significance of this fact is to show that, at least in the olive sector, Palestinian agriculture continued to expand, rather than stagnate, as has been popularly assumed. By 1953, the total area under olives for both banks combined had reached nearly 500,000 dunams.\(^11\) This means, at a minimum, an increase in planted area of 15,000 dunams per year,


\(^{10}\) Ibid., page 5.

\(^{11}\) Of 497,291 dunams, about 45,000 were nonbearing and thus recently planted. Le conseiller commercial C. Boeglin de France en Syrie & Jordanie à le secrétaire d’état aux affaires économiques et au plan direction des relations économiques extérieures, service des accords commerciaux, “Objet: la production de la Jordanie en 1953,” No. 5581/D [Damas, 382
which occurred mostly in the West Bank in this period. For that year (1953), total olive tonnage was 49,209, of which 44,701 tons were pressed to yield about 9,000 tons of olive oil, the rest conserved as pickled olives. About half of the olive oil was estimated to be exported to Syria and Lebanon.

By 1954, total area under olives was just under 509,000 dunams, including 60,547 young and not yet bearing dunams of newly planted olive trees. Of a total olive production of 61,000 tons, 48,500 came from the West Bank districts. Olive planting increased that year by an additional 192,905 trees or 19,000 or so dunams. As was typical of the period, Nablus district saw the most tree planting by far: 335,287 trees or 33,500 or so dunams.

Statistics for 1955, the last available from Western diplomatic sources for the early Jordanian period owing to the Suez Crisis, illustrate the continued expansion, up to 524,305
dunams under olives, with 70,000 not yet producing. The statistics cite an increase for the year of 27,415 new dunams planted with olives, showing some contradictions between the various figures; however, taking the overall figures, an average increase of another 15,000 dunam or so of olives seems like a conservative estimate, consistent with the average for the period. Again, the vast majority of new planting occurred in the West Bank. 1955 also illustrates the biannual fluctuation, with production dropping from 61,000 tons of olives to 12,000, leading to an enormous spike in prices of olive oil, olives, and olive oil soap. This would have meant an olive oil yield of 1,500-3,000 depending on how much of the crop was pickled. A spike would


99 Ibid. The report, for example, gives a breakdown by subdistrict, ranked by production for the year, which totaled equals only just over 400,000 dunams in the West Bank: Nablus 142,695; Ramallah 106,483; Tulkarem 76,160; Jenin 67,937; and Bethlehem 7,012. Two East Bank subdistricts are given as Jerash 7,050 and Tafilah 3,100, which leaves over 100,000 dunams unaccounted for. The figures for Ajloun and Irbid would not have exceeded 50,000 combined, meaning these figures (despite their value in greater detail) actually seem upon closer inspection to be less credible than the more general estimates.

100 Unfortunately the planting figures are again combined for all types of trees, but the largest increase in type of tree planted was once again olives with over 27,500 dunams newly planted. In terms of total tree planting, broken down by subdistrict, Nablus led the way once again (as it had in previous years when planting figures were given at the district level) with about 15,000 dunams of various trees planted for the year. Tulkarem came second with just over 10,000; Jenin third with 9,270; Hebron fourth with 7,672; Irbid fifth with just under 5,100; Tafilah sixth with 3,883; Ramallah seventh with 3,776, Bethlehem eighth with 3,659; and Jericho ninth with 3,439. Ibid., page 4. The other significant tree and fruit plantings for the year 14,306 dunams of almonds; 8,850 dunams of figs; 6,632 of forest trees; 4,100 dunams of citrus; and 3,600 or so of grape vines. Ibid., page 3.

101 Ibid., page 1.

102 Historically cultivators tended to press 80 percent of their olives, pickling with the remaining fifth, with a yield on average of 20 percent oil per amount pressed. Thus an olive crop of 12,000 tons would typically result in just under 2,000 tons of olive oil. An estimate the
be understandable, since undersecretary of agriculture and Palestinian olive expert Taher estimated that average annual consumption of olive oil was around 5,000 tons, with export to Syria and Lebanon of surpluses in the range of 1,000-6,000, depending on availability and prices.103

The larger significance of these statistics is to put the lie to the assumption that the Jordanian period was one of stagnation for the West Bank economically and agriculturally. While certain types of investments and foreign aid were diverted almost entirely to Amman and the East Bank, especially after 1956, the agricultural statistics illustrate an impressive increase in planting, a degree of vigor in West Bank agriculture that can only be explained by local initiative. It may again have been encouraged initially by the BMEO terracing funding, but ultimately the British advisor’s project seems to have been more of a spur than a direct input.

**Jordanian agriculture after Suez**

The severing of relations with Britain and France had multiple effects, from the expulsion of top British advisers to the more general reduction of European aid and influence, which had already been dwindling, especially in comparison to growing American aid. The withdrawal of British expertise, in particular, meant that the Jordanians took over the state bureaucracy and needed to constitute their own institutions and take their own measurements of growth. The following spring of 1956 from Taher gave a figure at the low end of 1,500 tons; with the hopes that the 1955/1956 crop would yield almost ten times as much olive oil, at 12,000 tons. Le secrétaire commercial, Amman to directeur de l’Office de l’huile d’olive, 15 rue Henry Boucher, Sfax, Royaume de Tunis, “Etat d’olivier en Jordanie,” no. 056 17 May 1956. CADN 30PO/1/112.

Ministry of Agriculture, for example, constituted a Department of Agricultural Statistics, which published a preliminary census of agricultural income in 1960, attempting to encapsulate developments since 1956.104 In short, the report summarized, the late 1950s had seen an increase in areas planted under fruit, especially olives, “owing to the intense enthusiasm for planting different trees, especially olive trees,” though two years of relative drought had severely impacted yields across the period (as they also had in the Galilee, as described in the previous chapter).105 The preliminary census put the number of dunams under olive trees just over 500,000, which could be credible if only counting those trees fully in bearing; however, the numbers would still be on the relatively low, conservative side.106 The department kept statistics on total tree planting — that is, grouping all fruit (and to a significantly lesser extent, forest) trees together.107 Thus, while these planting figures cannot be compared to the earlier statistics furnished by the British and French, they can at least provide the impression that planting continued to expand. Most importantly, by the state’s explicit admission, planting was driven almost purely by local initiative and the “intense enthusiasm” for planting fruit, especially olive, trees.

Since planting in the West Bank was essentially not encouraged by the central government in Amman in the 1950s, it is important to examine the ways that the state could intervene in the areas it newly claimed to govern. One method extended back to the Ottoman

104 Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Agricultural Statistics [Jordan], “Census of agricultural income for the year 1960, with comparison to the income of four previous years (1956-1959) [in Arabic],” ISA MGA-48/34, 114.1/1-799.
105 Ibid., page 11.
106 Ibid., page 4.
107 Ibid., page 11. In five years (1956-1960), 114,000 dunams of fruit trees were planted, from about 730,000 to 844,000.
period: export bans. With the dry seasons adversely affecting olives in the late 1950s, the Ministry of Economy imposed bans on the export of olive oil through defense orders.\(^{108}\) Between 1957 and 1959, the Ministry of Economy issued a variety of orders variously lifting and imposing the ban on the export of olive oil, attempting essentially to influence domestic prices by increasing supply.\(^{109}\) In 1959, the ministry banned the export of not only olive oil, but also olives themselves and jift oil (an industrial-grade oil produced by recrushing the leftover mass of crushed olives).\(^{110}\) The order offered an exemption of one “tankah” or tank, most likely the size of a jerrycan of around 20 liters, for personal use or as a gift.\(^{111}\) The ministry almost immediately issued another defense order clarifying that the export of olive seeds [habb al-zaytun] was permissible.\(^{112}\) But the primary focus of the ban remained olive oil,\(^{113}\) which had become the primary product of the olive sector in the West Bank with the decline and stagnation of the olive oil soap industry, effectively since the Great Depression. All of the export control orders cited a


\(^{110}\) Defense order [in Arabic] containing ban on the exportation of olives, olive oil, and jift oil from the kingdom, signed National Economic Minister Daud, Issue 1448, 27 October 1959, page 904. DNL official gazette.

\(^{111}\) Ibid., literally “fi hadud tankah wahedah.”

\(^{112}\) Defense order [in Arabic] containing permission to export olive seeds from the kingdom (exemption of “habb al-zaytun faqat”), signed National Economic Minister Khlusi al-Khayri, Issue 1448, 27 October 1959, page 904. DNL official gazettes.

\(^{113}\) Defense order [in Arabic] permitting the exportation of olive oil issued by the Ministry of Economy, signed Economic Minister Jalil Harb, Issue 1573, 26 September 1961, page 1282. DNL official gazette.
defense regulation (nitham al-difa’) number 6, article 5 of 1939 — a British wartime regulation, illustrating a parallel to legislation within Israel, where regulators also continued to call upon World War II-era restrictions in order to control supplies and prices.

Another practice continued from the Mandate period was control over picking, by setting the start of the harvest date. Unlike the British period, however, the district office in Jerusalem asked the security services to prevent premature picking, though it is unlikely that it was a priority.\footnote{Qiyadat mintaqat al-quds [Jerusalem district leadership] to security service [in Arabic], September 1959, ISA MGA 39/25, 114.1/1-649, Document 5.} Under the British, prevention of premature picking depended on intermediaries in the form of village mukhtars, later reinforced by roving inspectors in World War II who focused most of their attention on the presses rather than the groves. In the Jordanian period, control was relaxed in unproductive years.\footnote{ISA MGA 39/25, see for example document 1 [in Arabic] from Deir Qaddis (1959); document 7 [in Arabic], from qaimqam subdistrict Ramallah (1960); documents 58-59 [in Arabic], proclaiming no set dates for 1962 harvest (October 1962).} Since picking dates were typically set in Amman, localities in the West Bank would occasionally send petitions requesting delays to the date of the harvest, in order to prevent the picking of unripe fruit.\footnote{ISA MGA 39/25, Document 31, petition [in Arabic] from Bethlehem chamber of commerce regarding harvest dates (response to Document 25, setting picking dates for 1961; see documents 32, 41, and 55 for further petitions requesting exceptions to centrally set harvest dates; documents 35-36 from Amman indicate receptiveness to requests in delaying dates; all above referenced documents in Arabic).} This indicates indirectly that localities such as Bethlehem took the dates seriously — that there was local buy-in to the practice of preventing premature picking, otherwise the restrictions would have simply been ignored.

Beginning in the mid 1960s, the central government moved beyond these older, well-established methods of supporting the olive sector, with a mixture of receptiveness to local initiatives and attempts at centralization and standardization. In the fall of 1964, the Jordan
Central Cooperative Union in Amman recognized a cooperative in Deir Qaddis (near Ramallah) for olive pressing, storage, and marketing. The initiative is representative of the pioneering role of certain villages in the Ramallah-Bireh subdistrict in establishing cooperatives in this period. Second, in the winter of 1964, Amman — apparently for the first time — fixed standards and specifications for olive oil, which were published in the official government gazette. The standards proposed grades for different qualities of olive oil based on acidity, and addressed various types of adulteration as illegal. Returning again to the Mandate period, colonial officials had long bemoaned the lack of Arab cooperatives, especially compared to their Zionist counterparts, and had made efforts peaking during the war at detecting and preventing adulteration. In addressing olive oil standards, the Jordanian government lagged behind efforts at multinational technical cooperation that mounted substantially in the late 1950s through the auspices of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, driven in particular by Western Mediterranean nations (above all Tunisia), which can be explained by the fact that these conferences had expansive Southern European and North African participation, and a limited number of occasional participants from Israel, but no Jordanian or Palestinian participants.

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117 Contract and conditions for storehouses [in Arabic], the Jordanian Central Cooperative Union (Amman) and the cooperative society for the pressing of olives and marketing of its products, Deir Qaddis, Ramallah, September 1964. ISA MGA-48/34 114.1/1-799.
118 Qarar maqayis wa-muwasefat zayt zaytun [fixing standards and specifications of olive oil, in Arabic], Issue 1805, 16 November 1964, pages 1706-1707. DNL official gazette.
119 Ibid. Violations were to be punished according to agricultural law no. 37 of 1962.
120 Taher corresponded with the Tunisian headquarters of the Office of Olive Oil in the early 1950s, requesting information and publications, and continued to travel to France quite frequently, but evidently he did not participate personally in or send representatives to the multinational technical conferences on olive culture that were held throughout the 1950s and 1960s. See for example: Organisation des nations unies pour l’alimentation et l’agriculture (UN FAO), « Mission conférence oléicole intergouvernementale à Madrid du 22 au 25 mars 1954 » (CCP 54/17 30) ; UN FAO « La stabilisation du marché international de l’huile d’olive : études
The mid 1960s saw renewed attention to what the Jordanians called “front-line” (al-khatut al-imamiyah) villages, which the BMEO had called frontier villages in the early 1950s.

By 1965, the top priority for reliefs and works projects in the West Bank between Jerusalem and Hebron was expansion of olive tree planting. The minister of agriculture proposed planting an additional 40,000 dunams with olives, interplanted with grape vines (which had long been the specialty of the Hebron area), accompanied by a variety of other agricultural investments, where rainfall would be sufficient. The suggestion came on the basis of “a statistical study of rural resources for the front-line villages in southern Jerusalem and lawaa’ Hebron, with the intent of putting in place a development program to develop these resources, so as to guarantee the inhabitants of these areas a suitable income, affording them stability and reducing emigration from these regions with special importance.” The ultimate stated goal was to encourage “self-reliance” in the local population that would reduce the burden on the government in terms of

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122 Ibid.
social welfare expenditures. Along these lines, the ministry suggested signing a contract with the World Food Programme of the UN to substitute humanitarian food aid for cash wages as compensation for the work in planting olive trees and the other measures suggested. The Department of the Public Budget in the Ministry of Finance found no objection to the minister of agriculture negotiating with the WFP to contribute to developing rural resources in the front-line villages south of Jerusalem.123

Like the BMEO terracing project, political reasons would ultimately compel the WFP olive expansion project to shift in geographic focus away from the Green Line and to support olive cultivation in the East Bank instead. However, in the case of the WFP project, it was not domestic politics, but international politics, with the Jordanian loss of the West Bank in the 1967 war. In the meantime, the Ramallah subdistrict administrator pleaded for more funding to communities in the front-line villages in February 1966,124 but by the summer of 1966 changes to American funding of foreign aid compelled cuts in the WFP to those very villages.125 This

123 Letter [in Arabic] from Minister of Finance (Public Budget) to Prime Minister, 21 October 1965. DNL government documents, 106/20/1/30.
124 Letter [in Arabic] from Mutasarref lawwa' Ramallah [Administrator Ramallah Subdistrict] to Muhabeth al-Quds [Governor of Jerusalem Governorate], 7 February 1966. DNL government documents, 147/20/130. The Ramallah office seems to have taken the opportunity to link the issue of infiltration with the economic dislocations caused by 1948: “I wish to direct your highness’s attention that we are observing the conditions on the front lines continuously and watchfully; however on this occasion I wish to implore, please, working on extending a hand of aid to the inhabitants of these villages and providing them all available possibilities for their succor, as they have been living since the nakba in a state of extreme poverty and want.”
125 Letter [in Arabic] from minister of social affairs and labor to governors of Jerusalem, Nablus, and Hebron, 16 June 1966. DNL government documents, 199/20/1/30; 200/20/1/30; 201/20/1/30. The modifications were to come in effect on July 1, resulting in a reduction of shares of aid to front-line villages from 80,000 to 58,000 for “normal cases” and from 20,000 to 14,000 for “social cases;” the government planned to compensate by allotting an additional 20,000 shares to feed students in schools in front-line villages most affected by the reductions (Ibid., page 1). The ministry advised reallocating the aid along the following rubric: proximity to
illustrated the dependence of Jordan on foreign aid, and the shift from dependency on British aid to American aid. It seems in addition that while local officials remained concerned with the issue of infiltration, which was primarily caused by economic and social hardships, the central government was increasingly intent on reducing aid and funding just before 1967.

One area where the government had made significant strides in developing its own bureaucracies and capabilities in the wake of Suez was in the realm of statistics. However, censuses remained a work in progress. The Department of Statistics conducted the first true agricultural census in 1965; prior, the department had relied upon the ministry of agriculture, which had sent an agent from each sub-district to the villages, where the information on landholdings and crop production was supplied by either the mukhtar or the man identified as the chief farmer of the village. In short, the Jordanian ministry of agriculture had continued to follow the methods of the British Mandate, which depended in the end on a trusted local intermediary.

Nevertheless, considering the lack of alternative sources for estimating the state of West Bank agriculture prior to 1967 — especially because such benchmarks would be crucial to evaluating the impact of the Israeli occupation — the work of the Ministry of Agriculture’s

the armistice line; area of land lost and area of land remaining in possession; and general economic conditions of the village (Ibid., page 2). Of “normal cases,” Hebron had the most with a little over half, and was to be cut by 10,000, the others (Ramallah, Jenin, and Tulkarm) each to face reductions of 4,000-5,000 (Ibid., page 3).

126 Department of Statistics [Jordan], “al-mashru’ al-tajribi l-tatwir jamii’ al-ihsa’at al-zira’iyah [Experimental project to develop the gathering of statistics],” 1968, page 2. Al-Qa’ah al-Hashimiyah [Hashemite Hall, henceforth HH], University of Jordan Library [UJL], Special Collection of Government Reports. The department of statistics continued to develop sample survey questionnaires in 1966 and 1967; their efforts would bear fruit with a substantially improved 1975 agricultural census, which unfortunately would not include the West Bank.
Department of Agricultural Enumeration remains valuable for filling in this crucial lacuna. In 1963, the department enumerated 562,240 dunams of olives out of 928,143 of total bearing fruit trees, not including 257,060 nonbearing dunams. Of that figure, the Nablus district had nearly 64 percent of all of Jordan’s olive trees, with 357,360, and the Jerusalem district had 134,207 dunams. Ajloun, by contrast, still had just under 50,000 dunams. The two West Bank districts of Nablus and Jerusalem combined for about 491,500 dunams, or 87.5 percent of total Jordanian olive plantings. These figures indicate an increase in olive plantings in the year between 1962 and 1963 of 18,000 dunams for Jordan overall, 3,000 or so of which was planted in Ajloun, while the remainder was planted in the West Bank, predominantly the Nablus district, which had expanded its olive orchards by 12,000 dunams. These statistics again help to illustrate the slow but steady expansion of olive cultivation in the Jordanian West Bank throughout this period.

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127 Department of Agricultural Enumeration, Ministry of Agriculture [Jordan], “Annual report for the year 1963 [covering 1963-4-1 – 1964-31-3] [in Arabic],” page 22. HH UJL, Special Collection of Government Reports.
128 Ibid., page 25.
Figure 9. Mapping areas of olive production in 1960s Jordan\textsuperscript{130}

The above map of olive production in all of Jordan in the 1960s, with each dot representing 1,000 dunams, illustrates the concentration of olive cultivation in the West Bank, 

particularly the central north. The map is taken from the first *Agricultural Atlas of Jordan*, published in 1974, which compiled statistics (many of which are otherwise missing) from the annual surveys of the Ministry of Agriculture. In summary, what these statistics indicate is that the area under olives in the West Bank continued to increase by about 15,000 dunams per year in the early to mid 1960s. Rather than a static or moribund industry, the olive sector in the West Bank continued to develop, with the substantial majority of olive planting conducted in the northern West Bank district of Nablus (see Graph 7, next page).
Graph 7. Jordan olive production (in tons), 1961-1966\textsuperscript{131}
West Bank broken down by district; all East Bank districts combined

\begin{table}
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\hline
Nablus     & 59785 & 4102  & 22482 & 54174 & 18863 & 18864 \\
Jerusalem  & 35974 & 1427  & 8019  & 24918 & 4488  & 4125  \\
Hebron     & 2178  & 94    & 66    & 2062  & 460   & 600   \\
\hline
Total West Bank & 97937 & 5623  & 30567 & 81154 & 23811 & 23589 \\
Total East Bank & 16491 & 1731  & 8088  & 17158 & 13606 & 9132  \\
Grand total & 114428 & 7354  & 38655 & 98312 & 37417 & 32721 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{131} Adapted from Ibid., page 104. Table No. 19 “Production of olives in tons.” After 1967, East Bank production ranged between 10,000-25,000 tons a year.

Source: [Jordanian] Ministry of Agriculture
Graph 8. Jordan olive area by bank (in dunams), 1961-1966

Graph 9. West Bank olive area by district (in dunams), 1961-1966

132 Adapted from Ibid., Table No. 20 “Area of olives in dunams.” From 1966-1972, the East Bank area under olives doubled from about 65,000 to over 130,000 dunams.

