

point to is the fact that most of the cultivable land was held by peasants.<sup>117</sup> In Palestine, as in all agricultural societies, land obviously is the primary source of livelihood, and thus the peasants' tenacity in holding on to it. This explains the fact that throughout the period preceding WWI, most of the land was acquired from large landowners, local and absentee, foreign institutes such as churches, and from the government, with the first category the source of most land. Nonetheless, as Owen writes, "Whatever its legal ownership, the land in question had almost invariably been cultivated by peasants and seminomads who had either to be evicted or to be employed by the new colonists as laborers."<sup>118</sup>

The impact of the initial Jewish European settlement on the Palestinian society and economy is dealt with in the conclusion in the context of the overall changes beginning around the mid-nineteenth century.

#### 2.4 Conclusion

It is obvious from the above outline, that Palestine, during the 1850s-1914 period, underwent a relatively substantial economic growth, which is indicated both by the population growth and the quantitative increase in the three sectors. As already noted, what are not clear, given the lack of complete data, are the relative changes in the structure of production or the relative distribution of the population among the three sectors.

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<sup>117</sup>The extent of large land holdings and its relationship to land sales are discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>118</sup>Owen, *Middle East*, 270.