

1885, and 2,579 pages in three volumes in 1894. Agents—professional or otherwise—needed to be conversant with, at the very least, the 1872 Ballot Act, the 1854 and 1883 Corrupt Practices Acts, the two minor amending Acts of 1885 and 1895, and around 30 case laws by 1895. For voter registration, agents also required knowledge of a further 188 acts or part-acts of Parliament, more than sixty registration forms, and, by 1897, around 600 registration appeals. Election law, however, was just the one part of the agents' business. Agents were also responsible for the management of local elections and party organization, the organization of political education and soirees, and the enlisting of volunteers. The need for the latter was also stimulated by the 1883 Corrupt Practices Act, which imposed strict spending limits on candidates, introduced stringent punishments for breaches, and outlawed paid canvassers (who had been brazenly used as a cover for bribery in the 1880 election). Some agents were also expected to be good speakers.

Who were the agents? It depends where one looks. In the strongest section of the book, Rix draws upon biographical information of 199 agents to delve into their social, educational, and occupational backgrounds and their professional aspirations. Rix's collective biography is a dense wealth of information that is worth reading through more than once. What emerges strongly is the sheer variety. Although many agents had legal training, and others were drawn from the professions, a significant number came from working-class backgrounds. Despite this diversity, Rix identifies several commonalities, such as their improving status, geographical mobility, and rootedness in their communities. Although Rix weaves into her narrative many short pieces of biographical information, the collective biography would have been strengthened if a handful of more detailed biographies were included.

A great strength of the book is Rix's use of the agents to reassess broader themes of British political culture. In chapters 4 and 5, for example, Rix argues that the perceived cultural differences between the two parties have been overstated. The prevailing stereotypes are that the Liberals were pious kill-joys and the Tories were narrowly concerned with the "pleasures of the people." Rix shows that Liberal agents worked hard to counter the Liberal's sober image and that Tory agents engaged in political education. In the last two chapters of the book, however, we begin to lose sight of the agents. Chapter 6 considers candidate selection, which was, we are told, "not an area where agents played a major part" (173), and the final chapter is largely taken up with a discussion of electoral literature. These chapters are not without insight, but they fit poorly with the book's otherwise tight focus on agents. Indeed, they suggest that a more comprehensive history could have been written. These quibbles aside, this is an excellent book. It is the authority on electoral agents, a compelling history of electoral culture, and a demonstration of the rich rewards of studying the backroom mediators of political change.

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SHERENE SEIKALY. *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016. Pp. 258. \$21.89 (cloth).  
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The central theme of Sherene Seikaly's *Men of Capital* is Palestinian society in Mandatory Palestine. The key argument of the book is encapsulated in its final two paragraphs:

In the 1930s and the 1940s in Palestine, capital accumulation and the *nahda* project went hand in hand. We should remember that these Palestinians. . . did not live their world as shadows of the Jewish settler or the British colonial officer. Their realities were also part of the broader Arab project.

But it is time that we attend to this liberal age, with its utopian visions and its fashionable ideas, with more scrutiny . . . if we look to the foundational structure of the *nahda* as contingent on the maintenance of this exclusion and inequality, we may be able to stop eulogizing it just long enough to recognize that it never died. (178)

The term *nahda* (or *Al-Nahda*, as it is used elsewhere) is central to Seikaly's argument. Conventionally, it is used to refer to an intellectual "awakening" or "renaissance" in Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria, and other regions under Ottoman rule. Seikaly contends that Arab society in Palestine was also part of the *nahda* in the Middle East. The argument serves to support the three underlying aims of the book: it endeavors to debunk what has been at times a backward view regarding Palestinian society, it seeks to provide evidence for the existence of a distinct commercial liberal elite—a civil society—within the Palestinian society, and it foregrounds early signs of national identity.