133 Ibid.
Table 17. Jordanian planted area of olives in dunams, 1961-1966\(^{134}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nablus</td>
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<td>345439</td>
<td>357360</td>
<td>370533</td>
<td>390759</td>
<td>390767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>132602</td>
<td>134207</td>
<td>135381</td>
<td>136408</td>
<td>137067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebron</td>
<td>7667</td>
<td>8014</td>
<td>8014</td>
<td>8204</td>
<td>8620</td>
<td>9000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total West Bank</td>
<td>477183</td>
<td>486055</td>
<td>499581</td>
<td>514118</td>
<td>535787</td>
<td>536834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total East Bank</td>
<td>54214</td>
<td>58096</td>
<td>62759</td>
<td>66170</td>
<td>66165</td>
<td>65172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand total</td>
<td>531397</td>
<td>544151</td>
<td>562340</td>
<td>580288</td>
<td>601952</td>
<td>602006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [Jordanian] Ministry of Agriculture

Despite the lack of direct state support for West Bank agriculture in general and the olive sector in particular, Palestinians in the Jordanian period continued to plant. In particular, the expansion occurred in the northern areas of the Nablus district, which included Jenin and Tulkarm. These areas, known as the Triangle, constituted the traditional heartland of Palestinian olive production. Thus, similar to the Mandate period, Palestinians planted regardless of the state’s policies or lack of capacity to intervene effectively in rural areas.

The decline of olive oil soap and the rise of edible olive oil as the predominant Palestinian olive-derived commodity

One exception to this story of West Bank olive development by Palestinians under Jordanian rule was the olive oil soap industry, which had essentially never recovered from the twin blows of the Great Depression and export restrictions during World War II, especially as it was quickly supplanted by cheaper alternative soaps. The olive oil soap industry centered in Nablus was effectively stagnant under Jordanian control. Estimated production of Nabulsi olive

\(^{134}\) Ibid.
oil soap remained between 2,000-4,000 tons in the mid 1960s, with a small re-export trade via Jordan to neighboring Arab countries.135 The industry also seems to have begun importing olive oil from Spain for the purposes of making soap, beginning with around 1,000 tons in 1964, despite exports of about the same amount of olive oil to Lebanon the year prior.136 In the mid 1960s, these trends continued with roughly equal amounts of olive oil imported for the soap industry, which then exported about the same amount (around 500 tons per year) to the Gulf.137 One potential reason for what appears at first glance to be unnecessary imports could have been the differing quality of the respective oils, with the exported Palestinian olive oil a more valuable edible grade, and the imported Spanish olive oil being a cheaper industrial grade. This would then be a positive reflection of the improved quality of Palestinian olive oil, which would be more valuable as an edible oil than an industrial one. These changes altogether reflected a significant reorientation in the production of Palestinian olive commodities, away from the artisanal production of olive oil soap, and toward increasingly profitable edible olive oil.

Conclusion

The Palestinian olive sector, which had once oriented almost its entire surplus toward the soap factories, by the end of the Jordanian period was almost wholly devoted to olive oil

135 NMA, al-Sharif, page 38.
137 The primary recipient country in the Gulf was Kuwait, with Jordan exporting 358 tons of olive oil to Kuwait in 1965. D.L. MacDonald, American Embassy Beirut, “Subject: Jordan: Fats and Oils – Annual Report,” 28 February 1966. NARA RG 166 (FAS narrative reports of special agents, consular officers, and agricultural attaches, 1966) 170/73/03/01-07, Box 38 (Jordan), Folder “Jordan Fairs-Grains & Feeds 1966.”
production. This was the culmination of a wide array of factors: some positive, including the expansion of olive groves, improved methods of cultivation, and increased investment and modernization of olive processing; some negative, like the decline of artisanal Palestinian soap production and the loss of traditional olive oil soap export markets in neighboring Arab countries; and some external changes, particularly the increasing value of olive oil as a global commodity. All of these trends had begun in the British Mandate period, and all would continue to intensify in the subsequent period under Israeli occupation. After 1967, West Bank Palestinians would continue to expand olive plantings, though at a reduced rate and in different areas, and invest even more heavily in continuing to modernize olive oil presses.

In sum, for settled agriculturalists in rural areas of the West Bank between 1948 and 1967, at worst the Jordanian state’s policies could be characterized as benign neglect. In fact, in many respects agricultural policy under the Jordanians represented a continuation and expansion of positive Mandate-era policies, such as in seeking to prevent premature olive picking. Particularly in the second decade of Jordanian rule, the state made significant strides in supporting Palestinian agriculture, advances for which the Israelis would attempt to claim credit in the initial years of occupation. Part of the reason that the Israelis could advance these claims was the paucity of comparative data for the conditions in the West Bank prior to occupation. In many ways, this attempt by the Israeli authorities to take credit for Jordanian-Palestinian successes mirrored earlier efforts by the British under the Mandate to glorify its positive impact on Palestine via depictions of seemingly miraculous, instantaneous modernization and development that was in fact a disguised takeover and reclassification of late Ottoman
institutions and structures. The Israelis sought to exploit the “imagined barrenness” of the Jordanian period of rule, just as the British had for the preceding Ottoman period.

In the absence of effective and extensive state knowledge and control, this chapter has sought to emphasize the resilience of Palestinian communities in the West Bank, especially what the British and Jordanians identified as the “frontier villages” in the 1950s, later redubbed “frontline villages” in the 1960s. These villages were doubly impacted by the Nakba. While absorbing refugee inflows (to the point of nearly doubling the West Bank’s population), these communities also lost significant swaths of agricultural land within Israel, their main and in some cases only source of income. Foreign aid initially focused on relief to these areas. In the early period of Jordanian rule, when British advisers were ascendant after the collapse of the Palestine Mandate, an enterprising agricultural adviser named J.C. Eyre from the British Middle East Office pioneered a program of terracing and olive planting for the Green Line-adjacent villages most affected by the loss of lands to Israel and the influx of landless refugees.

However, over time, the central government shifted resources to encourage terracing and olive planting in the East Bank instead. Before the 1948 war, olive cultivation in Transjordan had been insignificant, especially compared to the West Bank. The shift to encouraging olive planting and terracing in the East Bank reflected both the priorities of the Jordanian monarchy and the sharp decrease in British influence (and in some cases, effective control) of the Jordanian bureaucracy with the 1956 Suez Crisis. By the time of the 1967 war, the Jordanian government had refocused international aid (primarily American funded, either directly through Point IV or indirectly through multinational institutions like the United Nations World Food Programme) on
developing the olive sector in the East Bank, which would explode to equal West Bank production by the time of the First Intifada in 1987, twenty years into the occupation.

Regardless of the central government’s relative prioritization of the East Bank over the West Bank in terms of development, in a significant continuity with Ottoman and British rule over Palestine, Jordanian capacity to intervene on the basis of newly gathered knowledge remained limited in many ways, especially in rural areas of the West Bank. The Jordanian government continued to rely on some of the same tools that both the Ottomans and British had used for decades, and in some cases centuries: tax relief in times of drought; bans on exports to attempt to intervene in domestic markets in times of shortages; and quality control of produce by setting and attempting to enforce when the harvest could be conducted. Like the British under the Mandate, Jordanian central bureaucrats attempted to set the proper times for picking, to delimit the harvest season to ensure the greatest yield. For olives, preventing premature picking was crucial to oil yields, as some farmers in the past would attempt to capitalize on higher early season prices by picking their olives prematurely, with the drawback of decreased yields. However, locals pushed back when the central bureaucrats fixed dates that failed to take into account the local context. Some Palestinians in the West Bank, through institutions such as the new chambers of commerce, were able to contest these dates if they were inappropriate to local conditions, such as in the case of a late harvest. By doing so, Palestinians in the West Bank continued the longstanding tradition of petitioning authorities, just as Palestinians remaining in the Galilee contested policies of the new Israeli state in this same period. Unlike the Israelis, but like the Ottomans and the British before them, the Jordanians used export controls to attempt to influence local supplies and keep domestic prices down when the olive oil yields were low.
Although Jordanian interventions in rural areas of the West Bank were relatively few in the 1950s, especially compared to traditional charitable arenas like education and health care in urban areas like Jerusalem, the government’s presence in the West Bank gradually increased over time. Perhaps the most significant impact of the Suez Crisis on midcentury Jordanian state-society relations, and on the Amman-West Bank relationship in particular, was something of an unintended consequence of the diplomatic rupture with Britain and France and the resultant expulsion of top British advisers. In response, Jordan further developed its own bureaucracies and capacities of surveillance, particularly through the gathering of statistics, which were significantly advanced in the 1960s.

While the property settlement process in the West Bank was incomplete by the time of the 1967 war, the Department of Lands and Survey (part of the Jordanian Ministry of Finance) had made significant progress in the West Bank. Similarly, the Jordanian Department of Statistics had completed its first experimental agricultural census in 1965, which together paved the way for the first true cadastral survey in the decade thereafter. The Jordanian state was thus gradually expanding its understanding of and control over the West Bank in the mid 1960s. Simultaneously, Palestinians were slowly but surely expanding olive orchards, especially in the traditional heartland of olive cultivation in the north and central West Bank. These gradual processes of development laid the groundwork for many of the successes that the Israelis would claim credit for in the early period of the occupation, just as the British had attempted to do in the early period of the Mandate.

Overall, despite received images of stagnation or decline — a type of “imagined barrenness” paralleling nationalist depictions of the Ottoman period — the Palestinian olive
sector in the West Bank continued to develop throughout the Jordanian period, with limited help from the government and foreign aid at certain points in time. Planting in particular continued to expand, along with production, such that by the end of the Jordanian period in 1967, the planted area of olives in the West Bank equaled that of Palestine as a whole before 1948 — nearly compensating for the areas lost in the Nakba of 1948 (primarily in the Galilee). Simultaneously, however, the Jordanian government began to encourage an East Bank olive sector, which ultimately came to rival the West Bank olive sector, leading to competing priorities after 1967 in setting Jordanian policy toward agriculture in the Occupied West Bank. Yet on the whole, as the next and final chapter will illustrate, these trends of expanded olive planting and increased olive production largely continued throughout the first two decades of Israeli occupation, as Jordan sought to retain its claims to sovereignty over the West Bank and (rhetorically at least) support the steadfastness of West Bank agriculturalists.
CHAPTER 6


Introduction

While olive culture in Palestine has been economically significant throughout the modern period, the olive tree (and by extension its cultivation, its products, and its surrounding socioeconomic structures) have taken on ever-increasing cultural and political significance in recent decades — particularly in relation to Palestinian nationalism. The late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s saw an explosion of agrarian political imagery as the Palestinian Liberation Organization became the governing body of the Palestinian national movement, and Yasser Arafat’s Fatah party took centerstage. This imagery, perhaps most iconically in political posters, sought to link the Palestinian cause to peasant revolts around the world, at a time of seemingly global guerrilla warfare. Drawing upon traditional designs, idealized imagery of the peasantry represented a way of putting the Palestinian national movement within these transnational currents. The history of

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For an example of Palestinian linkages to these transnational dynamics, see for example Ismail Shammout, “Victory: Vietnam-Palestine,” PLO circa 1972, The Palestine Poster Project Archives <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/vietnam-palestine>. The poster, which has both Arabic and English versions, depicts a Viet Cong soldier handing off a flag bearing the word “victory” to a keffiyeh-clad, AK-47-bearing feda’i.

2 See for example, Ismail Shammout, “The spring that was,” PLO circa 1966. Palestine Poster Project Archives <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/the-spring-that-was>. Although the iconography of Palestinian nationalism deserves further attention and research, it is striking that in the 1960s and early 1970s, when the one-state solution was ascendant in the
this period globally and regionally in connection with the Palestinian nationalist movement and its imagery deserves further study by art historians and other specialists in visual representation.  

In this chapter, rather than look at the cultural production of Palestinian political factions in exile, I will focus attention on the conditions of olive culture on the ground in the West Bank, which I argue are integrally connected to the question of the political future of the territories. Specifically, the economic significance of olive culture became increasingly intertwined with — even overshadowed by — its political significance under Israeli occupation. While in part the predominance of olive culture reflects its longstanding traditional economic importance, under Israeli occupation the tree became for the first time a symbol of sumud, of steadfastness, a type of passive resistance of rootedness. Sumud fit the political possibilities and pessimistic mood of many Palestinians living under occupation, depending on external actors, external funding, and external events — at least until the intifada changed the calculus entirely. The first section of this chapter examines the changes in the broader economic and political structures of the occupied territories, offering context for the changes in the olive subsector and the actions and decisions of Palestinian planters.

Olive tree planting in the West Bank slowed considerably — cut in at least half — from the pace of planting under both the British Mandate (1920-1948) and the period of Jordanian rule

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formula proposed and supported by the leftist factions of the PFLP and DFLP, posters predominated that drew extensively on symbols of “1948” territory, the Jaffa orange in particular.


⁴ Including both former great powers like the UK and France and the cold war superpowers of day in the USA and USSR, to regional leaders like Egyptian President Nasser, Jordanian King Hussein, and Palestinian Chairman Arafat.
from 1948-1967. The regional pattern of planting changed as well, with significant expansion in the south, where rainfall is frequently insufficient for sustainable production. The settled south — meaning roughly the south-central areas surrounding Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Hebron — was not coincidentally the focus of the settlement movement in the earliest period of the occupation. Planting olive trees became a defensive strategy to prevent confiscation, proving that land was under continuous cultivation, without having to fear a fallow season or seasonal field crops not showing up on aerial photography.⁵

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But rather than focus on Israeli policies, this chapter emphasizes Palestinian adaptations and resistance to the changes caused by the occupation, which meant not just the closing of certain options but the opening of new options that Palestinians made into opportunities. For example, poorer Palestinians increasingly turned away from agriculture and toward wage labor, but then used their wages to invest in family agriculture, which in turn continued — if on a reduced scale, and with growing dependence on unpaid familiar labor. According to a 2012

6 The full Arabic title reads: “Sumudun ka-shajar al-zaytun… ma bnfarat wa-la bnahun [(We are) steadfast as an olive tree… we will not disappear (literally be dissolved and ended, rhyming in the original Arabic)].” Mohammed Amous for Stop the Wall, Third Olive Festival 2008. Palestine Poster Project Archive <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/steadfast-as-an-olive-tree>.
Palestinian Authority study, a staggering 94 percent of Palestinian agricultural labor is unpaid.\(^7\) This reflects the culmination of many trends that began under Israeli occupation, with the cost of paid labor rising exponentially, and the declining profitability of agriculture leading to an increased reliance on non-labor-force family members, particularly elders and students. As the second section of this chapter indicates, these pressures also marked a possible shift in the gendered divisions of household and agricultural labor, though this subject requires further investigation.

Overall, this chapter is organized thematically in increasing level of detail and specificity to the olive sector of the West Bank. The first section is a historical overview of the period of occupation from 1967-1993, analyzing the shifts in policy, politics, and economics that shaped and altered the field (or champ, to use Bourdieu’s terminology) in which social actors were embedded.\(^8\) In the second section, the focus shifts to the reactions of West Bank agriculturalists, through the lens of Palestinian research into an emergent economic nationalism and the associated politicization of dry, nonirrigated, rainfed (b’ali) farming. The third and longest section analyses the changes and adaptations specific to the olive sector, and in the process illustrates how the development of Palestinian statistics and technical expertise drew upon indigenous knowledge. Each section is in turn organized roughly in chronological order.

\(^7\) Paid workers account for less than 6 percent of the 300,000 or so estimated workers employed in agriculture, the vast majority being family members that are not paid. Palestinian Monetary Authority, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and Economic Policy Research Institute, “Economic and Social Monitor” No. 27, 2012, cited in United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, “The Besieged Palestinian Agricultural Sector,” 205 UNCTAD/GDS/APP/2015/1, page 9.

The political and socioeconomic shifts in the West Bank under Israeli occupation coincided and were intertwined with the 1970s explosion in Palestinian higher education. The establishment of Palestinian institutions of higher education, largely funded from abroad (such as through remittances and government support from the Gulf, particularly Kuwait), led indirectly to substantial research publications beginning circa 1980 on rural Palestinian economic conditions, particularly surrounding agricultural practices, with special attention to the Palestinian olive sector. At Birzeit, where she taught for many years, Sumayyeh Farhat-Nasser published *Zaytun Filastin wa-Mushkilatuha* [*Olives of Palestine and their problems*] in 1981. A German-educated botanist, Farhat-Nasser combined her formal education with her personal experience of and connections to the Palestinian olive sector, focusing largely on technical problems (though of course acknowledging larger political issues) and documenting common practices of cultivators. At the same time, at an-Najah National University in Nablus, the British-educated Hisham Awartani established (with Kuwaiti funding) an organization called the Rural Research Centre, which published extensive reports not only on the Palestinian olive and olive oil sectors, but also on the demography and overall economy of the occupied territories, gathering and analyzing extensive statistics. The extremely detailed reports of the Rural Research Centre were published in Arabic in the West Bank, drawing upon both original

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10 While the Rural Research Centre reports typically had short English summaries, the vast majority of their work was conducted exclusively in Arabic. I located these now unfortunately rare published primary sources scattered across archives and libraries in Israel, Jordan, and the West Bank. Unlike Birzeit, which holds multiple copies of Farhat-Nasser’s slim volume, an-Najah unfortunately has not maintained a collection of these reports in their university library. I located only a single copy of each of the various reports cited in this chapter,
research in the field and the data furnished by Palestinian functionaries working in the West Bank agricultural directorates.

The question of the impact of Israeli administration and occupation on the West Bank has been contested from the very start. Statistics of economic development and particularly agricultural production have been a key battleground, as an ostensibly objective measure of the state of affairs; however, statistical authorities have largely been connected to the Israeli military or civilian administration. Statistics themselves are expressions of power, of knowledge, and of control.\(^\text{11}\) As these new Palestinian research institutions developed in the 1970s and 1980s, Palestinian academics and statisticians began arguing for a “Palestinian number,” calling into question the statistics provided by the occupying authorities, while nevertheless relying upon the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics for the vast majority of statistical information. Jordanian geographers and statisticians, led by then-Crown Prince Hassan, similarly relied exclusively on Israeli sources when producing reports on the West Bank, which the Hashemite Kingdom sought to claim until the king’s renunciation of claims amidst the First Intifada in the late 1980s.

Analysis of the agricultural economy of the occupied territories, and of the olive sector as the single-most significant individual component of West Bank agriculture, was and remains which I found at the Nablus Municipal Archive, the University of Jordan Library in Amman, and the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem.

inextricably linked to the political questions of the future of the territory: reunification with autonomy from the Israeli or Jordanian governments, or independence? Can the West Bank support itself economically, or must the West Bank and the Gaza Strip be linked in some form of economic or customs union to neighboring states? Could the occupied territories support the return of significant number of refugees in the wake of a political settlement? Or would they be transformed in effect into vast refugee camps, dependent on foreign aid for their economic viability?

While certainly embodying a level of distrust of the agenda of the occupying authorities and the potential ideological distortion of statistics, the call for “Palestinian numbers” was also a way of expressing political aspirations for — at the very least — autonomy, if not national independence. The question of the economic viability of the occupied territories was part and parcel of the question of the political future of the occupied territories, debates that dominated the diplomatic history of the period from 1967-1993, particularly in light of the regional developments that accelerated in the late 1970s. This swirl of regional and international politics increasingly put into question the relationship of the occupied territories to not only Jordan, but also to the PLO.

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12 These include the increasing international profile of the Palestinian national movement as unified within and represented by the Palestine Liberation Organization, the growth of the Israeli settlement movement, Egypt’s separate peace with Israel, and the increasing independence and prominence of the internal Palestinian political movements in Israel and in the occupied territories while the external leadership became involved in two civil wars, first in Jordan (Black September) and then in Lebanon, ultimately leading to exile in Tunisia.

13 Ultimately, after decades of intense contestation, Palestinian political aspirations seemed to come true in part, with the onset of the Oslo period in 1993 and the creation of the Palestinian National Authority in 1994. Oslo marks the end of this historical study — though not of the dynamics that still shape the conflicts and the debates that continue to rage today, many of which were set in motion in the period from 1967-1993.
As the third section of this chapter makes clear, interrogation of the statistics regarding Palestinian agricultural development and production in this period must take into account two crucial factors. First, the occupation depended on structures inherited from the Jordanian period, in the form of the agricultural directorates, and on their Palestinian employees. The data gathered by the agricultural directorates would eventually be published by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, with some revisions, which disguised the fact that the statistical knowledge claimed by the Israeli state regarding the “administered territories” was actually the product of local Palestinian work. Palestinian agricultural bureaucrats in turn depended on their connections to local farmers, harvesting and hybridizing indigenous knowledge. In addition to being a type of legitimizing technocratic discourse, statistics are ideological abstractions meant to represent reality. The final figures in this case were doubly abstracted: first by subaltern intermediaries who surveyed villages and questioned villagers in the field, then abstracted again by statisticians. In the early years of the occupation, largely in accordance with the vision of Moshe Dayan, who loudly proclaimed that he had learned from the disaster of American involvement in Vietnam, the Israeli military administration consciously sought as light of a footprint as possible. This was especially true in the realm of agriculture and extension. Jordanian-trained agricultural extension agents and professionals had laid all of the groundwork, and continued their work after 1967, with only a handful of Israeli Ministry of Agriculture employees supervising.14 In addition to being a type of legitimizing technocratic discourse, statistics are ideological abstractions meant to represent reality. The final figures in this case were doubly abstracted: first by subaltern intermediaries who surveyed villages and questioned villagers in the field, then abstracted again by statisticians. In the early years of the occupation, largely in accordance with the vision of Moshe Dayan, who loudly proclaimed that he had learned from the disaster of American involvement in Vietnam, the Israeli military administration consciously sought as light of a footprint as possible. This was especially true in the realm of agriculture and extension. Jordanian-trained agricultural extension agents and professionals had laid all of the groundwork, and continued their work after 1967, with only a handful of Israeli Ministry of Agriculture employees supervising.15

14 See Arun Agrawal, “Dismantling the Divide Between Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge.” Development and Change (1995), 413-439. Because indigenous knowledge is contextual, contingent, and communal, it reflects the hegemonic economic, social, cultural, ideological, and belief systems in which it is found.

