

moneylender/landlord to keep him on the land. Other peasants who retained their rights in land would end up being deeper in debt when conditions got bad. It was also the case that small peasants benefited from the Western expansion of cultivation in the nineteenth century as discussed in Chapter 2, and debt was not as great as during the Mandate period. During the latter period, the intensive spread of market relations including the commoditization of land gave a new meaning to debt. It became more profitable to acquire land from indebted peasants while it became harder for the latter to hold on to it. The loss of land or access to it by small peasants was evidenced in the continued acquisitions of land by European Jewish settlers and the increased concentration of Arab holdings.

In the process of the spread of market relations and the commoditization of land, government policies and European acquisition of land played critical roles. Beside its taxation policy, the government carried out a drive to register land in individual holdings, thus playing a role in undermining the communal *musha'a* and at the same time enlarging the potential market for land, while making it easier for transactions.

The European settler acquisition of land had two direct effects: It increased the pressure on land at a time of substantial population growth and the eviction of cultivators when the latter were tenants. Equally important, given their strong demand for land, was their instrumental role in intensifying the commoditization of land.