

public land that was subject to state disposition from the much larger realm of miri. In the abstract sense, miri land continued to designate the patrimony of the community of (Islamic) believers, represented by the seat of the ruler.

The Land Settlement Act of 1932 (taswiya), by which plots were privately registered on the basis of accurate cadastral surveys, represented a turning point in the consolidation of private property rights in Palestine. Its chief consequence, and probably its objective from the British view, was to facilitate the transfer of land transactions from Arab to Jewish control in coastal Palestine during the 1930s and 1940s.

The process of land registration was significant from another perspective. As the commoditization of landed properties proceeded, and disputes over transferred and inherited plots became a major pre-occupation of the courts, it became crucial that a proper system be established for the delineation of land boundaries. During Jordanian rule over the West Bank, land registration settlements were undertaken methodically, so that - by 1967 - about 40% of the total area was surveyed, and another 10% was in progress when the June War took place (cf. Map 9:1, in Chapter 9). One of the main land regulations introduced by Israel after the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza strip, was Military Order 291 by which all Land Settlement surveys in progress were cancelled, including the ratification of title deeds in areas such as Bitunya, where the survey was already completed (Shehadeh, 1981:6). That left about one-fourth of the total land area in the West Bank (1,530,000 dunums) without registration, and therefore without title deeds whatsoever.

Utilizing the ambiguity inherent in the category of miri land, and the legal vacuum emanating from the non-registration of village lands, the successive Military Governments of the West Bank (the Civil Administration after 1981), re-interpreted the Land Code for the purpose of expropriating