15 The shape and practices of the Israeli occupation and administration would constantly shift and evolve, though these policy debates are not directly relevant to this study. Suffice it to say that changes in the occupation authorities’ policies toward Palestinian agriculture mirrored
Second, while planting had slowed, their statistics indicate that olive planting nevertheless continued to expand in the 1980s — while investment in olive nurseries (mushatel) and olive presses had exploded beginning in the late 1970s. Even in the face of the adverse economic and environmental conditions that led to a simultaneous, drastic decline in the significance of Israeli agriculture — namely, hyperinflation, the removal of government controls and supports, and drought — the Palestinian olive sector actually increased in relative importance, if in no small part because the overall significance of Palestinian agriculture declined. Thus the second decade of occupation marked a rise in not only the political and sociocultural importance of the olive tree and olive culture, but also its longstanding economic utility, as income from olives remained while other forms of agricultural income diminished.

The seemingly positive development of expanded investment in olive planting and processing in the form of nurseries and presses beginning in the late 1970s, however, masks other increasingly negative trends. First, currency devaluations and inflation spurred the investment of surplus cash (largely generated outside the West Bank, in the form of remittances from Israel and the Gulf) into real property: for many this meant residential construction, but for some it meant the establishment of modern nurseries and olive presses, without necessarily calculating profitability of these increasingly costly investments or coordinating with others nearby making similar choices — ultimately risking duplication of services and unprofitability thanks to excessive competition. Second, the threat of land confiscations and closures spurred planting in less productive regions in the central-southern West Bank (from Ramallah and

the gradual shift in the question of the political future of the territory: initial strong continuities maintained through Israeli-Jordanian collaboration upholding the status quo, continuously undermined by changes on the ground by local actors and by external politics and events. 414
Jerusalem south to Bethlehem and Hebron), though the majority of planting remained in the historic heartland of olive cultivation (the northern West Bank, in the villages of Tulkarm, Jenin, and Nablus). Third, campaigns to uproot olive trees further politicized planting, whose logic increasingly necessitated subsidies through donations. Fourth, as noted above, the growing olive monoculture was in some ways less a result of the expansion of the sector, and more the diminishment of other agricultural sectors and of the reduced overall importance of agriculture to Palestinian income. Fifth, olive labor increasingly became the near-exclusive domain of unpaid nonworkforce family members. All of these trends expanded olive cultivation, but coupled with increasing costs and decreasing profitability, led to an ever-shakier economic rationale for successful and sustainable development.

The end result of all of these trends was increased olive and olive oil production, but without commensurate increase in demand. Amidst the First Intifada, Jordan renounced ties with the West Bank, and simultaneously the East Bank became self sufficient in olive oil production, effectively eliminating the only external market for surplus West Bank Palestinian olive oil. With the Gulf Crisis, West Bank producers lost the chance for export to the Arab Gulf States. The European Community, particularly the French consulate in Jerusalem, watched the growing economic crisis and offered symbolic trade deals to help alleviate the pressure. But Palestinian olive oil, which at its global peak during World War II produced one percent of the world’s supply, simply could not and cannot compete with the economies of scale (and the protections and in some cases subsidies) available to the dominant Mediterranean olive and olive oil producers: Tunisia, Spain, and their neighbors on the north and south shores of the sea. While the typical Palestinian olive oil producer gets by on customary local consumption and family
networks, the future has increasingly come to depend — as became the case under Israeli occupation — on economic and political support from abroad.

1. West Bank political and economic structures under occupation

Since Oslo,\(^{16}\) international solidarity activism and multinational funding (particularly from the European Union) have helped direct attention, resources, and studies into the olive sector of the West Bank, particularly in light of uprootings (centered around the intifadas, the construction of the Apartheid Wall/Security Barrier and settler “price tag” attacks). In becoming a symbol of sumud, passive resistance or steadfastness, the expansion of West Bank olive culture is something of an ironic consequence of Israeli policies. Palestinians responded to land closures and confiscations by planting olives; Palestinians responded to burnings, clear-cutting, and uprooting by planting more olive trees. It certainly was not an Israeli intention to reinforce Palestinian olive culture; credit is due to the individual initiative of Palestinians — as it had been under Ottoman, British and Jordanian rule — that led to the continued investment in the olive sector under Israeli occupation: planting olive trees, building new olives presses and importing olive processing machinery, and establishing olive nurseries. Both increased foreign awareness and the increased symbolic importance of the olive tree within Palestinian nationalism reflect, above all, the structural changes in the Palestinian economy under Israeli occupation — in particular, the changes to West Bank agriculture and marketing.

\(^{16}\) Oslo is used here as shorthand for the diplomatic accords from 1993-1995 negotiated between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian Chairman Yasser Arafat with multilateral mediation spearheaded by the American Clinton Administration in its first term, resulting in partial, temporary autonomy for portions of the territories occupied by Israel in 1967, encompassing the Oslo I Accord and the Oslo II Accord, as well as the Israel-PLO mutual recognition letters and the Gaza-Jericho agreement. The process stalled in the late 1990s.
After 1967, Israeli objectives in the short run were to minimize the costs of occupation by largely maintaining, in collaboration with Jordan, the economic structure of the occupied territories; however, the maintenance of the status quo was almost immediately and constantly undermined by often contradictory state and nonstate actors’ impulses to exploit the new territory in a variety of ways, from settlement to taxation and marketing. The architecture of the Oslo Accords reflected all of these gradual changes, as well as the economic incapacitation of both West and East Banks in the course of the late 1980s and early 1990s, owing to the First Intifada and the Gulf Crisis.

These larger political trends are important to mention here in order to acknowledge the structural changes to the economy of the occupied West Bank caused by political events, particularly in the forms of Israeli and Jordanian governmental policies toward the marketing and trade of Palestinian agricultural products. The continued expansion and investment in the olive sector can be explained in part by the closing off of certain options by the respective

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17 The period of occupation has been a slow creep and expansion of Israeli administration and settlement, with occasional landmark moments, like the Elon Moreh Israeli High Court of Justice decision in 1977 that set the subsequent dominant pattern for Israeli settlement practices.

18 Jordan went through a period of economic crisis in the late 1980s, and essentially could no longer afford — politically or economically — to maintain its claims to the West Bank, especially when coupled with the political awakening of the territories during the First Intifada. The First Intifada also took place at a moment of severely diminished political strength for the external Palestinian nationalist movement, which had been exiled to Tunisia in the course of its involvement in the Lebanese Civil War. Arafat’s disastrous decision to back Saddam Hussein in the Gulf Crisis then led Kuwait and the other Gulf States to suspend their longstanding financial support for Palestinian institutions, as well as expel Palestinian workers or otherwise interrupt the essential flow of remittances to the territories. The disruption of external financial support was simultaneously compounded by Israeli curfews and closures of the borders of the occupied territories to Palestinian movement during both the intifada and the Gulf Crisis — resulting in a severe economic crisis for the West Bank.
governments seeking to administer the Palestinians of the West Bank. For example, livestock management declined significantly, as costs rose. Larger macroeconomic trends threatened Palestinian livelihoods as well, such as Israel’s galloping inflation that turned into hyperinflation by the early 1980s, and the growing burden of Israeli taxation.

Simultaneously, through the “Open Bridges” policy, which was maintained on and sometimes temporarily off (frequently as a punitive measure for localized violence or for organized campaigns of civil disobedience), Israel and Jordan collaborated to keep the West Bank oriented economically toward the East Bank. However, Jordan simultaneously capped this trade (particularly through truck licensing, which kept the number of trucks licensed to cross the Allenby bridge limited to the original trucks in operation at the time of the 1967 war) and massively expanded East Bank agriculture, both as a means of pursuing autarkical self-sufficiency and as a political program of ensuring support from its base. The agricultural expansion of the East Bank, subsidized via the Jordanian government and multinational funding organizations like the World Food Programme, meant that East Bank agriculturalists increasingly

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19 The first decade or so of the occupation saw considerable movement toward industrialized vegetable and fruit farming — dependent on intensive cultivation through greenhouses, fertilizing, and above all, irrigation — particularly in the Jordan Valley. On the West Bank side, see Salim Tamari and Rita Giacaman, *Zbeidat: the social impact of drip irrigation on a Palestinian peasant community in the Jordan Valley* (Birzeit: Birzeit University, 1980); on the East Bank side, see Sharif S. Elmusa, *A harvest of technology: the super-green revolution in the Jordan Valley* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 1994). See in addition Tesdell, op. cit.

20 Land for grazing became unavailable; increasingly stringent policies and regulation of livestock procurement made the creation, let alone maintenance, of large flocks untenable; and the opportunity cost of farmers’ time became significant compared to the income that could be gained from other types of farming (fruits, nuts, vegetables, and tobacco) or from non-farming activity such as wage labor.
lobbied against competition from West Bank imports, as there was no longer a need for West Bank produce.

Collusion across the Jordan: Open Bridges

In early December 1967, American Ambassador to Israel Walworth Barbour and his wife joined General Moshe Dayan and Mrs. Dayan, accompanied by various other Israeli military administrators and Daniel Benor (director of the Israel agricultural extension service and newly made supervisor of agriculture for the West Bank) for what can only be called a working double date, touring the Jericho area. Dayan took the opportunity to elaborate upon what he called his “theory of occupation,” as recorded in a classified report by the American diplomats present:

[… Dayan stated] that he had learned from Vietnam that it was a mistake for outside military or civilian forces to deal with a civil population on too intimate a basis. He thought that that we had erred in Vietnam by trying to tell the South Vietnamese exactly what to do and by helping too much, with the result that they were in danger of losing the desire to take the initiative themselves. With this in mind he had instructed the occupying organizations to rule with as light a hand as possible except where security was concerned. When Mr. Benor described the simple but time consuming steps he was taking to improve agricultural practice on the West Bank, the General warned against becoming too involved, even in good works because Israel must operate on the West Bank on the basis that it is there only temporarily; therefore, it is best for the Arabs to be allowed to reconstruct their own relationship and to continue in their old ways with as little interference as possible.²¹

Benor was then asked by the American diplomats how many Israelis and “Jordanians” were involved respectively in agricultural extension in the West Bank. Benor replied that there were six Israelis and 250 Arabs, which spurred Dayan to tell Benor to reduce the number of Israelis

further, so the “Jordanians” would be left alone and forced to take the initiative. Dayan and Benor noted their pride in successfully “restoring life toward normal on the West Bank,” taking note in particular of the truck traffic across the Jordan River via two temporary “Bailey Bridges” at Damia and Allenby, which Benor estimated carried 200 lorries daily, some carrying Israeli products, and some traveling as far as Kuwait. While admitting to dumping Israeli watermelons in the West Bank, Benor and Dayan claimed that otherwise the economy operated as it had before the war, with the connection to Jordan fully restored. The only problem they foresaw was a shortage of labor, which they thought could be resolved by resettling refugees from Gaza in the Jericho area.

While Dayan’s and the broader Israeli government’s optimistic assessments would generally prove to be Panglossian, with the “Open Bridges” policy, the trade link between the West Bank of Palestine and the East Bank of Jordan had indeed largely been restored. Over the next two decades, with the help of foreign diplomatic pressure, Jordan sought to preserve its influence over and connections to the West Bank, which meant attempting to shore up the status quo in the face of its gradual erosion under the creeping, de facto annexation of the territories. In concrete terms, Jordan’s contributions were largely financial, funneling Gulf Arab money to sustain its connections to a variety of institutions and to traditional elites, who were increasingly facing challenges to their legitimacy from the PLO.

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22 Ibid., page 2.
23 Ibid.
25 The mainly Saudi funds were disbursed via the joint Palestinian-Jordanian Sumud (steadfastness) fund, formally called in Arabic al-lajnah al-urduniyah al-filastiniya al-mushtarakah l-d am Sumud al-sh 'ab al-filastini fi al-watan al-muhtal or in its official English translation “the Jordanian-Palestinian Committee for the Steadfastness of Palestine People in the
Like the Sumud fund, the unwritten Open Bridges policy was a prime example of how Jordan quietly collaborated with the occupation in order to preserve the vestiges of its interests. And whenever deemed necessary, the flow of goods from West to East could be cut off by Israel. The military authorities would periodically close the bridges in response to nonviolent civil disobedience like a general strike in Nablus in conjunction with the opening of the United Nations General Assembly in September 1967, and in response to local incidents of violence such as terrorist attacks, fedayeen actions, or border skirmishes. To punish Nablus for the September strike, for example, the military governor closed the 15 largest shops, suspended

Occupied Home Land.” An examination of the beautifully bound publications by the fund, produced in the late 1980s after about a decade of its existence (the Sumud Fund had been created at the 1978 Arab Summit in Baghdad), showed that the money had largely gone to elite West Bankers and to keep public institutions and utilities operational — in effect subsidizing the occupation. While ostensibly the funds were declared to be for initiatives like supporting striking workers and rebuilding demolished homes, the vast majority of the funding went instead to things like the construction of villas in the West Bank, the subsidizing of housing in Jerusalem, and supporting the always-on-the-verge-of-bankruptcy Jerusalem Electric Company (ostensibly to keep it “Arab owned,” though with the unilateral annexation of Jerusalem, the majority of customers it supplied had become Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem). See [in Arabic] al-amanah al-ʿamah l-lajnah al-mushtarkah [General Secretariat of the Joint Committee], Taqrir al-munajazat 1979-1986 [Report of accomplishments 1979-1986], Amman : al-maktabay al-urduniyah al-hashimyah [Hashemite Jordanian Library], October 1987. The volume is leatherbound with gold leaf touches on the cover, and printed in full color with detailed maps and charts detailing its disbursements. In April 1989, the same bodies published a small paperback pamphlet updating the information through 1988 on where precisely the funds had come from and where they had gone. Copies of both publications located by the author in the French diplomatic post archives: CADN 30PO/1 (Amman Ambassade 1963-1993), Carton 323, Jordanie/T.A.O. COMITE CONJOINT JORDANO-PALESTINIEN - ANMO 22/2, « Comité Conjoint Jordano.Palestinien pour le soutien à la fermeté du Peuple Palestinien dans les Territoires Occupés ».


public transit, withheld permissions to bring vegetables and fruit to market in town, “and, most important, the hitherto flourishing export of goods to Jordan was prohibited,” with the British consul general in Jerusalem noting that “if the bann [sic] on the export of goods — particularly of olive oil and its by-products which are the town’s [Nablus] main manufactures – to Jordan and further afield is maintained it may have a crippling effect on the economy of Nablus.” Later in the month, permission to export olive oil to Jordan was specifically withdrawn, as collective punishment of Nablus for the killing of an Israeli policeman by unknown assailants.

By 1969, French diplomatic assessments based on local sources put Nablus agricultural production at 50-75 percent of prewar levels, with overall West Bank levels remaining below production prior to the war, attributed to the loss of the Jordan Valley and political uncertainty compounded by improvised occupational policy. Israeli statistics for 1967-68 indicated that olive oil constituted nearly half of agricultural exports to Jordan by value (I£ 23 million of I£ 48 million). While up to 40 percent of the workforce had been in agriculture before the war, the socioeconomic structures of the West Bank under occupation had already begun to change.

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27 Ibid.
28 British Consul Lewen, “Arab Unrest,” 28 September 1967, page 1. TNA FCO 17/212, Document 74. While the authorities accused the city of harboring and financing the act, Mayor Hamdi Kanaan denied a connection between the peaceful general strike and this or any other act of terror; the British consular official said the truth of the matter could not be assessed, since no notable would admit connections to terrorism, though in his view Kanaan and the others “seem[ed] to recognize the futility of violence in any form short of full-scale war, (of which they know that the Arab states are for the present incapable) and the need for a peaceful resolution of their present problems.”
30 Ibid., page 3.
Dayan’s vision for the occupation likewise did not remain ascendant for long, though Israeli technical assistance did continue to depend largely on the remnants of the Jordanian agricultural infrastructure. For example, in the British consul general’s review for the year 1969, he noted that limited Israeli technical assistance for increasing agricultural yields and improving markets in the West Bank utilized “to a large extent research stations and extension schemes previously set up by the Jordanians.”  

By 1973, an Israeli press release regarding the activities of the Ministry of Agriculture in “the administered areas” of “Judaea and Samaria” noted that the staff engaged in agricultural extension had expanded to 30 Israelis and 400 “local personnel,” of whom roughly half were agricultural college or university graduates. Therefore with respect to agricultural policy and staff, the continuities across 1967 between the Jordanian and Israeli periods are surprisingly striking, if consistent with the consensus enforced by the international community on preserving the pre-June status quo.

East Bank: Jordan’s rapid expansion of olive cultivation funded by the World Food Programme

In the meantime, agriculture in the East Bank had been developing at a breakneck pace. By 1974, the American agricultural attaché in Amman reported the East Bank would likely for the first time ever “be self-sufficient in meeting its olive oil needs which hitherto have been

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largely met by the West Bank, traditionally its principal supplier in this commodity.”34 This change had occurred thanks largely to subsidies from the central government, which had in turn received international development funding to expand olive planting via the UN World Food Programme.35 The Jordanian Department of Statistics completed its first complete agricultural census in 1975-1976, which put the number of olive trees at 2 million, with just 60 percent bearing. At 10 trees per dunam, the area planted was estimated at 200,000 dunams with 120,000 dunams in bearing — significantly less than had previously been reported by the Jordanian Ministry of Agriculture.36 By 1977, the area under olives had expanded to 250,000 dunams, with almost 150,000 mature and bearing, with the World Food Program project renewed with plans to plant another 150,000 dunams over the coming five years.37 By 1979, Jordan had around 300,000 dunams under olives, with less than two-thirds bearing, owing to the remarkably rapid expansion of newly planted trees.38 In 1985, renewing the agreement yet again and continuing the now-two-decade-old collaboration with the World Food Program, Jordan agreed to plant another 100,000

34 Agricultural Attaché Shackford Pitcher, “Jordan: fats and oils,” 15 March 1974, JR 4002, page 5. NARA RG 166 170/73/19/01, Box 41 (Jordan), transmitted from American Embassy Beirut. Pitcher had noted that Jordanian housewives had begun to accept the substitution of cheaper oils made from soybeans and cottonseed for cooking, but that olive oil continued to be the most consumed oil nevertheless, mainly because “[i]ts uses in raw form go with many popular dishes which, for considerations having to do with taste, apparently make it hard for other vegetable oils to replace.”

35 Ibid., 4-5.


dunams of reclaimed hills from 1986-1990.\(^3^9\) Thereafter, Jordan would only import olive oil from abroad in years of insufficient crops for domestic demand — but not necessarily from the West Bank.\(^4^0\) The continued expansion of Jordanian olive production with UNWFP support had begun before 1967, but was without a doubt spurred by the loss of the West Bank in the Six Day War. Thereafter, East Bank olive cultivation had become integrally tied to the question of the West Bank’s political future.

**West Bank: economic and political turbulence of the 1980s**

On 30 September 1986, the Israeli deputy minister of agriculture (Katz-Oz) declared on Israeli television that he had met with a Jordanian delegation “charged with fixing the volumes of agricultural exports from the West Bank toward Jordan and Arab countries.” Such meetings had occurred regularly for many years, but this was the first time that they were revealed publicly.\(^4^1\)

Austerity measures taken by the Israeli government in the early 1980s had already been weighing particularly heavily on the West Bank for a number of reasons, including the lack of a

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\(^3^9\) American Embassy Baghdad (Foreign Agricultural Service), “Jordan: annual agricultural situation – 1985,” JO 6001 16 March 1986, page 17. NARA RG 166 (FAS) 170/76/20/4-6, “Narrative Reports, 1986, Entry 14.” In addition to the reclamation and olive planting project, the World Food Program supported the forestation of another 100,000 dunams of government-owned “sheep land,” presumably used for grazing.


