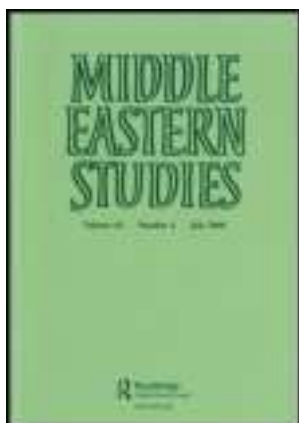


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### Land of Progress. Palestine in the Age of Colonial Development, 1905–1948

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Ballobar was a Spanish nationalist, he greeted with relief the British occupation of Jerusalem by Christmas 1917, if only to bring much-needed security to the inhabitants of that city. It is not clear why Mazza, in his introduction, concludes that Ballobar was ‘not a good observer’ (p.23). Judging from the diary he was fair and detailed in his observations, unlike the unfortunate Turjman.

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### **Land of Progress. Palestine in the Age of Colonial Development, 1905–1948**

Jacob Norris

*Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. xii + 241. £65.00 (hardback) ISBN 978-0-19-966936-3*

*Land of Progress* by Jacob Norris will seemingly spark a strong academic debate as the author is challenging the way Palestine was seen during the British Mandate, placing the region in a wider historical context of empire and colonialism. Reversing the view of Palestine as a ‘Promised Land’, Norris suggests that it turned into a land of progress across the late Ottoman era and the Mandate period. Relying on an alternative chronological approach, as suggested by some recent scholarship, the author presents two case studies – Haifa and the Dead Sea – in order to show that colonial development, interested more in infrastructures than welfare, was a key feature of British policy in Palestine. One of the novelties of this work is that Norris argues that the late Ottoman state too pursued similar policies of colonial development, as proved by the case studies presented. The British, once in control of Palestine, prioritized infrastructural projects, but what transpires from Norris’s analyses is that many of those projects were based on earlier Ottoman enterprises. The consistent argument, which is well proven throughout a very detailed analysis of the sources presented, is that Palestine should be viewed as part of the British global empire. If on one hand some works have been dedicated to the economic divisions that grew between Arabs and Zionists during the Mandate, Norris is breaking ground looking at the eagerness of the various social classes to participate in the development brought by the British. A second major point discussed by the author is in relation to British support for Zionism. Norris argues that ‘new imperialists’ who came to occupy prominent positions during the war saw Zionism as a tool for colonial expansion: sole agents of development. The legacies of this choice are clearly discussed in the conclusion: in 1948 the newly created state of Israel adopted the same vocabulary of development. Interestingly, though the Palestine Mandate ended in failure, the British in the aftermath of the war of 1948 sought to create a ‘free port’ in Haifa, showing that colonial development was hard to dismiss.

Divided into five chapters, this elegantly written book starts by discussing Ottoman colonial development. A topic seldom discussed in Ottoman studies, Norris exposes the false British claims of a new era at the Dead Sea and Haifa as these places

were already the focus of Ottoman modernization. This chapter provides an overview of Ottoman colonial development in the Eastern Mediterranean and the enthusiastic reception by local politicians, merchants and intellectuals, particularly after the revolution of 1908. The discussion of Haifa as an emergent Ottoman port city, and the early interest in the potential for mineral extraction from the Dead Sea, shows that British policies were of continuity rather than rupture. However, what really transpires from this chapter is the shared Jewish–Arab endeavour to modernize: the discourse of progress was stronger than ethno-national standpoints. In the following chapter, Norris shows how the war changed the political discourse and introduced ethno-national–religious lines of division, but at the same time the colonial development projects remained the same. In this cutting-edge chapter the author looks at the younger generation of British imperialists through their mouthpiece, *The Round Table*. Norris is able to show with convincing evidence the link between British post-war enterprises in Palestine and a long history of Jews acting as agents of colonial development. Much has been written in relation to the Balfour Declaration, but very little about the wider context and how Zionists fitted the model of colonial development. Many new imperialists saw Palestine as a colonial laboratory that could have been successful only through the work of European Zionists. Jews were seen as the archetype of ‘middleman minority’ and a civilizing element; though relations between the Zionists and the British fluctuated throughout the three decades of British rule, the legal structure of the Mandate unequivocally favoured the Jews over local Palestinians.

Turning attention to the case studies, chapter three delves into the discussion of Haifa, the emerging port city that under the British was meant to become the gateway to the British Middle East. Haifa’s status as a centre of communications intensified after 1905 when a branch of the Hejaz Railway connected the city to Dera’a, hence to the rest of Ottoman Syria. The British, however, already since the beginning of the war, with the outcomes of the De Bunsen Committee, wanted to make Haifa the coastal headquarters in the region. British plans however were not limited to making Haifa a port city; it was seen as a doorway to the rest of the British-controlled Middle East: raw materials and oil linked Haifa with Iraq and the rest of the British Empire. In the inter-war period both railways and air travel were developed, at the cost of alienating some local population, due to land requisitions. These enterprises could not be funded with governmental money, as its commitment was reduced to a minimum; therefore, when capital was required it was the Zionist who filled the gap. Jewish industries were established in the city. Many, like Nesher, employed cheap Arab labour; however this was contrary to the Zionist ideology. Telling a forgotten history, Norris shows how Zionists began recruiting Jews to be employed as stevedores at the Haifa Harbour. In the 1920s a small community of Sephardi Jews from Salonika moved to Haifa, where an integrated – for a short while – Jewish–Arab economy was growing. Salonikan Jews competed with Arab workers, in time breaking Arab dominance of the labour force at the docks. This is not a successful story of a migrant community; in fact their ‘victory’ over the Arabs came to a price, as they agreed to work for lower salaries, even lower than the local Palestinians. In the end both communities lost. The British not only developed the port and the docks but also worked towards the development of a ‘downtown’ at the cost of demolishing many Arab properties. Kingsway became a magnet for both Jewish and

Arab workers; however the development of the port and the city centre, as planned by the British, created an underclass of Arab workers that eventually came to lead the Arab revolt in the late 1930s.

