



Government and Society in Rural Palestine, 1920-1948 (Modern Middle East (Paperback))

Ylana Miller

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In 1947, Arabs made up two-thirds of the population of Palestine, and they owned most of its cultivable land. Why then, did they "lose" their homes and land to a relatively small Jewish community just emerging from the shocks of World War II? Did the Palestinians "lose" their homeland because they were backward, primitive, and reactionary? Or was Israel the product of persistent victimization of Palestinian Arabs by an imperialist power which supported Zionist colonization? Did the Palestinians sell each other out? Or were they helpless sufferers in the face of a sophisticated enemy with endless resources?

Too often discussions of Palestine are couched in such rhetorical language, based on the assumption that either Jews or Arabs are morally to blame for historical realities. This study seeks to go beyond attributions of responsibility to investigate the concrete conditions which determined and limited Palestinian Arab actions between 1920 and 1948. It was during that period, while Great Britain governed the area under a League of Nations mandate, that Palestine both emerged and disappeared as a modern political entity.

Many studies of Palestinian Arab nationalism have looked to Zionism as the primary agent of change in the region. Miller assumes the impact of Jewish settlement but goes beyond these earlier studies to explore the way in which policies of the Palestine government affected the daily lives of villagers—the majority of the population—and their understanding of the changes occurring around them. In this way, what emerges is a detailed analysis of the influence, for good or ill, that government policy had on village community life.

Based largely on archival sources never before used, this work allows the reader to gain a deeper appreciation of the internal life of the rural community, which had previously received relatively little attention. Understanding the experiences of Palestinians before 1948 helps us to comprehend immeasurably better the continuity of movements for Palestinian statehood as well as the continuing tensions and problems on the West Bank today.

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