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social safety net and the currency complications caused by the West Bank economy remaining effectively on the dinar.\textsuperscript{42} In the summer of 1983, the High Court of Justice rejected an appeal by West Bank chambers of commerce against the extension of VAT to the territories, which had been imposed since 1976 under the pretext that it paid for the security and administration of the Palestinian territories.\textsuperscript{43} In addition, in the fall of 1983, the occupational authorities had passed Military Ordinance 1015 pertaining to the licensing of tree planting, which sought to protect Israeli fruit tree cultivators by restricting competition from Palestinian cultivation of the same fruits.\textsuperscript{44} MO 1015 did not apply to olive trees. While perhaps bowing to practicalities, in that restrictions on planting olives in the West Bank would have been near impossible to enforce and would have engendered widespread resistance, the most likely reason why MO 1015 did not apply to olives was that olive cultivation in Israel remained predominated by Palestinian citizens of Israel remaining in the Galilee.\textsuperscript{45}

By 1986, agriculture comprised 30 percent of West Bank GDP, compared to 6 percent in Israel, though in gross terms the value of West Bank agricultural production was less than a fifth

\textsuperscript{45} On Palestinian olive cultivation in Israel from 1948-1967, see chapter 4 of this dissertation. In short, after a sharp reduction in planted area with the Nakba of 1948, the Palestinian-dominated olive oil sector in Israel (concentrated predominantly in the Western Galilee) largely stagnated, and gradually diminished in importance over subsequent decades, facing outright hostility in the early years of the state and extremely limited governmental support thereafter, especially in comparison to other agricultural sectors in Israel.
of Israeli agricultural production.\textsuperscript{46} While the West Bank economy had grown rapidly from 1967-1980, drought from 1980-1985 led to a drop in total agricultural production, reflected in minimal overall economic growth in the first half of the 1980s.\textsuperscript{47} A bumper crop of olives, around 150,000 tons, in 1986, disrupted this overall pattern, which reflected the contribution of the continued, if slowed, planting of olives throughout the first two decades of occupation.\textsuperscript{48} While the overall cultivated area in the West Bank had decreased because of competition from Israeli production and land confiscation and closures, the area under fruit trees had increased considerably since 1967.\textsuperscript{49} Simultaneously, the number of West Bankers working in agricultural dropped from half of the work force to a quarter.\textsuperscript{50} Thus, though the relative importance of the olive sector had increased, this reflected not only olive expansion, but also the gradual diminishment of agriculture overall.

\textbf{Intifada, renunciation of Jordanian claims, and the Gulf Crisis}

If the drought of the first half of the 1980s indicated the extent to which Palestinian agriculture depended on rainfall, the events of the second half of the 1980s, particularly the First Intifada, illustrated that Palestinian agriculture was not only dependent on the weather (with


\textsuperscript{47} Estimated around 0.4 percent annually. Ibid., page 3.

\textsuperscript{48} The excellent olive crop led to West Bank growth of 9 percent for 1986. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., page 7. Fruit tree damage had grown from under 700,000 to over a million by 1985.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., page 8, from 42,000 to 28,300 workers.
adverse effects from events like the particularly cold winter of 1988/1989, but also on the political environment. During the intifada, Palestinian olive cultivation was significantly impacted by strikes and repressive countermeasures such as uprootings of fruit trees, curfews preventing harvest at the proper time, and the closures of external outlets for surplus production (such as across the river to Jordan). One potential counterbalancing trend could be found in the dynamic of nationalist consumerism — to buy Palestinian, as an expression of support for the cause of the intifada. But there was only so much demand for olive oil locally in the West Bank, which desperately needed an external outlet for the overproduction that occurred every 2-3 years.

In the midst of the First Intifada, at the end of July 1988, Jordan renounced its residual claims to the West Bank. In a letter to French President François Mitterrand, King Hussein of Jordan declared that as of that year’s summit in Algiers, Jordan would cede the sole representative burden to the PLO. Jordan did so, in the words of the Hashemite Monarch:

in order to dispel any illusion that Jordan has ever had any territorial ambitions, or sought to impose its hegemony over the Palestinian people and their future and rights on their national soil, occupied by Israel since June 1967, the Jordanian Government has reassessed the requirements of giving greater prominence to Palestinian identity by enabling the PLO to shoulder its full responsibility.

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52 Ibid., 17. However, fewer workers were traveling to work in Israel, and the Jordanian government not only stopped paying the salaries of tens of thousands of bureaucrats, but also ceased aid and the transfer of Arab “Sumud” funds, while Israel put stricter controls on remittances from the Palestinian diaspora to the West Bank (page 18).
53 Ibid., 22.
The declaration was certainly an attempt at revision of two decades of Jordanian policy headed by then-Crown Prince Hassan, and belied the fact that the United States and Israel had typically sought to constrain negotiations to Jordanian (rather than PLO) representatives — even at the Madrid conference in 1991, Israel objected to official PLO representation and Palestinians were officially part of a combined Palestinian-Jordanian delegation. Nevertheless, the statement marked the end of the joint Jordanian-Palestinian committees to implement the Jordanian Development Plan for the Occupied Territories. In practical terms, it freed Jordan and the Gulf Arab states from continuing to subsidize the costs of the occupation and the corruption of the traditional West Bank elites through the Sumud Fund.

Perhaps even more significant than either the cessation of transfers of Arab aid or the Jordanian monarchy’s renunciation of claims to the occupied territories were the economic effects of changes in Jordanian macroeconomic policy, specifically the devaluation of the dinar and the imposition of import quotas, beginning August 1988. A lack of agricultural outlets represented a dire threat to West Bank agriculture and to the Palestinian olive sector in particular.

The European Economic Community (or EEC, predecessor to the European Union) stepped in beginning late 1988 and early 1989 to offer at least symbolic support, with contracts for modest amounts of olive oil to be exported to Europe for refining and then reexport as aid to countries in Africa (namely Sudan). Circa 1990, West Bank olive oil cooperatives signed contracts for Italy to purchase, refine, and reexport 6,000 tons of Palestinian olive oil, though the Gulf crisis and resulting curfews meant that far less was actually collected and available for

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55 Ibid., 2.
export. The initiative was regarded by the EEC as aid to both Africa and the occupied territories, worth up to $16 million for the West Bank. On its part, the PLO saw it as a potential new source of income for the West Bank, cut off from traditional Arab funds and sources of remittances, and in light of the changing Arab political scene, the PLO saw it as a way to build relations with and potentially win over the cooperative movement, which was regarded as traditionally pro-Jordanian, with its roots in the period of Jordan rule over the West Bank. The agreement involved on the Palestinian side a PLO economic development official and the heads of the Jericho and Jenin agricultural cooperatives.

What had spurred this agreement combining the EEC, the PLO, and these local West Bank cooperatives was the question of future Palestinian exports to Jordan, which had banned imports of olive oil from the West Bank in the winter of 1988-1989. The French commercial

58 Patrick LeClercq, Ambassade de France en Jordanie (Amman), à Roland Dumas, MAE Direction AN-MO, “A/S. – Autorisation temporaire d’importation d’huile d’olive palestinienne,” 3 April 1989, No. 177/ANMO. CADN 294PO/4/54, Dossier « Huile d’olive ». This was regarded as a public gesture of support for the agricultural cooperatives in the West Bank; East Bank production was at the time sufficient for domestic needs, meaning the modest amounts that the West Bank exported to Jordan (3,000-5,000 tons) would be reexported to other Arab countries. However, the political rupture between East Bank and West Bank meant that this temporary reopening and authorization had little if any practical effect, especially considering Jordan’s own economic difficulties at the time.
attaché in Jerusalem submitted a lengthy report on West Bank olive culture in the late fall/early winter of 1988, based on visits to cooperatives near Bethlehem (Beit Jala) and Ramallah (ʿEin Sinia) as well as information collected and published by the West Bank Data Base Project. The report emphasized that olive cultivation was not only a “way of life,” but also a “symbol of the attachment of the Palestinian to his land.” Planting could be seen as speculation for profit, and a way of illustrating development through progress in cultivating the land, particularly owing to the olive tree’s drought-resistance and suitability for planting on hillsides. On the basis of planted area alone, it had become the core of Palestinian agriculture. While extension of planting farther south in the Hebron region dated mainly to the recent period following 1967, the traditional areas around Nablus and Tulkarm were estimated to be 75 percent olive trees, perhaps owing to the unique fact that many families that had otherwise ceased to practice agriculture nevertheless continued to cultivate olives; family members who had moved to cities for work would return annually to their villages for the olive harvest. The recent period had seen substantial investment in modern presses, about 120 in the West Bank (including 11 cooperative

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The WBDP, headed by former deputy mayor of Jerusalem and academic medievalist Meron Benvenisti, was housed at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington DC and funded by the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, primarily to document the growing settler movement in the occupied territories. For a contentious, in-depth interview with Benvenisti elaborating his late-life views of contemporary Israeli politics and modern Israeli history, see Ari Shavit, “Jerusalem-born thinker Meron Benvenisti has a message for Israelis: stop whining,” Haaretz, 11 October 2012.

60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., page 2.
owned presses), in addition to 280 older presses.\textsuperscript{64} The modern presses, imported from Italy, cost on average around 75,000 JD — equivalent to $225,000 in 1988/1989, and could range much higher in cost.\textsuperscript{65} While in a good year the West Bank could produce 100,000-150,000 tons of olives, yielding 15,000-25,000 tons of olive oil, domestic consumption on an annual basis remained limited to 8,000 tons.\textsuperscript{66} Owing to the wild fluctuations in olive production, exports typically would not exceed 8,000-10,000 tons in a bumper year, as the remainder could be stored in the expectation of weak crops the following season.\textsuperscript{67}

Until 1988, Jordan had been the principal market, offering a quota for half of the surplus at a fixed price; other Arab countries were not viable alternative markets for three different reasons: self-sufficiency (like Syria); weak consumption levels of olive oil (like Iraq); or lack of foreign currency to be able to afford to import more expensive olive oil, especially when cheaper edible oils could be purchased instead as substitutes (like Egypt).\textsuperscript{68} Europe, with the entry of Spain to the common market, was itself a surplus producer, and had already been importing the bulk of its needs from Tunisia.\textsuperscript{69} “Palestinian producers are thus locked in an impasse: no subsidies [aide à la production], no external outlets, and relatively unfavorable local environment,” considering the detrimental impact of Israeli occupational policies.\textsuperscript{70} In addition to competition from Spain and Tunisia, Palestinian olive oil found little appeal among European consumers, who at the time were uninterested in cold-pressed virgin oil without chemical

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., page 3.  
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 3-4.  
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 4.  
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 5.  
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.  

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intervention such as occurred through refining and blending to yield lighter oils. In addition, Palestinian oil faced a packaging problem.  

The standard unlabelled containers were much too large, nearing 18 liters, for consumer retail; however, without an established external market with a demand for smaller, more sophisticated packaging, investment in such facilities would be extremely risky. The combination of these problems plus the uncompetitiveness of the scale of Palestinian olive cultivation meant that the sector was economically trapped going into the 1990s.

Thus, the end result of the structural changes in the politics of the occupied territories was that the economic calculus of West Bank agriculture (led by olive culture) had become increasingly tenuous. The rising costs of inputs, for labor and processing, cut into profits. Demand for olive oil failed to keep up with ever-increasing supply, as local consumption remained largely static while the Jordanian East Bank no longer needed West Bank olive oil. But in response, beginning in the 1970s, the expansion of higher education in the West Bank contributed indirectly to the politicization of agriculture and the olive sector in particular, framing the planting of olives trees as a means of nationalist land defense from confiscation.

2. Palestinian adaptations to occupation: the politicization of rainfed (bʿali) farming and the gendered division of agricultural labor

Palestinian researchers in the West Bank had long recognized all of these issues outlined above on their own. The acting chair of the department of economics at the still relatively new an-Najah National University in Nablus, Hisham Awartani, would be at the center of many of

\footnote{Ibid., page 6.}

\footnote{Ibid.}
these efforts to assess the prospects of the agricultural economy and the olive sector from the late 1970s through the early 1990s, Awartani was an alumnus of the American University of Beirut, having received both his bachelor’s and master’s before returning to the West Bank to teach. In the early 1980s, he studied in the UK and received his Ph.D. on a British Council scholarship. Prior to that, Awartani had shared a research report with the British Consulate in Jerusalem in the winter of 1978/1979, offering a preliminary glimpse into his dissertation project assessing the impact of the occupation on West Bank agriculture and proposing possible policy prescriptions to remediate its negative consequences.

Awartani noted in particular the rising threats to West Bank olives posed by the increasing costs of inputs — namely labor for plowing, picking, and pruning — as well as competition from imported Spanish olive oil. In addition to general Israeli policies adversely affecting Palestinian agriculture, relating especially to a dearth of credit and marketing obstacles, Awartani noted a number of particular challenges to the large and relatively well-developed extension services provided through seven district offices dating to the Jordanian period: namely, limited funding for extension education; limited transportation for officials; limited training for extension agents; and the conflict of long-term interests between Israeli military officers and administrators who tended to support programs serving AGREXCO and other Israeli export

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75 Ibid., page 15.
companies over the interests of West Bank farmers.\textsuperscript{76} Jordanian-era research stations had been converted into demonstration farms under Israeli administration, with research centralized in Israel at the Volcani Institute, though the military government established a technical department in Ramallah to convey matters of interest for study at Volcani via an Israeli liaison officer.\textsuperscript{77} These changes suggest that by the second decade of Israeli occupation, some of the continuities with the Jordanian era with respect to agricultural extension policy were beginning to be undermined by Israeli centralization and the reversal of Dayan’s tenets of a light footprint of occupation.

Awartani followed up on this preliminary report with his doctoral dissertation completed at the University of Bradford. His work offers an extremely detailed and comprehensive examination of agriculture in the West Bank in the first 14 years or so of Israeli occupation, combining agronomy and politics.\textsuperscript{78} The core argument of Awartani’s thesis was that while rainfed (b’ali) agriculture is uneconomical for almost all West Bank crops when practiced on a commercial scale, sociopolitical factors should encourage its continuance and expansion — in particular, nationalism. Awartani noted that profitability had decreased owing to the rising cost of production inputs without a commensurate increase in the sale prices of produce.\textsuperscript{79} In turn, he concluded:

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 19-20.  
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 20.  
\textsuperscript{78} Hisham Masoud Awartani, “Notes on agricultural development in the West Bank: an economic and political study of the development of rain-fed farming in the West Bank.” (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Bradford, 1982). Awartani received his bachelor’s and master’s of science from the American University of Beirut.  
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 92-93. Awartani writes: “The crux of the problem lies in the sharply declining profitability of most patterns of farming, which in turn is attributed to complex variations that have boosted production costs without inducing comparable rises in the prices of farm products.”
In fact, if farmers in dryland areas were to evaluate their enterprises on purely economic criteria, they would be much better off selling their land and leaving for Jordan and the Gulf states, where labour and capital are much more remunerative. Fortunately, this has not been the case, partly due to an intrinsic attachment to land, and partly due to the notably efficient mobilization of labour and capital inputs which have low alternative investment possibilities.\textsuperscript{80}

In summation, he called for a criterion of “national” viability, beyond purely economic viability, in evaluating the sustainability of traditional patterns of Palestinian agriculture.\textsuperscript{81} The continuation of b’ali farming was not based purely on profit motive; and potential profits should not be the sole criterion for the evaluation of b’ali cultivation, owing to rainfed agriculture’s suitability to the political circumstances of the West Bank. Rainfed agriculture has high risk and low profits. But rainfed agriculture is relatively labor intensive, which traditionally suited the demographics of the rural West Bank with a large uneducated labor pool — though both education levels and education costs had already begun to rise sharply. Rainfed agriculture remained suited to the geography of the West Bank — and particularly to the restrictions imposed on water usage by the occupying authorities, preventing the substantial expansion of irrigated, intensive agriculture. Socially, somewhere around a third of the labor force remained employed in agriculture at the time, and it supplied a third of the West Bank’s GDP,\textsuperscript{82} of which

\begin{flushleft}
Awartani later concludes that this is an unintended consequence of Israeli occupation, which has resulted in both a rising cost of living as well as a rising cost of inputs such as labor. In particular, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, inflation was so rapid that it was impacting inputs faster than the prices of consumer goods. “The push-effect induced by reduced income from farming has been further accentuated by a soaring consumer price index and rising standards of living in rural communities. This has forced thousands of farmers to leave and choose the apparently more lucrative option of becoming hired labourers – largely in Israel.”
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 412.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 6.
\end{flushleft}
olives contributed up to a third of agricultural income.\textsuperscript{83} At a time of high (petroleum) oil prices and substantial inflows from Palestinians and states like Kuwait in the Gulf, projects encouraging the extension of rainfed farming could remain viable with the help of external funding. In his abstract, he calls rainfed agriculture “a national liability rather than an entrepreneurial activity,” and its sustainability would be contingent upon external support. The successful continuation of rainfed farming under occupation would necessitate ample financing through credit and subsidies, strong trade relations with Jordan, and the expansion of institutions and services like cooperatives, research stations, and agricultural extension (particularly farmer education and advocacy of technological development).\textsuperscript{84}

These trends, particularly of rising input costs without an equivalent rise in produce sale prices, led to a potential economic threat to olive culture. In real terms, while wages had quintupled from 1966, the price of olive oil had only doubled.\textsuperscript{85} In addition, for a variety of reasons largely related to the type of land used for cultivation (rough, rocky topography with unpredictable rainfall), the potential for mechanization and other forms of technical innovation to solve this problem of rising labor costs remained extremely limited in the case of the olive sector.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 189.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., abstract (unnumbered).
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 230.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid. Additional factors that Awartani discusses earlier include a lack of interest from the Israeli research centers where agricultural research was concentrated after the conversion of the Jordanian-era West Bank research centers into demonstration farms after 1967. Israeli agronomists generally saw hillside rainfed agriculture as unsustainable, especially while untapped plains remained to be developed and farmed in Israel. Awartani noted, however, that even if the technology was available it would be unlikely to be adopted for a number of reasons: First, unsuitability to the small scale of West Bank agriculture, since agricultural property in the West Bank remained largely unconsolidated and dominated by smallholdings, with family or
So rather than mechanize to solve the problem of rising labor costs, Palestinians adapted by employing women as unpaid agricultural labor. Women had long been involved in agriculture, particularly in processing harvested goods, as documented by missionaries in the late Ottoman period and in great detail by pioneering anthropologist Hilma Granqvist in the early Mandate period. Granqvist documented and photographed how, for example, during the olive

individual parcels often dispersed among the holdings of other villagers (or even of other villages). This factor could potentially be overcome on its own, but not when coupled with the second factor, a scarcity of credit, and the third factor, a dearth of cooperatives and a lack of cooperation generally among neighboring farmers that could have made investment in technology through combined smallholdings economical. Fourth and perhaps most important of all, Awartani cited a well-founded skepticism by farmers toward extension agents and toward costly investments in new technology. Extension agents themselves typically attributed the hesitancy of farmers to adopt new technology to ignorance and conservative culture, stereotyping rural farmers by citing their old age and lack of education; however, Awartani noted that the farmers lacked confidence in undertrained and inexperienced agents, and that their skepticism toward radical change would be more than understandable considering their fragile economic straits (see Ibid., 205-207).

Such conservatism is typical for subsistence cultivators, as articulated perhaps most prominently in the work of James C. Scott, *Moral Economy of the Peasant*, op. cit.  

87 Hilma Natalia Granqvist, Karen Seger (editor). *Portrait of a Palestinian Village: The Photographs of Hilma Granqvist* (London: Third World Centre for Research and Pub., 1981). See in particular Chapter Six: Division of labor, page 103: General agricultural work was done by both men and women, but specific tasks would be done by one sex or the other. During the wheat harvest all the villagers worked in the fields (Plate 146). The men cut the wheat with scythes while the women collected it in bundles (Plate 147). The men threshed and winnowed while the women sorted and sifted the grain (Plates 149-150). The sacks of grain were sometimes carried from the fields by the women or loaded on the backs of mules with the bundles of straw (Plates 152, 153). Everyone also participated in the harvest of fruits and vegetables (Plates 156, 157). Often the whole family moved from their village house to a tent or shed made of stones and branches near their orchard or vineyard for the period of the harvest (Plates 158, 159). Again, men and women often did slightly different tasks. The men cut the bunches of grapes. The women collected the fruit and pressed some of it to make grape syrup (*dibs*). The men climbed the olive trees or put up ladders to shake down the olives which were collected by the women below (Plates 154, 155) [emphasis added].
harvest in a Bethlehem-area village the men would climb ladders to pick or hit the olive trees, while the women bent below to collect the fallen olives.\textsuperscript{88}

In terms of women’s historic role in olive oil processing, the late Ottoman-era consul American consul John D. Whiting documented how the women of families with small-scale olive holdings would use water to separate the olive oil, using what they called “the water process” to produce olive oil themselves rather than taking small amounts of olives to the (frequently filthy) village presses of the time.\textsuperscript{89} Whiting suspected that the inability to clean the mechanisms in the oldest presses — wherein the remnants from the previous years crushings and pressings remained and became rancid in the mills — was likely to blame for the sharp bitterness and the high level of the acidity of the olive oil produced in traditional presses. Women on both banks of the Jordan River would typically follow “the water process,” in order to produce the preferred quality of edible oil (since it would be untainted by the remnants of rotten olives or byproducts stuck in older-style presses). Circa World War I, Whiting described the method of

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., page 118.
\textsuperscript{89} Both the reporting of Granqvist and Whiting are confirmed by Martha Mundy’s description of village agricultural work east of the Jordan River, in the olive-dominated Ottoman-Syrian district of ‘Ajlun, based on both fieldwork and archival sources:

In many families women would work at all stages of cultivation, scattering seed behind the plough, using the drill for crops not broadcast, weeding and harvesting. Even in prosperous families women would join in agricultural work at times of labour shortage such as harvest. Husband and wife often worked together in cultivation or in animal herding. Many families had enough olive trees, planted near the village site, to provide for their needs; a few men had enough trees to sell oil to others in the village. Women worked in olive production: weeding, picking and preparing the olives in the tradition of the Kura whereby the olives are first boiled for a short time, then laid out on cloths on the roof of the house to dry in the sun for two days before pressing. This technique reduces harshness and concentrates flavour, producing sweet oil. All of this is women’s work.