In chapter four, Norris presents a relatively unknown case study: the exploitation of the Dead Sea. If on one hand the Dead Sea was for the most part associated with biblical stories, by the nineteenth century it was seen by westerners as an object of study but also a potential source of wealth. The discovery of potash – an element largely required for agricultural purposes – and a method of extraction invented by the Russian Jew Novomeysky indicated that the Dead Sea was meant to be economically exploited through large investments in infrastructure. It was during the Second World War that the real value of the Dead Sea came to fruition when potash and bromine produced in Germany and France were no longer available to the British. The development of the industrial infrastructure around the Dead Sea was for the most part a British–Zionist enterprise that denied the Arabs the opportunity to develop their own businesses. The last chapter discusses Arab reactions to British colonial development. In the inter-war period Palestinians not only fought against Zionism but also confronted British imperialism in a variety of ways. There is plenty of literature discussing Haifa as a centre of Palestinian resistance against British rule, however, much less, if anything, has been written in relation to the Dead Sea. As Haifa experienced a radical form of colonial development, Arabs, who were not given the same opportunities as Jews, found themselves excluded from the benefits of this development. Following an economic downturn in 1935, strikes and violence were used by Arabs to protest against the British; however, despite a short period of calm, violence broke out again when the Peel Commission revealed its partition plan which would leave Haifa in British hands. Arabs were not only struggling with Zionists but also with British policies of development. The less studied Dead Sea suggests that there were tensions there as well. Though official sources do not discuss any particular incident, it is clear from local Arab newspapers that Palestinians too were interested in the exploitation of the natural resources. Articles focused on the exclusion of Arabs, as the management was only a British–Zionist affair: in the words of the author, ‘it was European Jews who had been earmarked’ by the British (p.196). Both sites, Haifa and the Dead Sea, also played a major role in the war for Palestine in 1948. Norris presents a brief discussion on the events of 1948 surrounding these two places: indeed this would be a good starting point for another research project.

In conclusion, Norris has found a new interpretative key that may change the ways in which we interpret the Mandate years. The land of progress vis-à-vis the promised land suggests that looking into the economic dynamics in transition from the late Ottoman era to the Mandate years, and possibly beyond, may give us a better understanding of how communities reacted to challenges and how they related to each other. Norris suggests that not much has been written about the impact of European investment on workers; his example of the Salonikan workers is indeed a good point to show how much work still needs to be carried out. For once the ethno-nationalist dimension of the Arab–Jewish conflict has been surpassed by a new vision, one that shows how the choices of the imperial power have radically reshaped a world defined at first by shared competition, to one defined by the hegemony of the chosen group

over the other. This is indeed a must-read book that may or may not convince the reader but will certainly instigate a healthy debate. If one criticism can be made of Norris, it is the extreme use of acronyms that can at times be confusing.

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### **Hezbollah and Hamas: A Comparative Study**

Joshua L. Gleis and Benedetta Berti

*Baltimore, MD, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012. Pp. 264, bibliography, index. ISBN 978-1-4422-1952-6 (hardback); 978-1-4422-1954-0 (electronic)*

This book by Joshua L. Gleis and Benedetta Berti conducts a comparative study of Hezbollah and Hamas. Thematically, the book is divided into three parts. The first two discuss each movement separately, on the basis of a mostly political historical survey of the spheres in which the movements participate, the backdrop against which they were formed, and their tactics and organizational structure.

The third part of the book, 'Israeli Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism', focuses on the shared vision of both movements, namely the destruction of the State of Israel. Despite the fact that the movements fail to present a serious existential threat to Israel, the political discourse they apply is designed to justify their political activity and military build-up, which have respectively positioned them as states-within-states in Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority.

A notable weakness in the argumentation of the book is that it relies by and large on secondary sources, most of which are in English. Other than references to the online editions of *Filastin al-Muslima*, primary sources in Arabic are sorely lacking. Considering that the political discourse of the Islamic movements is mostly internal and directed towards activists in the field, access to primary sources, interviews and publication of the movements is essential in order to fully understand Hamas and Hezbollah, let alone a comparative analysis of the two. It follows that the attempt to conduct a comparison between these two complex movements, which consist each of a political body, a military wing and a socio-religious component, falls well short of the literature about Hamas and Hezbollah it refers to.

The main contribution of the book is to be found in the third chapter, which discusses the *modus operandi* of Hamas and Hezbollah, and Israel's methods of countering both organizations. This chapter also outlines the lessons learned by both sides following the rounds of fighting and ongoing clashes between the parties. The sections dealing with tactics reaffirm the fact that Hezbollah has become the model for Arab resistance, one that Hamas has opted to replicate. The different geopolitical conditions which prevail in the Gaza Strip had prevented Hamas from fortifying its strongholds and developing striking capabilities akin to those of Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon. This chapter also reveals the predominance of western and Israeli viewpoints throughout the book.