“poor women gleaners and those who only have a very small quantity of olives,” who would lay the berries on a flat rock and then crush them by rolling a stone over them, in a micro version of the typically animal-driven crushers of the time. Then, the pulp would be dumped into boiling water to separate the oil: the bits of seeds and sediment descend to the bottom, while the clear oil floats and then is skimmed off. “Oil made by the water process is in all cases considered superior to that which is separated by squeezing,” Writing wrote in 1915. This of course would only be efficient for a very small batch of olives. Perhaps one reason women developed this independent method was the possibility of a woman inheriting trees through her mahr, with the ability to make a livelihood from trees that were registered in her name and possible to claim under Islamic and Ottoman laws.

While the subject of the changes in the gendered division of agricultural labor under Israeli occupation demands deeper investigation, Awartani offers some telling statistics that suggest a shift (if not offering any precision as to the timing):

Women’s share in agricultural labour, though difficult to quantify, is much more important than is indicated in official data. Technicians and officials who were interviewed in the course of this study have estimated women’s share in the aggregate labour supply which is mobilized in agriculture at about 75%, as compared with only 20% in Jordan and 3.9% in Israel. A similar proportion as that reported above was calculated from the responses of farmers who were sampled in this study. Furthermore, it was indicated by both groups (technicians and farmers) that about two thirds of female labour input is contributed by

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members of farm families on a seasonal basis. This explains the difficulty of accounting for female labour in official data.\(^ {92}\)

The comparison to Jordan is striking, particularly in light of the similarities in the late Ottoman-era account of Whiting for the West Bank and Martha Mundy’s studies of the East Bank, both documenting the same time in the very early 20\(^{th}\) century.

While circa 1980 Jordan and the West Bank had similar percentages of women officially employed in the labor force,\(^ {93}\) the contribution of women to agriculture was estimated to be almost four times higher in the West Bank than in Jordan. According to Awartani’s sample of farmers and technicians, school-aged children and older members of the family provided another 10-15 percent of total agricultural labor,\(^ {94}\) with the remaining 5-10 percent contribution came from male family heads of household on weekends and during the peak season of a crop (while most of his labor at all other times went to other jobs in Israel or the West Bank).\(^ {95}\)

Awartani describes these changes as “adaptation mechanisms” to unfavorable labor conditions. In light of the rising opportunity cost of male heads of household employing their labor in decreasingly profitable fields, Palestinian families instead shifted to using unpaid, non-workforce members of the family — perhaps building on, perhaps radically changing past local traditions of gendered division of agricultural labor.\(^ {96}\)


\(^{93}\) Ibid., 90. The percentage of women in the workforce was 16 percent in Jordan versus 18 percent in the West Bank, compared to 36 percent in Israel, which was more than both the US and the UK at the time (30 percent and 33 percent respectively), but less than the USSR (44 percent).

\(^{94}\) Ibid., 94.

\(^{95}\) Ibid., 95.

\(^{96}\) Tamari (1983), 235, suggests that the 1970s saw women participate in jadd, shaking or picking from the top of the olive tree, previously an exclusively male task like plowing.
These changes to the familial division of agricultural labor all likely reinforced the role of the olive tree, since out-of-pocket costs in olive cultivation could be limited essentially to plowing. Pressing was typically paid for with a percentage of the resultant olive oil, and most families would pick their own trees. If the owner or owning family were unable or no longer wanted to pick the trees themselves (such as if they were abroad, or had relocated to an urban area), tenant farmers would be compensated with a percentage of the olives picked, usually one third. As befits his training in agronomy, Awartani gamely laid out a detailed study of the profitability of olive oil, examining input costs on a monetary basis, but admitted that these fail to tell even part of the story of motivation for cultivating olives in the West Bank. In addition to wide variation in productivity based on the different regions in the West Bank (owing largely to annual rainfall), Awartani noted a number of additional “adaptation mechanisms” to diminishing profitability, as well as some of the distinct benefits of olives, not only economic in terms of sunk costs, but also in terms of social significance. Income from olives accrued

97 Awartani (1982), 226. Olive presses take a fixed percentage of either the olives or the resultant olive oil, typically between 9-11 percent — lower in the case of older presses, and higher in the case of modern, more efficient presses. The extraction rate could vary widely between 22-32 percent of the weight of the original olives in this period.
98 Ibid.
99 See Table VII-5, “Profitability of Olives,” Ibid., 228.
100 Ibid., 227. Quoting Awartani, who presents these complex issues quite concisely: The vast majority of olive farmers have inherited orchards which are too old (at least from owners’ points of view) to justify worrying about rearing costs, because such costs have been long amortized. Furthermore, olive farmers find it meaningless to talk about fixed costs arising from interest on fixed investment (mainly the market price of orchard land) for two main reasons. Firstly, they are unwilling to considering selling their land even for the sake of better investment opportunities. Secondly, the kind of land grown with olives is usually so marginal that it is often worthless to convert it to an alternative type of farming. In areas where conversion is feasible, farmers do not hesitate to make the shift

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mainly to peasant families on the lower scale of income, while nutritionally olive products continued to provide villagers in the West Bank with about half of their fat intake and almost a sixth of their caloric needs.\textsuperscript{101} Since the Nablus soap factories had long since switched to using cheaper imported oils in place of locally produced industrial-grade oil, the olive oil from second or third pressings with high acidity could, like the inedible byproduct of repressings known as jift (along with the wood from the annual pruning), easily serve as a free source of fuel.\textsuperscript{102}

In addition to these considerations, which are typically not included in agronomic or econometric studies, Awartani emphasized that in terms of both land and labor, olives have minimal opportunity costs. The land where olives are planted typically cannot be used for other types of agriculture, and the labor of olive culture is typically provided by women, children, older men, and the spare time of male heads of household.\textsuperscript{103} Thus without substantial outlays, olives can be cultivated with reasonable efficiency for one’s own consumption, without having to necessarily consider the profitability calculation of selling olive oil or pickled olives.

The problem of course was that olive orchards continued to expand, if slowly, resulting in increasing surpluses over the relatively static level of domestic consumption.\textsuperscript{104} While older land

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A similar argument applies to labour. Being a typically labour-intensive tree, much of the olive’s labour needs are mobilized from family members who command a negligible opportunity cost. Again, this is another item of costs which farmers would not take into account when ascertaining olive profitability. …

The cost of picking poses different problems. On about 30\% of all olive orchards picking and pressing is undertaken by tenants against a share of one third of the olive oil output. In this case owners are exempted of all picking expenses.\textsuperscript{101}
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 219. \\
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 220. \\
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 221. Awartani cites Farhat-Nasser (page 28 of her book) regarding the important fact that the annual consumption level of 8,000 tons (which is confirmed by other sources in this period as well) should be differentiated between larger towns, where the quantity of olive oil
had been neatly terraced, the exorbitant and always rising costs of labor and material under Israeli occupation meant that newly planted olive orchards could only involve minimal land development.\footnote{Farhat-Nasser, 39, cited in Awartani, 224. In the literature review section of his dissertation, page 32, Awartani unfairly impugns her work as “rather journalistic and avoids discussion of technical details,” though I would note there was something of a disciplinary divide between the two. Awartani used standardized questionnaires to structure interviews with cultivators, duplicating the forms in his appendices. Farhat-Nasser, trained as a botanist, was more interested in issues relating to cultivation practices and local knowledge, rather than formal statistical documentation. Awartani notes that plowing was roughly half of the cost of production, meaning that the reduction in number of plowings could substantially increase profitability. Ibid., 229.} Farhat-Nasser, who interviewed farmers in a less structured way than Awartani, estimated that at least a third of owners had reduced plowing to once a year (instead of ideally twice, as needed for weeding) owing to high cost.\footnote{Ibid., 224.}

In summary: under Israeli occupation, Palestinians modified the agricultural economy of the West Bank, building on and expanding past practices, particularly the role of women in non-commercial agricultural harvesting and processing. Olive culture, which was well established in the settled highlands, remained especially well suited to the environmental conditions of the West Bank, leading to growing concentration in the sector. What Awartani called “adaptation mechanisms” were essentially survival mechanisms for small-scale subsistence agriculture, mobilizing nonworkforce labor and politicizing planting in reaction to the increasing pressures of the economic and political changes of the period.

\footnote{Ibid.}

consumed per person would be lower, in favor of cheaper vegetable seed oils or “samneh” (traditionally animal fat, but increasingly vegetable-based margarine beginning in the 1960s), such that an urban dweller consumed 2-4 kilograms of olive oil per year, while a person living in a small village would consume quadruple the amount of olive oil, with levels in excess of 15 kilograms per person annually.\footnote{Ibid.}
Of the wide variety of proposals that Awartani suggested to ameliorate the Palestinian agricultural economy, he accomplished one himself, by establishing what he called a Rural Research Centre at his home university of an-Najah in Nablus. He originally envisioned it as the technical arm of a never-established central agricultural board. Evidently while he was in the process of doing research for his dissertation, Awartani submitted a proposal in the fall of 1980 to the “Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development” in Kuwait, which was accepted and earmarked for a grant of $270,000. The RRC was established in May 1981 and generated a wealth of published primary sources over the next decade, particularly in the form of original research reports on the crucial economic subsectors related to olives as well as the general agricultural conditions in the West Bank.

3. Palestinian statistics, the agricultural economy, and the Rural Research Centre (RRC) at Nablus

Statistics from the earliest period of Israeli occupation, for the first dozen years or so after 1967, remain conflicting and in dispute depending on the source — likely, in no small part, owing to issues of land classification (thanks to interplanting and to issues of distinguishing mature trees in bearing versus immature, nonbearing, newly planted areas). The Israeli government published propaganda illustrating what it claimed to be substantial progress across the board; however, the reports depend upon questionable pre-occupation benchmarks, which make it difficult to maintain that economic growth in the late 1960s and early 1970s was anything more than the resumption of activity after conflict — picking up where things had left off in the late Jordanian period of the mid 1960s. Although reliable annual planting statistics are

107 Ibid., 350.
lacking for 1967-1973 and conflicting for 1974-1979, we can conclude on the basis of available estimates that planting continued from 1967-1979, but at a significantly reduced pace from the rate of planting under British and Jordanian rule.

The last reliable statistics from the Jordanian period indicate that around 560,000 dunams were under bearing olive trees in the West Bank in 1965/1966. By about 1973, this figure had increased to a range between 615,000-635,000, depending on the source. As noted above, such disparities owed in large part to methodological differences in distinguishing bearing from nonbearing orchards, and in the finer distinctions in classifying land use (owing to variations in density of planting and potential intercropping). According to the most commonly cited estimates, the number of bearing dunams under olives in the West Bank fluctuated significantly throughout the remainder of the 1970s:

Table 18. West Bank olive orchards in bearing (in dunams) and total estimated olive production (in tons) for the years 1974-1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Bearing area (dunams)</th>
<th>Total olive production (tons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1974/75</td>
<td>618,000</td>
<td>124,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975/76</td>
<td>627,000</td>
<td>21,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976/77</td>
<td>622,000</td>
<td>66,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977/78</td>
<td>654,000</td>
<td>165,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978/79</td>
<td>663,000</td>
<td>106,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979/80</td>
<td>653,000</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980/81</td>
<td>665,800</td>
<td>137,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reasons for these fluctuations can be attributed to, in decreasing order of importance, first and foremost the gradual maturing of trees planted in the late Jordanian period; second, to seasonal crop failures, particularly in the newly planted southern district of Hebron, where annual rainfall could be insufficient; and third and least important, to the uprooting of olive orchards, either for development by Palestinians in urbanizing areas like Ramallah or for settlements by Israelis.\textsuperscript{109}

By 1980, a consensus had emerged that there were about 660,000 dunams planted with olive trees in bearing throughout the West Bank. So over about 15 years, the planted area had increased by 100,000 dunams, at a rate of 6,000-7,000 a year — less than half the average of the Jordanian period, and nearly a third of the rate under the British Mandate. The average disguises the fact that planting stalled considerably in the mid 1970s, which would coincide precisely with the last of the trees planted under Jordanian rule maturing and coming into bearing after 8-10 years. Planting then picked up again only in the 1980s. The planting rate in the 1980s averaged between 7,000-8,000 new bearing dunams a year, a slight increase over the average rate of expansion for the first dozen years, from 1967-1979.

In the 1980s, Palestinian statistical gathering became more regular and thorough, and Palestinian sources began publishing studies in Arabic regularly on the agricultural economy in the occupied territories, above all the Rural Research Centre or the RRC.\textsuperscript{110} In the meantime, by 1990, olive orchards in bearing constituted over 740,000 dunams in the West Bank.

\textsuperscript{109} Settlement activity in the earliest period after 1967 was highly localized and largely confined to the Hebron area (Kiryat Arba) and the Latrun Salient, shortly thereafter expanding to areas surrounding Jerusalem.

\textsuperscript{110} The Rural Research Centre published an annual statistical bulletin for the West Bank and Gaza Strip from 1980-1986 (\textit{al-nashrah al-ihsa'iyah al-sanawiyah lil-dhifah al-gharbiyah al-Quds}).
That olive planting continued to expand at all in the face of mounting economic and political challenges is in itself significant. The causes for the slowdown in planting are interwoven with all of the complex political, economic, and social changes in the period outlined in the preceding sections. Within the traditional olive cultivating heartland, olive planting continued in the northern subdistricts of Tulkarm, Jenin, and Nablus, but planting largely stalled in the central subdistricts of Ramallah and Bethlehem.\textsuperscript{111} Planting expanded considerably in the southern subdistrict of Hebron, which traditionally had minimal olive cultivation owing to the pattern of rainfall (usually around a quarter of the amount received farther north).\textsuperscript{112} Studies in the 1980s by the RRC tended to attribute the expansion in olives in the Hebron area largely to a desire for diversification, away from the traditional focus on grapes, but political considerations were paramount. Olive tree planting in the period of Israeli occupation became a defensive tactic wa-qeta ’ghazah), which was discontinued for the first few years of the First Intifada, and then resumed in slightly different format with the publication in 1989 and 1990 of a replacement bulletin focusing solely on agricultural (al-nashrah al-ihsa’iyah al-zera’iyah al-sanawiyah lil-dhifah al-gharbiyah wa-qeta’ ghazah, or Agricultural Statistical Bulletins for the West Bank and Gaza Strip). Copies of all but volume 7 (covering 1986) were located by the author at the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.

The 1980-1986 statistical bulletins were mainly in Arabic, typically with just some of the brief introductory remarks translated into English. The bulk of the statistical information on non-agricultural topics like population, labor force, and education had been translated into Arabic from the Hebrew publications of the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, which would have been potentially inaccessible to non-Hebrew and non-English speakers, such as researchers in the West Bank or broader Arab world. The role of the intifada in disrupting Israeli data collection may account for the disruption and shift in focus to locally obtained data on agriculture.\textsuperscript{111}

Statistics for olive cultivation in the areas annexed into the municipality of Jerusalem are effectively nonexistent, which could perhaps account for the drop off, as could the growing settlement movement in the Jerusalem area throughout the 1970s. It should be noted here that much of the Bethlehem-area olives had historically been concentrated in the village of Beit Jala.\textsuperscript{112} Some areas of the northern West Bank can receive up to 600 millimeters of rainfall annually, while some areas in the south can receive less than 150 millimeters.
against land confiscation, the risk of which was perhaps most acute in the Hebron area as one of
the primary loci of settlement activity (along with Jerusalem) in the early period of occupation.

The agricultural data on estimated crops and cultivated areas in the RRC reports were, in
Awartani’s words, “obtained discretely from the local staff of the Department of Agriculture in
the territory,” meaning the Palestinian staff of the district-level agricultural directorates.
Awartani noted that the RRC data were therefore published before review by the Israeli
statisticians in Jerusalem, who would occasionally revise the figures for a variety of reasons,
from correcting calculation errors to potentially more politically motivated changes. Considering
the fieldwork experience of the local Palestinian staff and their close connections to the farmers
themselves, these statistics should be considered the most reliable source on the agricultural
sector in the period.114

In the 1980s, the area of mature olive orchards expanded by 7,000-8,000 dunams per year
(see Graph 10), a slight increase over the rate of expansion in the 1970s as mentioned above.

113 Hisham Awartani, “Sources of economic and social statistics on the West Bank and
114 Ibid. Other potential published primary sources for statistics in this era tend to be
based upon directly upon the official published ICBS statistics, which were potentially redacted.
This was the case for Arab and Jordanian researchers working outside the occupied territories,
such as those commissioned by Jordanian Crown Prince Hassan, who effectively controlled the
West Bank policy file and oversaw the publication of a number of studies in the same period, but
which were based exclusively on ICBS statistics (just with different interpretations of the same
figures from the Israeli authorities).

The geographic pattern of planting was consistent throughout the 1970s and 1980s, with most of the expansion happening in the traditional northern areas (Tulkarm, Nablus, and Jenin roughly in that order). Over the decade of the 1980s, the three northern subdistricts combined for more than half of the overall increase for the territory, with 41,600 newly bearing dunams. However, Hebron had the largest increase of any single district, from about 20,000 in 1980 to 49,000 dunams in 1990 — which meant that the area had more than doubled in a decade.

Table 19. Olive orchards in bearing by district (increase from 1980 to 1990)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Olive orchards in bearing (thousands of dunams), 1990</th>
<th>Olive orchards in bearing (thousands of dunams), 1980</th>
<th>Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tulkarm</td>
<td>226.1</td>
<td>210.0</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nablus</td>
<td>162.7</td>
<td>147.2</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramallah</td>
<td>147.6</td>
<td>141.5</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenin</td>
<td>141.6</td>
<td>131.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebron</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethlehem</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>742.9</td>
<td>664.5</td>
<td>78.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to these general statistical publications, the RRC focused much of its research efforts into producing specialized studies on different facets of the olive sector, reflecting the

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118 Owing to rounding, there is a slight difference between the totals given by the publications as the total for the West Bank as a whole (in the last row of the chart), versus if the district figures in this chart are summed (742.8; 664.1; and 78.7 respectively).
The longstanding and continued importance of olive cultivation to the economy of the West Bank. The very first study published in the RRC’s technical publications series was by Awartani himself on the “present and future” of West Bank olives;\(^{119}\) the second focused on the past, present, and potential future of West Bank olive oil presses.\(^{120}\) Of the first 10 technical studies published by the RRC between 1981-1986, four focused on olive culture, with the seventh volume examining marketing problems of West Bank olive products,\(^{121}\) and the 10\(^{th}\) examining the substantial expansion of fruit-trees nurseries (mushatel) in the period of Israeli occupation, with special attention to olive propagation.\(^{122}\)

Although the economic importance of olives fluctuated from year to year, depending on the crop, from 1973-1979 the value of olive production contributed between 8-40 percent of the West Bank’s entire agricultural income.\(^{123}\) The nutritional importance of olive oil for the poorer


\(^{120}\) Dr. Feras Sawalha and Munir Ahmad Awad, Rural Research Centre, an-Najah National University Nablus, *Technical Publications Series No. 2: Olive presses of the West Bank* [Arabic: \textit{Awdha} m`\textit{aser al-zaytun fi al-dhifah al-gharbiyah}], November 1982. Copy located by the author at the Nablus Municipal Archive.


\(^{123}\) Awartani, *West Bank Olives: Present and future*, page 2, Table no. 1 [in Arabic]:

<table>
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</table>

Table 20. Development of agricultural income and the share of the olive sector, 1973-1979
classes in rural areas cannot be overstated. Awartani noted one particular popular saying that rhymes in the original colloquial Arabic: “La takhaf ma dam al-sab’in (al-asadin) fi al-bayt, al-qamh w-l-zayt [Do not fear as long as the two lions are in the house, flour and olive oil].”

With an average annual domestic consumption of 8,000 tons of olive oil, the remainder in surplus years in the 1970s was exported to the East Bank and occasionally reexported to Arab Gulf States. In a similar proportion to its contribution of overall agricultural income, exports of olive oil constituted about a third of the value of all West Bank and Gaza Strip exports.

Awartani identified seven economic and technical challenges to the future of West Bank olives by 1981. All seven were relatively longstanding challenges with roots back to the Mandate period, though some trends had accelerated in recent years under Israeli occupation. Perhaps the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total agricultural income at market price in:</th>
<th>Millions of Israeli lira</th>
<th>Millions of Jordanian dinar*</th>
<th>Value of olives production (millions of lira)</th>
<th>Share of olives production (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Millions of Israeli lira</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>795</td>
<td>713</td>
<td>1243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millions of Jordanian dinar*</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of olives production (millions of lira)</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of olives production (percentage)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"*Converted to the value according to the average exchange rate.
Source: Annual statistical books [ICBS] for the years mentioned.”

124 Ibid., page 3.
125 Ibid., page 6, Table 2 [in Arabic]. The only rival in this period in terms of export value was citrus from Gaza, which was reexported via the West Bank to Iran; however, this market was lost with the Iranian revolution in 1979.

Awartani suggests caution with official export statistics, as porterage was rarely weighed on either side of the Allenby Bridge in the early period, which meant that export shipments may have been substantially larger than what the exporters were officially allowed under their export licenses (which provided the basis of the statistics). Ibid., page 5.
two most important were first, rising labor costs, particularly for plowing and picking; and second, dependence on boom years — called “diamond [masiyyah]” years in Palestinian farmer slang — that owing to the climate and geography of planting (in rugged terrain with high variability in rainfall) occurred only about once every three years. In addition, olive oil faced competition from cheaper alternative edible fats that could be potential substitutes such as margarine or vegetable oils, as well as competition from imported olive oil. The diminished Nablus soap industry, for example, had turned almost exclusively to cheaper refined olive oils imported from Spain by this period, which soap factory owners argued was essential for their survival. Fifth, in comparison to larger producers like Spain and Tunisia, Palestinian olive cultivators tended to hold small, scattered plots, rather than large-scale industrial orchards. Furthermore, Palestinian processing, packaging, and marketing lacked standardization, leading to divergent quality in the final product, potentially decreasing demand while increasing consumer skepticism. Lastly, any efforts toward switching from traditional rainfed (bʿali) extensive cultivation toward intensive cultivation faced the problem of rising costs of inputs like fertilizer, herbicides, and pesticides. (Awartani did not mention the costs of irrigation, likely since such an investigation would be largely made moot by the political difficulties surrounding the issues of water in the occupied territories.)

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126 Remarkably, this usage is attested to by both Ali Nasuh al-Tahe in the 1930s/1940s and Sumayyeh Farhat-Nasser in the 1970s/1980s in their respective published works on Palestinian olives, op. cit.
128 Ibid., 20
129 Ibid., 5.
130 Ibid., 20
131 Ibid.
132 Ibid., 21.
In addition to these agronomic problems, Awartani noted the changing political calculations that olive culture faced: “The authority has taken a clear hostile stance toward olives, because it has become an essential symbol for the sumud [steadfastness] of rural regions in the West Bank and their connection to the land. Fallow land or field crops are an easier target for colonization and confiscation operations.” Awartani characterized Israeli policy toward olive as one of near-total neglect, “tajahul wa-ihmal [disregard and negligence].” The occupation authorities in effect obstructed efforts by foreign aid organizations to support Palestinian agriculture, while failing to offer substantial guidance to farmers or assist in defending against pests. All of these concerns predated the growing phenomenon of uprootings, which gained momentum in response to the First Intifada in the late 1980s and thereafter.

Many of the myriad challenges facing Palestinian olive culture were out of the hands of the farmers, reflecting Israeli governmental policies that most West Bankers could not hope to influence or change directly. Understandably, then, the subsequent technical studies by the RRC on different aspects of the olive sector focused on the areas where Palestinians themselves could impact its present and future viability and profitability. Investing in the modernization of olive oil presses, for example, could potentially help alleviate some of the problems facing the olive oil sector by increasing the quality of the resultant olive oil and increasing the efficiency of olive oil extraction.

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133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.

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By 1980, the West Bank had about 300 olive oil presses located in 148 out of the 375 olive-producing villages.\textsuperscript{135} This distribution reflects the fact that a single village would often have 2-3 presses, while neighboring villages without presses would transport their olives to be pressed there. Over two-thirds of these presses were considered “qadima,” ancient or old; a quarter half automatic; and about seven percent were fully automatic, half of which had double lines.\textsuperscript{136} By subdistrict, Tulkarm had the most “old” presses, with 84, followed by Ramallah’s 60.\textsuperscript{137} Tulkarm also had the most half automatic presses, with 25 (Nablus, Ramallah and Jenin followed with 17, 14, and 11 respectively). Ramallah had the most automatic presses with eight, followed by Nablus, Tulkarm and Jenin in that order with five, four, and three respectively. Most of the older presses would not operate if the harvest was insufficient, meaning that farmers preferred to take their olives to the newer presses, unless all newer presses were at capacity and the backlog would mean that their olives could be not pressed in a timely fashion — necessitating a resort to the older, less efficient presses.\textsuperscript{138}

RRC researchers surveyed a representative sample consisting of 41 percent of all presses in the West Bank in order to understand better the conditions of the presses and the motivations

\textsuperscript{135} Sawalha and Awad, \textit{Olives presses of the West Bank}, page v.[Arabic: hey].
\textsuperscript{136} The old or ancient presses constituted 69 percent, a total of 206 presses; half automatic were 24 percent (72 presses); and there were 22 fully automatic presses with 33 total lines. Sawalha and Awad, \textit{Olives presses of the West Bank}, page v [Arabic: hey]; Awartani, \textit{West Bank Olives: Present and future}, 13.
\textsuperscript{137} These and the following statistics derived from Table no. 5, number and distribution of olive presses (1980), Awartani, \textit{West Bank Olives: Present and future}, 13.
\textsuperscript{138} An unremarked upon paradox in this and other RRC studies that calculated press profitability is that the researchers found that newer presses need more olives — that is, they should only operate at times of larger crops — while older presses can be profitable with fewer olives, in times of smaller crops. Yet back to the Mandate period, the older presses would only operate essentially out of necessity. I would argue this illustrates that cultivator preferences for the more efficient, cleaner, newer presses won out over operator profitability calculations.
of the press owners for investing in the development of modern presses, which extended historically back through much of the century to the late Mandate period. The study found that the rate of establishment of new presses began to increase in the 1940s, with 4-7 new presses established every year. This pattern, beginning about 1941 during the World War II boom, held throughout the Jordanian period as well, through 1965. From 1966-1970, owing to the instability and uncertainty caused by the 1967 War, only a handful of new presses were established at a rate of one per year or slightly less. However, beginning in the 1970s, the rate of establishment accelerated just past the 1941-1965 benchmark, with around 8 presses established each year. In the late 1970s, the rate of increase more than doubled and nearly tripled, with roughly 21 new presses added each year from 1976-1980.

\[139\] Sawalha and Awad, *Olive presses of the West Bank*, 11
\[140\] Ibid., 12. Table no. 5 “Distribution of presses according to period of establishment and average increase in number of presses, 1941-1980 [in Arabic].”
\[141\] Ibid., page 11.
As noted above, the survey sampled 41 percent of all West Bank olive oil presses, with representative numbers from each respective subdistrict; the rate of establishment for the West Bank overall appears to have been extrapolated by dividing all figures by 41 percent. There is no consideration of margin of error. Graph based on Ibid., 12, Table no. 5 and Ibid., 13, Graph no. 1 “Development of the number of presses that the sample encompassed [in Arabic].”
With rising technological sophistication came rising costs, which prompted the detailed RRC study. While the rising costs of land and construction labor contributed to the growing expense of building new olive presses, the machinery itself — typically state-of-the-art technology imported from Italy — was the primary cause of the increasingly exorbitant cost of building a new olive oil press. While the press mechanism and motor had constituted about half of the expense of establishing a new press from 1950-1970, the proportion had risen in the 1970s to close to 80 percent of the total cost by 1981.\textsuperscript{144} The tradeoff was reduced labor expenses and increased efficiency in olive oil extraction, for which press owners could charge more.\textsuperscript{145} Additionally, unpublished laboratory tests by the Volcani Institute showed a substantial reduction in acidity in the olive oil produced by fully automatic presses, cut almost in half from nearly 7 percent acidity to just over 3 percent.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{143} Again, please note that the rate of establishment for the West Bank overall appears to have been extrapolated by dividing all figures by 41 percent without consideration of margin of error, such that the average rate of increase of 2-3 presses within the sample from 1945-1965 was interpreted by the authors to indicate that 4-7 presses were established annually in the West Bank as a whole; 8 presses were established each year in the West Bank as a whole from 1971-1975; and 21 from 1976-1980. Graph based on Ibid., 12, Table no. 5 and Ibid., 14, Graph no. 2 “Average annual increase of [number of] presses [in Arabic].”

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., page 27, Table no. 12 “Average chief costs in establishing presses and their percentage [of the total] by period, 1940-1981 [in Arabic].”

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., vi [Arabic: waw]. According to the survey results, traditional presses needed five laborers and semi-automatic needed six, while fully automatic only needed three. Press owners typically received a proportion of the oil as payment, which could vary from 6-11 percent, with standard rates being 8 percent for a traditional press, 9 percent for half automatic, and 10 percent for full automatic.

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 48-49, Table no. 23 “Results of laboratory analyses connected with olive oil produced by different types of olive oil presses [in Arabic].” The unpublished Volcani Institute tests also showed that fully automatic presses reduced in half the amount of olive oil that remained (and was thus wasted) in both the jift [the olive “cake” of smashed olives resulting from their pressing] and in the olive mill wastewater [al-zibar].
For all of the potential advantages of the state-of-the-art fully automatic presses, the explosion in cost necessitated at a minimum better planning. New presses were frequently established at the individual initiative of farmers who often had limited personal olive holdings; at best, a press would be in operation two months out of every year.\textsuperscript{147} With costs rising into the hundreds of thousands of Jordanian dinars, not only could such incredible sums perhaps be better allocated elsewhere in terms of agroindustrial investments, but also the question had to be raised regarding the suitability of modern automated presses to the surplus of labor in the West Bank. Putting aside questions of efficiency, quality, and profitability, the RRC authors suggested that the level of technology in the newest presses did not match the needs of the local labor force.\textsuperscript{148} At a minimum, cultivators and press owners needed to coordinate and plan better to match capacity to local supply and demand.

By 1980 or so, olive trees constituted almost three-quarters of all fruit trees in the West Bank, and occupied about 13.3 percent of the total area of the entire West Bank.\textsuperscript{149} Despite the recent investments in processing, however, West Bank olive oil remained uncompetitive in comparison to olive oil imported from the major Mediterranean producers of Southern Europe and North Africa. In particular, the East Bank, which had typically absorbed between a sixth and two-thirds (16-67.5 percent) of West Bank olive oil production, had become increasingly self-sufficient.\textsuperscript{150} In years of insufficient crops, the East Bank could more cheaply import better

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item 147 Ibid., 50; 52.
\item 148 Ibid., 51.
\item 149 Awad, \textit{Marketing problems of olive oil in the West Bank}, page 1.
\item 150 Ibid., 15, Table 9 “Percentage exports comprise of total production [in Arabic].”
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
packaged olive oil from Europe — precisely what would happen in the late 1980s and early 1990s, after Jordan’s official renunciation of claims to the West Bank in 1987.

With the continued expansion in olive planting and processing, the West Bank increasingly confronted a marketing problem. Domestic demand had long remained stable around 8,000 tons a year,\(^{151}\) while production increased. Surpluses could range from nearly none to up to 25,000 tons.\(^{152}\) The East Bank could absorb up to 6,000-7,000 of this surplus in a typical year in the early 1980s.\(^{153}\) The Nabulsi soap industry had long since ceased to absorb much if any of surplus local olive oil production. While admitting that the root of the issue for the future of West Bank olives was the uncompetitiveness of Palestinian olive oil owing to rising costs and the lack of large-scale cooperatives (or really any significant economies of scale achievable through industrialization),\(^{154}\) experts instead sought to focus on what could be more easily improved: the packaging of West Bank olive oil. Imported olive oil from larger producers could come in four different container sizes based on the needs of consumers; West Bank olive oil was only sold in 17-kilogram containers (metal jerrycans known as \textit{tankah}).\(^{155}\) Imported containers would indicate the origin and weight of the contents; West Bank containers were reused metal that was liable to rust, bringing out defects in the oil and changing its taste for the worse.\(^{156}\) The anonymity of unlabeled packaging meant that traders depended on personal trust to verify the

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\(^{151}\) Ibid., 12, Table 5, “Amount of olive oil consumed annually in the West Bank [in Arabic],” summarizes annual domestic consumption for the late 1970s and 1980s, citing the files of the West Bank agricultural directorates’ department of planning and export.

\(^{152}\) Ibid., page 13.

\(^{153}\) Ibid., 14, table 8 “Exports to East Bank [in Arabic],” citing files of cooperative societies in the West Bank.

\(^{154}\) Ibid., 10, noted that as of 1984 Palestinian olive oil could retail for no less than 1 Jordanian dinar per kilogram, while Spanish olive oil could sell for 800 fils (0.8 JD) or less.

\(^{155}\) Ibid., 9.

\(^{156}\) Ibid., 10.
quality of the contents. Certainly, recurring scandals in the Italian olive oil industry illustrate that detailed, standardized, and regulated packaging can be equally if not more deceptive.\(^\text{157}\)

However, the type of West Bank packaging — unidentifiable, bulk quantities, effectively untraceable — could lend itself to unscrupulous practices by some traders that would ultimately reduce consumer confidence in West Bank olive oil. Without descending into full-on counterfeiting or adulteration with other cheaper oils, such shady practices could include mixing old olive oil with new olive oil, underfilling containers while selling them at full price, or adulterating higher-grade olive oil with lower-grade oil.\(^\text{158}\)

To solve the problem of West Bank olive oil marketing would necessitate a comprehensive solution. Costs in the early 1980s, particularly of plowing and picking, continued to rise considerably since Awartani’s first study, basically doubling from 1978/1979 to 1983/1984 (see Table 21, next page).\(^\text{159}\)


\(^\text{159}\) Ibid., page 21.
Table 21. “Average price of a kilogram of olive oil and likewise costs of plowing a single dunam planted with olives and wages for picking olive harvest”¹⁶⁰

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Price of olive oil Dinar/kg</th>
<th>Percentage increase in olive oil price</th>
<th>Wage for olive picking single day (dinar)</th>
<th>Percent increase in picking wage</th>
<th>Costs of plowing single dunam twice a season (dinar)</th>
<th>Percentage increase in costs of plowing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1978/79</td>
<td>0.800</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.400</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.320</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979/80</td>
<td>0.850</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2.550</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980/81</td>
<td>0.880</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3.520</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4.660</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981/82</td>
<td>0.950</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>3.800</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>5.320</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982/83</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>4.500</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>8.000</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983/84</td>
<td>1.200</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>6.000</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>10.000</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Awad, the RRC author of the 1984 report on olive oil marketing problems, suggested wholesale consolidation of the olive oil industry: first, establish factories to package olive oil in multiple sizes of containers, which would identify the source of the olives, the location of the press, and the percentage of acidity or grade of the oil; second, reorganize and overhaul the marketing of Palestinian olive oil abroad. The West Bank needed to find new markets beyond the East Bank, whether in Arab countries or not, which meant a need to compete with European edible oils.¹⁶¹ In the short term, Awad proposed a feasibility study for building a reinforced plastic factory to produce transparent plastic containers for storing and exporting olive oil.¹⁶² A marketing campaign promoting local consumption could be mounted in both the West and East Banks,

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., page 22, Table number (13), literal translation by the author of the original Arabic table title. Awad cited as his source “field work – sample from an olive region,” which is unspecified.
¹⁶¹ Ibid., 24.
¹⁶² Ibid., 25. While such a container would mean ease of inspection by consumers, Awad does not note that exposure to sunlight would be severely detrimental to the quality of the olive oil, making storage more difficult at minimum. Furthermore, the potential leaching of harmful chemicals from plastics into their edible contents, a problem that has only recently begun to receive widespread attention, would be another significant drawback.
against the competition of imported oils from Spain, Italy, and Turkey in particular, which the
governments could seek to limit through quotas or tariffs.\textsuperscript{163} Lastly, the West Bank lacked its
own laboratory to analyze and test olive oil, and prevent the marketing of counterfeit edible olive
oil ("al-zayut al-maghshushah"), depending instead on the facilities of the Israeli Volcani
Institute that typically had its own priorities. Awad suggested establishing a testing lab at any of
the new West Bank universities for this purpose.\textsuperscript{164} Needless to say, all of these changes would
be a tall order in any circumstance, but particularly so in the difficult political and economic
environment of the occupied West Bank.

While the rate of establishment of new olive oil presses had accelerated considerably
under Israeli occupation, the number of fruit tree nurseries [\textit{mushatel}] in the West Bank
increased almost exponentially, from eight in 1966/1967 to 47 nurseries in 1985/1986.\textsuperscript{165} Around
80 percent of the saplings produced by these mushatel were olives.\textsuperscript{166} As with the investments in
olive tree planting and in olive oil presses, expansion in this period was initially slow, with an
increase from eight to 12 total tree nurseries in the dozen years or so between 1967 and
1979/1980, with expansion accelerating gradually in the early 1980s to 18 nurseries by
1982/1983.\textsuperscript{167} Then, in the mid 1980s, the number of nurseries nearly doubled within three years,
from 28 in 1983/84 to 47 in 1985/1986.\textsuperscript{168} The primary causes behind this rapid expansion were

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{165} Sawalha, \textit{Nurseries of Fruit Trees in the West Bank}, page 8, Table 1 [in Arabic].
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., page 16.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., page 8, Table 1 indicates 8 nurseries in 1966/67; 12 nurseries in 1979/80; 14 in
1981/82; and 18 in 1982/83.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
demand in both the East and West Banks, particularly the expansion of olive planting in the southern West Bank. Half of all olive seedlings were sold and exported to the East Bank; nearly all citrus were too.\(^{169}\) Olive sapling production expanded accordingly from 410,000 in 1979/80, constituting 86.2 percent of all saplings produced in the West Bank, to over 833,000 sapling in 1983/1984, and then around 1.3 million saplings annually in both 1984/1985 and 1985/1986.\(^ {170}\)

If true, these figures are staggering. A typical dunam supports 10 trees, meaning that in the mid 1980s the nurseries had begun supplying enough trees to plant 100,000 dunams or more per year. It took from 1967 until 1980 for 100,000 new dunams under olives to come into bearing in the West Bank; and then another dozen years for the next 100,000. The East Bank’s planting in this period was substantially greater. The five-year plans for the East Bank in the 1970s and early 1980s estimated a planting rate of 100,000 dunams every five years, which was reduced to 50,000 only in the late 1980s. Although not mentioned at all in the report, the

\(^{169}\) Ibid., 2. Of the three nurseries specializing exclusively in citrus, two were in Qalqilyah. Of 13 nurseries in Jenin, nine specialized exclusively in olives, as did half of the six in Nablus, while all seven in Tulkarm were mixed. Of the remainder, the other nine of the 12 total in Qalqilyah were mixed, as were five of the six in Hebron. Ibid., page 13, Table 3 [in Arabic].

\(^{170}\) Ibid., page 15, Table 4 (translated from Arabic and retitled by the author):

### Table 22. Olive tree sapling production in West Bank nurseries, 1979-1986

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of olive saplings</th>
<th>Percentage of all saplings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979/1980</td>
<td>410,000</td>
<td>86.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983/1984</td>
<td>833,000</td>
<td>88.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984/1985</td>
<td>1,338,000</td>
<td>86.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985/1986</td>
<td>1,227,000</td>
<td>75.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sawalha cited the agricultural directorates as the source for his statistics. The reduction in percentage of olives below 80 percent in 1985/1986 reflects the growth in orange tree production, as oranges jumped from 4 percent in 1979/80 to between 6-8 percent in the mid 1980s — from 18,000 saplings in 1979/1980 to 80,000 in 1983/1984, 93,000 in 1984/1985, and finally 139,000 in 1985/1986.
remainder was probably sold to Israelis (whether Palestinian citizens or Jewish cultivators — either inside the Green Line or potentially supporting the agricultural expansion of settlements in the West Bank — is unclear).

As with the expansion in olive oil presses, investment in nurseries was likely driven by a desire to convert excess cash holdings into real property to defend against inflation. These nurseries evidently fueled both the massive expansion in East Bank cultivation and contributed to the “land defense” planting of olive trees in marginal areas in the south around Hebron and Bethlehem, where annual rainfall of less than 150 millimeters meant that trees could often fail to remain in bearing.171 From the perspective of Awartani’s criterion of economic national viability, the nurseries were a paradoxical investment: simultaneously supporting the national economy of the West Bank by driving the politicization of planting, while ultimately undermining the West Bank’s traditional market for surplus olive oil by selling to planters in the Jordanian East Bank, who would become self sufficient in olive oil production by the late 1980s and cut off imports from the Palestinian West Bank during the First Intifada (and possibly also to Israelis on either side of the Green Line).

171 Sawalha attributed the predominance of olive sapling production to five factors: first, the “suitability of the tree to the topography and the different factors of West Bank climate;” second, as a strategy to prevent unplanted land from being liable to confiscation and settlement in the southern areas around Hebron and Bethlehem, which Sawalha noted had expanded considerably in the late 1970s and 1980s, which corresponded with the growth of the settlement movement in that region; third, the economic advantage of olive oil as a commodity that can be stored to mitigate adverse price swings owing to market forces; fourth, the olive tree was considered more forgiving and less technically demanding than other fruit trees that may require more tending or active attention and investment in the form of water for irrigation; and fifth, olive trees were cheaper than other fruit trees, thus meaning more upfront profits for an investment that could also continue giving in the long term. Ibid., 16-17.
In sum: the increasing specificity of the RRC reports reflected the professionalization and institutionalization of indigenous knowledge through the efforts of Palestinian technical experts, who tapped into their personal networks and the remnants of the Jordanian agricultural extension service to collect detailed data, which they then presented and published in standardized forms familiar to Western agronomists and economists. The emphasis of the RRC reports on the olive subsectors reflected their paramount and growing importance within the West Bank agricultural economy, particularly as other types of agriculture suffered under the occupation and the growing weights of inflation, taxation, and competition from Israeli produce. Palestinians adapted by not only politicizing planting and mobilizing nonworkforce members (and possibly modifying the gendered division of labor within households in the process), but also by investing heavily in modernizing and expanding olive oil presses and olive tree nurseries. Individuals and families drove these changes, which is evidenced by the consequent lack of centralization, consolidation, and planning. This would have negative consequences in the longer run once external sources of funding such as remittances were disrupted by subsequent political events in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Conclusion

Palestinian olive production captured a larger share of agricultural production and value through the mid 1970s; however, thereafter, as in Israel, agriculture in a general became a diminished sector. By the time of the First Intifada, Palestinian olive producers faced existential problems owing to oversupply, due to surplus production and a lack of external markets, which continued through the Gulf Crisis and the Palestinian external leadership’s disastrous decision to
align with Saddam Hussein in his invasion of Kuwait — leading to a broader economic crisis with the loss of Gulf state funding and remittances from Palestinians working in the Gulf.

Planting had continued to expand throughout the first 20 years of Israeli occupation, but at a much slower pace than it had either under the British Mandate or under Jordan — reduced by at least half. The rationale for planting shifted from mainly economic, to increasingly political. Planting in the first two decades of occupation became in part a politicized form of land defense, to prevent confiscations. In the third decade of occupation, olive trees became targets for uprooting.

Under Israeli occupation, investment in olive presses soared, and the rate of establishment of new olive oil presses in the West Bank doubled in comparison to the annual rates under the British Mandate and Jordanian rule. The new presses offered substantial improvements in efficiency and hygiene over many of the older style presses that increasingly were put into operation only in years of bumper crops (when newer presses would be at full capacity, leading to an undesirable processing bottleneck, because the quality of olive oil will deteriorate if picked olives are left to continue to ripen). But the unrestrained expansion of olive oil presses under the Israeli occupation led to increasing criticism by Palestinian researchers and experts.

In large part, these criticisms derived from the increasingly exorbitant costs of importing and establishing new olive oil presses, the costs of which were estimated to rise up to hundreds of thousands of Jordanian dinars in the 1980s, as well as a lack of planning and coordination by the owners, particularly in failing to study marketing mechanisms and profitability. Olive oil presses tended to be erected by Palestinians without substantial olive orchard holdings. West
Bankers with larger landholdings had continued to expand their plantings, though again at a slower rate than in previous period. Both types of investments — more trees, newer presses — reflected the growing investment by West Bank Palestinians into real property in this period, such as in home construction or expansion. Beyond political considerations, I would argue that much of the impetus for these investments resulted from the combination of cash remittances from abroad with the economic instability of the 1970s and 1980s, which was marked by periods of austerity and hyperinflation.

Although the West Bank remained to some extent on the Jordanian dinar, in that most Palestinians preferred to keep their savings in the currency and exchange it into Israeli currency for daily expenses, the West Bank was by no means disconnected from the macroeconomic trends in Israel. In particular, the cost of living in the West Bank increased exponentially under Israeli rule. And at the same time as Israel expanded its administration of the territories throughout this period, the West Bank became increasingly dependent upon remittances from the Gulf and wage labor inside Israel. One way to preserve the value of these funds from devaluation would be to convert cash into property. While a good strategy that could potentially diminish the detrimental impacts of macroeconomic issues like Israeli hyperinflation and Jordanian devaluation of the dinar, the problem was that the expansion of olive groves and the expansion of olive presses led to excess capacity. The failures to conduct market research, to evaluate potential profitability, and to coordinate with others through the establishment of cooperatives in order to share costs are all understandable within the political and socioeconomic context of the time. But these trends would have negative consequences in the longer term: namely, rising costs
and rising capacity, but without achieving the economies of scale that could make Palestinian olive oil globally competitive in price with other, larger Mediterranean producers.

By the time of the Oslo I Accord in 1993, despite the development efforts of Palestinians such as the experts at the Rural Research Centre (RRC), the primary impact of agriculture remained food supply, rather than for income.\(^\text{172}\) Despite increasing commercialization, family production for one’s own consumption remained a key motivating factor for the extensive scale of olive production, especially considering the increasingly thin profit margins.\(^\text{173}\)

By the early 1990s, consumption of all edible oils in the West Bank was estimated at 16,000 tons annually, 10,000 of which was olive oil (a slight increase over the 8,000 figure cited from the 1960s through the 1980s), while the remainder was corn oil, which found increasing favor for frying. Total output of olive oil (averaged for the wide variation between seasons) was about 17,000 tons of olive oil per year.\(^\text{174}\) Production had continued to expand, in effect, without much of a corresponding increase in marketing outlets. When domestic consumption hovered around 8,000 tons a year and domestic production averaged 15,000 tons a year in the 1970s and 1980s, the West Bank needed to dispose of an annual average surplus of 7,000 tons of olive oil. The same remained true into the early 1990s — the West Bank needed an outlet for the 7,000 ton surplus between annual production averaging 17,000 tons and annual consumption of 10,000

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\(^{172}\) Hisham Awartani, “The Agricultural Sector of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip,” 12 October 1993, UNCTAD/DSD/SEU/Misc.5, page 16. Local West Bank production remained self-sufficient for most foods: “vegetables, citrus, grapes, olive oil, and mutton,” with trade deficits (with Israel) for eggs and poultry, though that sector had seen and continues to see significant development, which Awartani attributed to the political drive embodied in the intifada. Wheat, sugar, and rice offered the three clearest cases of dependency on external sources, imported via Israel, with 70 percent of wheat and 100 percent of both sugar and rice imported. Ibid., 19.

\(^{173}\) Ibid., 16.

\(^{174}\) Ibid., 21.
tons — except by the 1990s, Jordan no longer absorbed 6,000 tons of olive oil a year. And despite the best efforts of the French on the behalf of the European Economic Community (EEC), no other viable market appeared as a sustainable, potential alternative.

Thanks in no small part to Israeli policies and to the changing relationship between the occupied West Bank and Jordan (as well as other Arab states during the Gulf Crisis), the overall economic significance of agriculture dropped considerably under the occupation. Yet Palestinian farmers continued to expand olives, at a rate of about 6,300 dunams per annum.\textsuperscript{175} Although representing a drop by more than half of the rate of planting in the Jordanian period, this rate of West Bank olive planting still created a significant, secular increase over time. This fact bears repeating, because it is indicative of how olive culture gained growing nationalist political and social importance in this period. Israeli occupational policies thus in a way inadvertently augmented the importance of West Bank olive culture, especially by threatening its profitability. Production and planting continued to expand, despite increasing problems like olive tree uprootings and significant barriers to effective, profitable marketing and trade of olive commodities. Why?

The answer lies in the agency of ordinary West Bank Palestinians, their resiliency, and their adaptations to life under occupation, as this chapter has outlined. In 1993, when the two-state solution appeared imminent, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development published a series of reports by researchers on the economic viability of an independent Palestinian state comprised of the occupied territories. One report came from none other than

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
Hisham Awartani, who summarized two economic motives for the continued orientation of West Bankers toward olive production: the production for one’s own consumption of superior quality of olive oil over cheaper substitutes, and the utilization of lands of marginal quality that could not be used for other potentially more lucrative crops. 176 However, a new, third motive had emerged during the second decade of occupation: the importance of visibly demonstrating that land remained under active cultivation, in order to avoid confiscation by settlers or the state. 177 The Israeli authorities increasingly relied upon aerial photography, in time series, to help support efforts to seize and settle land in the West Bank in particular. 178

Thus, by the time of the intifada, the olive had acquired outsized political significance — reflecting its longstanding if recently diminishing economic significance — as a target for uprooting by settlers and “green patrol” officers, who were estimated to have uprooted 78,000 trees and seedlings in 1988-1989, of which 90 percent were olive trees. 179 Converted to dunams, this figure of about 70,000 olive trees and seedlings (taking 90 percent of the total figure), planted at about 10 per dunam, meant a net loss of 7,000 dunams of olives — roughly equal to a year’s worth of planting across the territory.

By 1990, olive oil presses comprised 75 percent of all agro-industrial enterprise in the territories, with many established during the second decade of occupation. 180 If olive planting had slowed in the West Bank under occupation, especially in comparison to the East Bank, investment in olive processing into olive oil had expanded considerably. The problem then

176 Ibid.
177 Ibid.
180 Ibid., 76.
became finding viable external outlets for West Bank olive oil, at a time when trade over the
Jordan River became increasingly fraught.

West Bank agricultural exports had remained predominantly oriented toward the East
Bank for the first two decades of occupation, from 1967 to 1987. The fluctuations of annual
olive oil production were reflected in overall trade value between the occupied territories and
Jordan, with olive oil and pickled olives contributing over half of total industrial exports in a
good year, and down to 20 percent in a bad year. Total olive sector exports to Jordan thus
would typically equal $20-30 million out of a total industrial export trade of $40-60 million for
much of the 1980s.

The loss of the Jordanian market came at the worst possible time for the Palestinian
territories in the midst of the First Intifada. The timing was driven by the domestic economic
interests of Jordan as well as regional politics. The French charge d’affaires in Amman criticized

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181 Mahmoud El-Jafari (Islamic University of Gaza), “Main features of domestic and
external merchandise trade of the West Bank and Gaza Strip,” 21 October 1994,
UNCTAD/ECDC/SEU/S, page 20. Surprisingly, according to the author, there had been an
opening in the 1970s of Israeli markets to certain Palestinian goods in the 1970s, such that West
Bank and Gaza Strip agricultural exports had been split roughly in half for most of the 1970s
(1973-1979) between Israeli and Jordanian/Arab markets, with a slight increase to 60 percent
oriented toward Jordanian (with some reexport to other Arab markets) from 1980-1987 as trade
policies and restrictions changed slightly. These statistics may in fact reflect the transshipment of
goods from Gaza or the West Bank (or vice versa) to be reexported via Israel to foreign markets.
According to El-Jafari’s figures, West Bank agricultural imports ranged between 1.1 percent and
2.6 percent of the value of all Israeli agricultural imports from 1968-1990, from which can be
drawn three conclusions: restrictive Israeli trade policies were successful at preventing the
importation of most Palestinian agricultural goods; Palestinian agricultural production was
dwarfed in the overall market; and the appeal of certain types of goods from the territories was
limited to certain segments (such as Palestinian citizens of Israel).

182 Ibid., page 26. Dairy products, including margarine, constituted the chief industrial
rival for the period from 1971-1990, see Table 2-17 “West Bank: exports of industrial products
to Jordan, 1971-1990 (current million dollars),” Ibid., page 82.

183 Ibid. Prices given in 1994 dollars to adjust for inflation.
the 1988/1989 Jordanian suspension of imports from the West Bank, judging it at best a lack of imagination, and at worst indifference to the practical problems of living under occupation. Furthermore, the step quite blatantly contradicted the Jordanian government’s rhetoric of support for the Palestinian intifada.\textsuperscript{184}

One unanticipated consequence of the Jordanian ban was that clandestine smuggling into Israel rose sharply in December 1988.\textsuperscript{185} Complaints from the Galilee of undercutting from West Bank olive presses had a long history, back to the immediate aftermath of the 1967 war. An article in the Israeli press suggested that since interdiction would be near impossible, the only real solution to protect Israeli producers would be to find a substitute outlet for West Bankers to market their goods.\textsuperscript{186} Then, of course, the Gulf Crisis led to even more severe problems for Palestinian trade, beginning in 1990.\textsuperscript{187}

Smuggling into the Galilee illustrates the lack of viable alternative outlets for West Bank olive oil in the late 1980s. The Nablus soap industry could no longer offer any absorptive capacity either, having converted in the mid 20\textsuperscript{th} century from a local craft industry with local inputs and local marketing, to an export-driven industry supplied by imported oils. The product itself had also changed, from almost entirely white soap to green soap over the course of the two

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{184} Jean-Pierre Filiu on behalf of Jean-Francois Dobelle, Chargé d’affaires de France (Amman), to Dumas, MAE, “A/S. Restrictions à l’importation par la Jordanie de l’huile d’olive des Territoires Occupés,” 14 December 1988, No.785/ANMO. CADN 294PO/4/54, Dossier « Huile d’olive ».
\item \textsuperscript{185} Mordehai Elkan, “Galilee presses threatened by competition from the olive oil of the territories,” \textit{Maariv} 26 December 1988, page 9.
\item \textsuperscript{186} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
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decades from 1967 to 1987. In the process, the total amount of soap production in Nablus remained about the same, with a marginal increase from around 4,000 tons a year in the 1960s to between 4,000-6,000 in the mid-to-late 1980s. The slight increase in quantity was likely accompanied by a decline in quality. The conversion to green soap had begun in the Jordanian period, as a way of cutting manufacturing costs and lessening dependence on local olive oil production, instead using byproducts like jift and cheaper imported oils. While cheaper inputs would theoretically lead to increased profits, green soap was less valued and had minimal demand in the local markets, meaning that nearly all of Nabulsi soap was now exported via Jordan to Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf countries. Furthermore, factory owners complained that new taxes under the Israeli occupation had mounted to the point that by 1987 taxes took almost two-thirds of manufacturers’ profits. Considering that Palestinian olive oil soap by 1990 was largely sold abroad in the Arab Gulf states, the Gulf Crisis would have affected the Nabulsi soap industry potentially even worse than olive oil manufacturers, whose industry had long since surpassed the soap industry by almost every measure.

In terms of total dunams, both bearing and nonbearing, Palestinian olive orchards had expanded from 600,000 dunams in the mid-to-late 1960s to around 800,000 dunams in the late

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189 Ibid., 25, citing Nablus Chamber of Commerce records in Arabic for 1987.

190 Ibid., 36. al-Sharif cites an interview conducted 12/11/1986 with Khalil abd al-Hadi to support his claim that taxes by the late 1980s comprised more than 65 percent of profits. These taxes included a production tax of 20 percent, which had at one point been increased to 32.5 percent but was reduced after intense protests; a residency tax of 17 percent, which had been 7 percent previously; and an income tax of a variable rate between 20-37 percent. al-Hadi noted that there had been a subsidy for the first two years or so of the occupation, what the factory owners called “duties of encouragement,” but these export subsidies (amounting to 30 percent of the soap’s value) were only in effect for a brief period.
Although the year-to-year fluctuations were sharp, disguising drops in bearing dunamage in some years and massive expansions in others, the overall trend from 1967-1990 was expansion by 200,000 dunams, or 100,000 dunams roughly each dozen years of that period.

Olive expansion came to some extent at the expense of field crops previously planted on land with relatively marginal productivity. Olive orchards require far less in the way of cash

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191 Awartani (UNCTAD 1993), page 110, Table 3-10 “Secular trends in West Bank olives area, average annual output, and share in agricultural output value, selected years.”

192 Ibid. See also Table 3-11, “Growth trend of olive orchards in the West Bank, 1978-1989 (thousand dunams).”

193 Ibid. Graph based on Awartani’s Table 3-11, which itself was based on upon the files of the West Bank Agricultural Directorates. The sharp dip in 1982 may be a statistical aberration in the original files, a data-entry error in the UNCTAD report, or possibly reflective of the environmental and economic difficulties of the era (such as drought), though the last possibility is least likely, since the figures are supposed to include both bearing and non-bearing areas.

194 Ibid., 28.
expenses (such as outlays for seeds).\textsuperscript{195} Field crops were most affected by land closures and confiscations, as well as the opportunity cost of planting higher value crops (including olives).\textsuperscript{196}

Above all, the slow but steady expansion of olive cultivation reflected the individual initiative of West Bank Palestinian families. Olives continued to provide a base of subsistence, but the nonwage labor of women, elders, and children became increasingly essential to olive cultivation. Furthermore, expansion did not lead to industrialization or increased coordination, as the cooperative movement (beginning principally in the Jordanian period) remained relatively marginal. Even with the switch to uncompensated household members for most of the harvesting labor, the consequence was that Palestinian olive oil had become more and more internationally uncompetitive. If anything, the loss of traditional marketing arrangements with the Jordanian East Bank circa 1990 meant that continued surplus production had increasingly become a problem, rather than a sign of West Bank socioeconomic health. For the many complex, interconnected reasons explicated in this chapter, throughout much of the latter half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century West Bank Palestinian agriculture had become increasingly focused on olive culture; however, nationalist political motivations had begun to figure more prominently, complementing if not outweighing profit motives. These trends could be economically unsustainable in the long-term without external financial support from Palestinian remittances and from Arab states like Jordan and Kuwait.

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid.
CONCLUSION

Palestinians have never had a state to govern themselves. Much of the second half of the 20th century has been a struggle for such a state, through a wide variety of means, movements, ideologies, and strategies. To date, all have failed in their fundamental objective. From the perspective of state-centric nationhood, Palestinian nationalism is teleologically unfulfilled.

Much of modern Middle Eastern history is consumed with the stories of nations and nationalism, particularly in coping with the obstacles presented by European colonialism to various peoples’ aspirations for independence. Palestinian history has not been exceptional in many respects, as colonialism and imperialism remain the dominant paradigms for understanding the external conditions and obstacles to Palestinian nationalism.

This dissertation has neither been a study of elite Palestinian politics nor of Palestinian nationalism directly. It has instead been a critique of governmentality via a return to material history. The cultural turn in Middle East history has revealed all the ways that power operates, particularly discursively through ideological violence embodied in different forms of cultural expression. Outside of the academy, and even in many Anglo-American or Eurocentric disciplines, Orientalism and stereotyping of the mysterious, alluring, terrifying and terrorist-producing East still predominate. Because racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia and other forms of discriminatory, exclusionist ideologies remain politically powerful and relevant, the importance of the cultural turn in critically analyzing discourses remains vital. The aim of this dissertation has been to restore the material context of economic and structural factors to analyses of culture and politics — focusing on what Marxists would call
the base, in order to contextualize the superstructure. Prior to the cultural turn, political economy tended to ignore the superstructure as epiphenomenal. But perhaps the pendulum has swung too far the other way in reaction. Studying the superstructure without a firm understanding of the base — the structures underlying and mutually reinforcing discourses — risks missing how the two operate dialectically.

This work is thus situated in the tradition of political economy, used as a lens to study the changes to Palestinian society from below. How have ordinary Palestinians coped with the upheavals and ruptures of the 20th century, particularly the range of governments that have sought to surveil and rule them? How have Palestinians survived in their circumstances, constrained by a wide variety of actors and factors, both internal and external? What are the continuities and strengths of a society fractured and under siege, particularly at moments of vulnerability? What are the continuities underlying the transitions of political rule? To what extent can governments truly know and control the people they claim to govern?

In order to do so, I have sought to identify the gaps in state control for society to assert itself, and I have predominantly relied on a range of state archives by reading these archives against the grain. I have sought to question the extent to which a modern state can turn its nationals into self-disciplining individuals through its apparatuses, whether ideological or directly repressive. A bureaucracy is fundamentally concerned with self preservation, which typically means funding through budgeting and aggrandizing its successes and impacts. Bureaucracies, like academic disciplines, resort to statistical and quantitative expressions of knowledge at times of crises of authority. Therefore, throughout, I have sought to undermine the self-aggrandization of the state and its functionaries to show the ways that the state has failed in
these moments of crisis. Citizens have been forced to, in the absences or failures of states, govern themselves. This is part of the reason why the transition to modernity was identified by Michel Foucault with the movement from discipline as an external form of public spectacle to the creation of self-disciplining individuals, through what Louis Althusser called ideological state apparatuses like schools, as opposed to physically coercive repressive state apparatuses like the military, police, and other types of security services.

As a rule, the modern state must make self-governing, self-disciplining individuals in order to function effectively. Even the most authoritarian governments essentially rely on petty local leadership in the forms of party subcommittees, block captains, informants and the like. The reason why Palestinians have become such a significant case study is because a wide range of governments has sought to govern and discipline different groupings of Palestinians in a relatively short period of time. I am not arguing that Palestinians are not modern. Quite the contrary: they have been forced to become hyper-modern, perhaps even post modern, and articulate their interests and defend themselves as individuals against governments of various degrees of repressiveness. I have sought to extend the lessons of peasant and rural studies to society more broadly, to show the myriad ways that the masses can, to quote James C. Scott, “make an utter shambles of the policies devised by their would-be superiors in the capital” — whether that capital be Istanbul, London, Washington DC, Jerusalem, Amman, or Ramallah.

I have in the process sought to reconstruct the complexity and dynamism of the political economy of rural Palestinians, who have too often been absent even from the scholarly literature, let alone popular narratives that at best have reified and almost deified the fellahin (peasantry) in the abstract while rejecting or seeking to reform and reeducate the rural masses in practice.
whenever possible as embarrassing emblems of backwardness, irrationality, and ossified traditions. In the tradition of E.P. Thompson, I have sought to show the fundamental rationality of resistance through protest in order to protect one’s family’s and one’s own livelihood within the framework of the moral economy. And like the British Marxists and in the Marxist Humanist tradition, I have also sought to redeem rural Palestinians from the condescension of posterity. For as much as discourses of *sumud* have come to define Palestinians residing in historic Palestine, farming Palestinians have faced more than the condescension of class. By the nature of their living under Israeli rule, those Palestinians who stayed have endured suspicion and skepticism from fellow countrymen and others in the wider diaspora as potential traitors — the mirror image of discourses of betrayal directed at those who fled violence in fear of their and their relatives lives. Whichever choice Palestinians made in 1948 or 1967, to stay or go, one might feel shame or worse, particularly in the immediate aftermath.

As a result of my focus on a certain segment of Palestinian society — Palestinians in historic Palestine who participate in the olive sectors as producers and consumers — this dissertation is not strictly speaking a commodity history. I do not trace supply chains, because in most cases there are no formal chains, as those that exist are informal and untraceable from governmental documents. And to a large extent, the products I studied are not truly commoditized. Because olive trees routinely do not bear fully, olives in most years serve as a subsistence crop. The waves of globalization have not passed Palestinians in historic Palestine by, particularly in other economic sectors subjected more directly to the forces of foreign capital; but olive cultivation has remained surprisingly resilient in its form as a highly localized, idiosyncratic, familial enterprise.
Although government officials and development experts across the 20th century increasingly saw potential in the olive as a cash crop, particularly as its value has risen monetarily and nutritionally, Palestinian households have persisted in consuming their own olive products. Olive oil consumption levels are markedly higher in rural olive-producing areas and among lower-class Palestinians. While subsistence was key to grove expansion in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the question since the Mandate period became what to do with growing surpluses, especially as Palestinian investments in production led supply to outstrip domestic demand (which did not increase commensurately owing to political and economic changes that in turn shaped demographics, tastes, and uses of edible oils in the mid-to-late 20th century).

The fundamental strength and weakness of the Palestinian olive sector is that it has remained decentralized and unorganized. It is an organic creation of individuals, families, and only in rare cases collectives. Profit margins may be increasingly slim, but profits do not matter if one consumes what one makes. Standardization in grading and packaging does not matter if you can trust those who pick and process the olives. The precise percentage of acidity of the olive oil does not matter if one likes the taste.

This all may finally be changing in the post-Oslo period owing to the increasingly extensive interventions of non-governmental organizations and multinational or national development agencies. But these interventions tend to be highly localized, encouraging a collective here or a group of participating families in one village there. More importantly, one cannot and should not blame the EU and others for trying to connect consumers in the developed West to famers in rural villages of Jenin, whether for the simple benefit of the latter obtaining better prices, or for the more complex calculus of political solidarity. It simply should be pointed
out that expert interventions typically have unintended consequences. As with nearly any aspect of modernity, recognition of the tradeoffs is crucial. And as with anything related to Palestine, even seemingly innocuous questions related to olive consumption and olive oil commoditization are essentially political.

The olive sector has become one of the most significant components of the West Bank’s agricultural economy in many measures since 1967. The olive and olive tree have become so symbolically important to Palestinian nationalism in a relatively straightforward, linear relationship: the question of the future of the olive sector is integrally related to the political future of the Palestinian territories, particularly the question of whether a future state can be self-sufficient economically. These questions spiked around Oslo and have since declined in importance as Israel has sought to integrate the Palestinian territories while rejecting the Palestinian population. Perhaps the story of Palestinians in the Galilee in the 1950s and 1960s will only become more relevant to the Palestinians of the West Bank in the future, though it remains to be seen what kind of rights regime will be imposed on West Bankers and Gazans.

This dissertation has argued that regardless of who has sought to govern them, Palestinians have found remarkable spaces to assert their agency and resist adverse policies. This is true, I think, of citizens everywhere. The difference, again, is that Palestinians have never had a state of their own to govern themselves.

Chapter 1 addressed the changes to the broader political economy of rural Palestine in the late Ottoman period, as traditional subsistence agriculture became tied into global networks of commodities. Unlike neighboring Egypt or Lebanon, Palestine avoided a monoculture and large-scale consolidation of landholdings in much of the hills where the vast majority of the population
lived. The coasts and the cities were a different case entirely. The urban bias of late Ottoman history has given a misleading impression of widespread social change and crisis at moments of vulnerability like the First World War. Palestinian villagers remained largely self-sufficient and resilient, though not hidebound. Allegations of peasant “deforestation” of Palestine and Ottoman abuse of the land, though based on grains of truth, were exaggerated to serve modernist colonialist discourses that became divorced from the material reality of the impact on the ground. Apocalyptic assessments were driven instead by politics and policies tied to the British aspirations for colonial control and the British-supported Zionist movement for a Jewish national home. Additionally, the use of trees as firewood was decontextualized from the fuel famine conditions resulting from the Entente blockade. The coppicing of fruit trees like the olive in particular was tied to the reach and the need of the railways.

Chapter 2 traced the continuities between late Ottoman and early British rule. Although British colonial government was rhetorically based on its rupture with the incompetency, decadence, and wanton abuses of the capricious Ottomans and their ignorant peasant subjects, the actual methods and instruments of British rule under the Mandate were essentially the same. The Mandate functioned under the logic of colonialism on the cheap, such that interventions were always limited by the budget, since Palestine was supposed to subsidize in full the costs of its administration. After moments of violence, such as the revolt of 1929, British officialdom conducted investigations that recognized the numerous failures to help rural agriculturalists especially in light of the dislocations caused by other policies, such as encouraging Zionist settlement. Yet concrete initiatives in response were typically short lived or simply never implemented due to lack of funding.
Chapter 3 focused on the high watermark of British control of the Mandate economy, which came during the Palestinian political quietism during World War II, bookended by moments of open revolt: the 1936-1939 rural revolt, and the 1947-1949 civil war. Even at its peak, the gaps in British colonial control left significant spaces for resistance.

Chapter 4 analyzed the changing relationship between an unwanted and undesirable population, the “Arab”-majority Western Galilee, and the bureaucrats of the newly formed Israeli state. Like the British before them, the Israelis depended on local intermediaries for their knowledge. The relationship between olive producers and the relevant government authorities gradually evolved from one of outright hostility and constant suspicion to one of cautious cooperation. Nevertheless, discrimination in the way that the state dealt with the claims and needs of the Palestinian olive sector, in contrast to other sectors of the agricultural economy, illustrates the ceiling placed on Palestinian aspirations and standing in a state explicitly based on exclusivist, exclusionist grounds.

Chapter 5 explored the extension of Jordanian sovereignty to the West Bank and the attempts of villages near the armistice lines to cope with the traumas of 1948. While the Jordanian state privileged the provision of services in (East) Jerusalem, much of the rest of the West Bank was effectively left to its own devices. Despite received images of stagnation and de-development, West Bankers exploited this benign neglect to continue what they had been doing: expand olive production.

A number of continuities in terms of staff and policies from the late Mandate period benefited the agricultural sector of the West Bank, which continued to develop in ways that were not recognized until the Israeli administration annexed their staff and attempted to reduce the
footprint (and cost) of its occupation by relying on local employees of the sub-district agricultural directorates, which emerged as powerful forces in the post-1967 political vacuum as Jordan and the PLO (and Israel) fought over the offices of the mayors throughout the 1970s and 1980s as proxies for political control. Both Jordan and Israel had significant common interests in maintaining the status quo, though changes on the ground, particularly by non-state actors, undermined these policies nearly from the beginning, with these changes becoming especially apparent during the second decade of Israeli occupation.

Chapter 6 analyzed the changing, increasingly politicized nature of olive planting under occupation, particularly in light of the emergence of new West Bank Palestinian educational and research institutions such as universities and the Rural Research Centre under Hisham Awartani. Agricultural development plans for the East Bank simultaneously began to contradict and undermine the initial policy of Israeli-Jordanian collaboration to maintain the status quo through the “Open Bridges” policy, which sought to keep the West Bank export economy largely oriented toward Jordan in the initial decades of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank (1967-1987). As olive production exploded in the East Bank, olive planting slowed considerably in the West Bank under Israeli occupation — the rate cut in half — as costs rose exponentially and Palestinian investment (funded increasingly by wage labor in Israel and the Gulf) went instead into modernizing nurseries and above all olive oil presses. By the time of the First Intifada and Jordan’s renunciation of claims to the West Bank in the late 1980s, the East Bank was self-sufficient in olive oil production, and thereafter the West Bank lost its primary export market that had reliably absorbed Palestinian surpluses in good years. The West Bank olive economy had
expanded production, improved quality, and increased efficiency — but with no viable outlets, thanks to uncompetitive costs.

The project’s overall periodization has sought to highlight the underlying continuities in Palestinian society and the agricultural economy, rather than reinforce assumptions of immediate and total ruptures with changes in administration. Throughout, I have emphasized the agency of ordinary Palestinians and their voices wherever possible, while addressing the complex relationships between state and society under the four different governments that sought to rule historic Palestine in the 20th century: Ottoman, British, Israeli, and Jordanian.

Therefore it is important to emphasize that the credit for the expansion of Palestinian olive cultivation is not due to any of the governments that have sought to rule the land, but due almost solely to individual or family initiatives of ordinary Palestinians, especially in the north and central West Bank. The problem, however, is that thanks to the investments by Palestinians in olive production, the average annual surplus is far more than can be consumed domestically, and rising costs under Israeli occupation have made Palestinian olive oil uncompetitive globally. The West Bank’s traditional external markets, neighboring Arab countries, all are either self-sufficient or prefer to import cheaper olive oil from Southern Europe or North Africa. The increasing political importance of the olive tree as a symbol of sumud (steadfastness) and as a practical marker to defend land (by defining it as cultivated) from Israeli confiscation or settlement grew precisely as the profitability of the Palestinian olive sector sharply declined in the late 1970s and early 1980s, right before West Bankers began to take the lead in the political leadership of the Palestinian nationalist movement through the First Intifada. Ultimately, of course, the external leadership reasserted control through the Oslo process, but Palestinian olive
culture has only continued to expand on the ground, despite its declining economic profitability and diminished contribution to income in recent decades.

By tracing the changes to the Palestinian political and moral economy centered around olive culture, this dissertation has documented the history of how and why Palestinians expanded the cultivation of the olive tree and the production of olive-derived commodities in the villages of the Galilee and the West Bank. As a result of this resilience and the previously overlooked continuities in rural Palestinian society, the nationalist cultural symbolism of the olive and the olive tree have developed in parallel, manifesting in a variety of artistic and literary forms including folk songs, graffiti, literature, poetry, and political posters, which have been deftly analyzed by Carol Bardenstein and Anne Meneley, among others. My contribution has been to use the methods of social history to link the changes in the Palestinian rural, agricultural moral and political economy to these contemporary cultural and literary studies.

My preliminary hypothesis had been that the olive had emerged as the central symbol of Palestinian nationalism in response to changing political, social, and economic conditions on the ground: specifically, that its symbolic importance had grown as its material significance had declined — as Palestine modernized across the 20th century, as Palestinians became more educated and urbanized while moving away from rural agriculture, as the Palestinian peasant become more nationalist signifier than social fact, and as the economic contribution of agriculture declined in general.

In examining the longer history, which confirms many of these longer-term trends, I in fact found the opposite relationship that I had expected between the material and symbolic
importance of olive culture. Despite increasing education levels, urbanization, and declining levels of income from agriculture, the material significance of olive culture grew immensely across the 20th century — especially in the West Bank. The increased political, cultural, and symbolic importance of Palestinian olives is therefore not inversely, but directly related to its economic significance. Palestinians kept planting olive orchards throughout the 20th century, expanding olive orchards in the Galilee and the West Bank considerably throughout, despite economic hardships and adverse political events and detrimental governmental policies.

This expansion of Palestinian olive culture owes in large part to the adaptations of Palestinian families to changing political and socioeconomic circumstances, and to the unique suitability of the olive to the geography of Palestinian hill country. The olive tree is rainfed (bʿali) and farmed extensively; unlike other forms of farming, the demands on farming families in terms of annual cash investment and time are minimal to none once an orchard is established. As a result of its rainfed nature in particular, the olive tree is well suited to the environment, where water is increasingly in short supply, and the olive tree can help to preserve soil both with its roots itself and by promoting terracing by farmers on the hillsides. Earlier Orientalist critiques by missionaries and colonial officials harped upon its irregular shape and its failure to give shade, while later developmentalist critiques by British bureaucrats, Zionist agronomists, and even some Arab and Palestinian agricultural engineers criticized its unsuitability to intensive agriculture through the ineffectiveness or inapplicability of irrigation, mechanization, and fertilization. As costs of plowing and picking have risen, unpaid familial labor, particularly of nonworkforce women, children, and older men, has become essential to its continuation, as a type of adaptive mechanism. While marketing is rudimentary, Palestinian olive oil as a
commodity has largely retained its roots in subsistence production, contributing primarily in the form of self-sufficient consumption by the producers themselves. Olive oil is nutritionally rich and has remained a staple of local diets, though cheaper but less nutritious edible oils have made significant inroads, particularly for frying. Local infrastructure for processing in the form of advanced, modern olive oil presses is well established. Palestinian popular culture contributes to a virtuous cycle, reinforcing the material significance of olive cultivation.

Throughout, this dissertation has shown how the rural masses, whether as individuals or larger collectives, could shape or resist policies. In large part, the decisions by governments to change policy or cease implementation entirely have rested on costs. It has always been too expensive to centralize or nationalize the Palestinian olive sector. But resistance has major costs for those who resist as well. Palestinians, as one of the archetypical stateless peoples of the 20th century, have often been both rhetorically privileged and concretely vulnerable.

Within the subject of Palestinian olive culture in the 20th century, a number of important areas for future research remain. Once the archives are declassified, future historians will hopefully have a wealth of documents to read on the post-Oslo period beginning in the mid 1990s, which contemporary analysis regarded as the NGOization of civil society, resulting in its colonization and dependency on foreign aid and Western backers. I have begun some of this work myself, thanks to obtaining publications resulting from the statistical-gathering efforts of the Palestinian Authority through the Ministry of Agriculture, but the statistics lack accompanying correspondence to enrich and contextualize these snapshots. The interactions between the PA (or the PNA or the State of Palestine, as it has variously declared itself), the
factions of the Palestinian National Movement, the NGOs, and the preexisting bureaucratic infrastructure in the form of the agricultural directorates established by the Jordanians and continued by the Israelis require close examination in particular. I also hope that once the Israel State Archive is again accessible to researchers, and their monumental declassification backlog is overcome, that historians can assess what has happened after 1967 to Palestinian citizens of Israel, through the lens of the olive cultivators among them. My sense is that they continued to leverage their growing familiarity with Israeli institutions to expand the pickled olive sector with some state capital investment; however, the significance of agriculture overall, like the area of land under olives in particular, continued to dwindle as alternative uses for the property and for people’s time became more and more lucrative — and thus the opportunity costs rose too high to ignore, particularly with the Israeli economic crises of the late 1970s and 1980s. The story of the explosion of East Bank Jordanian olive cultivation after 1967 remains to be told as well, which I suspect is the useful exploitation by the Hashemite Monarchy of the UN World Food Programme to coopt agriculturally minded subjects.

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1 For a sociological examination of the continued exclusion of and discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel, and a well-defined typology of legalized forms of overt segregation and tacitly condoned forms of veiled segregation in the housing, land, and real estate sectors in the period following the abolition of the military government in 1966, see Gershon Shafir, “From overt to veiled segregation: Israel’s Palestinian Arab citizens in the Galilee,” International Journal of Middle East Studies 50:1 (February 2018), 1-22. Shafir argues for a shift from overt (parallel to the Jim Crow regime in the American South) to veiled segregation during the hopeful Oslo period (defined roughly as 1995-2000), thanks to activist judicial rulings by the Israeli High Court of Justice. As sources, he largely uses the reports of NGOs and multinational organizations in the place of inaccessible archival documents. The study mainly focuses on Jewish Israeli strategies of control and exclusion of the Palestinian Arab minority, though it touches in passing on some examples of Palestinian responses, strategies of evasion, and resistance at points (such as by moving from underfunded and overcrowded villages to the anonymity of urban spaces).
The major unanswered question is when precisely olive cultivation became politicized in the West Bank. I think that the Israeli occupation, the advent of the settler movement, the establishment of West Bank universities and student mobilization along factional lines provided the major impetuses some time in the 1970s. But more research, particularly by oral historians or anthropologists inclined toward ethnographic fieldwork, is needed to document the voices of activists and organizers of planting efforts to establish the precise chain of events that began the shift in motivations for planting. This sea change, in turn, raised a number of questions that remain pressing today: to what extent and for how long can political or cultural motivations overcome economic obstacles? As a result of the politicization of planting, the olive sector of the West Bank functions in many ways as not only a proxy for Palestinian wellbeing, but as a microcosm of the unintended consequences of Palestinian independence and development in the occupied territories. With increasing expertise and education have come increasing costs, making local ventures economically unsustainable, with external political solidarity as temporary succor. Can Palestinian economic nationalism be viable without external financial support?

Based on the example of the Gulf Crisis in the early 1990s, the answer seems to me to be no, except in the short term and under exceptional conditions of solidarity and mobilization. Even when those conditions were present, such as during the First Intifada, the disruption of external support in conjunction with Israeli measures finally ended mass mobilization. Israeli repression had been insufficient on its own, until Arafat led the PLO to take a disastrous diplomatic stance seemingly in support of Saddam Hussein’s invasion and occupation of Kuwait. Kuwait had long been one of the more significant Arab donor states to Palestinian institutions in the territories; Gulf solidarity and scapegoating led to the expulsion of Palestinian workers.
(particularly from Kuwait in 1991-1992) and the disruption of diaspora remittances, resulting in economic crisis in the Palestinian territories in combination with Israeli closures and restrictions on movement, which eventually led to a long-term change in the Israeli-Palestinian labor market with the substitution of foreign guest workers in place of Palestinian day laborers. The situation likewise led in a roundabout way to the external PLO leadership accepting the terms of the Oslo Accords, leading to the current status quo, which began to deteriorate as soon as Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated and the Clinton Administration deluded itself into thinking that the U.S. could serve as a neutral, honest broker.

The best long-term scenario for Palestinian olive culture involves multinational technical cooperation, particularly with the help of larger olive-cultivating Mediterranean countries such as Tunisia or Algeria, to spur consolidation and commercialization. But while Palestinians remain under Israeli occupation, smaller scale networks of solidarity among customers and donors in Europe and North America appear to be the upper limit of transnational support: enough to sustain cultivation in select villages, but insufficient to alter the socioeconomic structures of the occupied Palestinian territories directly. Unless a political settlement is reached, the current de facto arrangements will continue to entrench themselves.
Archives

Archives Nationales — Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, France (ANF)

Birzeit University Library — Birzeit, West Bank, Palestine (BZU)

Central Zionist Archive — Jerusalem, Israel (CZA)

Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes — Nantes, France (CADN)

Department of the National Library — Amman, Jordan (DNL)

Department of Statistics Archival Library — Amman, Jordan (JDS)

Hashemite Hall, University of Jordan Library — Amman, Jordan (HH UJL)

Israel State Archive — Jerusalem, Israel (ISA)

Jerusalem City (Municipal) Archive — Jerusalem, Israel (JCMA)

Manuscript Division, Library of Congress — Washington DC, USA (MD LOC)

Ministre des Affaires Etrangères — La Courneuve, France (MAE)

Nablus Municipal Archive — Nablus, West Bank, Palestine (NMA)

an-Najah National University Library — Nablus, West Bank, Palestine (NNU)

National Archives and Records Administration — College Park MD, USA (NARA)

National Library of Israel — Jerusalem, Israel (NLI)

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