According to Seikaly, then, during the 1930s Arab society in Palestine experienced a period of economic and cultural *nahda*, which has been thus far "invisible" to scholars of Palestine: "One of the reasons men of capital in Palestine are difficult to understand today," explains Seikaly, "is because they occupied multiple universes of thought that are not immediately accessible to us" (19). Seikaly seeks to make the hitherto invisible, visible and to show that economic-cultural prosperity in Palestine was accompanied by the creation of sociopolitical features typical of liberal societies—features triggered in turn by the emergence of a Palestinian civil society with both a commercial sector and a proletariat.

Liberalism and commercial orientation, argues Seikaly, were not inconsistent with a national identity. The Palestinian men of capital developed a sense of social solidarity that can be interpreted as a nascent national identity, inspired by similar types of liberal-national *nahda* in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. The private interest of the economic-cultural elite was not perceived as antagonistic to Arab polity: "their conceptualization of national economy led them to the state as an implicit unit of analysis" (42). This association between markets and statehood was the foundation of what Seikaly calls "Arab liberalism" (51).

The end of the Palestinian *nahda* arrived with the onset of World War II and the British way of governing the economy in Palestine: "Paralysis, destruction, devastation, injustice, isolation, and conspiracy: these were the salient terms of the Palestinian economic lexicon in the 1940s. . . The British colonial government was behind the scenes, conferring recognition and intervening" (103). Cooperation between the British government and the Zionist political and economic organizations blocked the development and prosperity of Palestinian businesses and farms. The British government's various austerity and rationing measures repressed the Palestinian economy, while Jewish economic organizations, such as Tnuva, a food-production company owned by the Jewish Labor Organization, used their monopolistic power to shape markets to their favor (134).

A key scholarly point of reference of *Men of Capital* is Jacob Metzger's *The Divided Economy of Mandatory Palestine* (1998), to which Seikaly makes reference. Metzger's key argument is that the economy of Palestine was divided into two sectors, an Arab sector and a Jewish sector, which operated side by side despite having common political and territorial boundaries. The economy was divided by ethnic and national boundaries (Arab vs. Jewish), by structural economic boundaries (rural vs. urban), as well as by the respective socio-political institutional structures that characterized each of the two sectors. Metzger characterizes the Arab sector by terms that are often used by economic historians to characterize underdeveloped societies:

“traditional,” “peasant-based husbandry,” “household firms,” “poor school attendance,” and “low level of income per capita” (Metzer, 10).

*Men of Capital* is an attempt to dismiss Metzer’s thesis by using two methods: first, by presenting new archival evidence and second, by deconstructing the language and concepts by which mainstream economic historians measure nations. In that sense, *Men of Capital* is part of a growing body of literature that challenges the way Western observers—realists, liberals, Marxists, or developmentalists—perceive the Arab world.

*Men of Capital* does a very good job in shaking the prevailing conceptions regarding Palestinian society during the British Mandate. Seikaly presents new evidence that supports her argument regarding the existence of a liberal commercial elite and a nascent national identity emerging in the 1930s. However, the book stops short of debunking the prevailing paradigm. What is missing is convincing systematic comparative research assessing the *depth* and *scope* of the role of these Arab liberal ideas and practices within socioeconomic spaces in Arab society other than just within the commercial elite’s sphere.

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DAVID SWIFT. *For Class and Country: The Patriotic Left and the First World War*. Studies in Labour History 9. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017. Pp. 230. \$120.00 (cloth). doi: 10.1017/jbr.2018.50

This is an important contribution to the ever-fascinating subject of the history of the British left with particular attention to the development of the Labor party. It is also timely as we are in the process of marking the centenary of the First World War and how it affected British society. Swift argues convincingly for its significance not only in dramatically changing the nature of the British left but also for sowing the seeds for the post-Second World War welfare state. Through showing its patriotism, the working class greatly strengthened its position in British society, demonstrating its worthiness to be well treated. But Swift argues that this change was more sudden than I believe it was. As David Roberts and others argued many years ago, the British state has always had paradoxical elements. It might well appear to have become a *laissez-faire* society in the nineteenth century, but Benthamism and its influence led the state to play an increasing role in the shaping of society, as in the changes in the Poor Law in 1834 that certainly affected the working classes. Jumping forward to the period shortly before the war itself, 1906–10, the Liberal party, supposedly the party of *laissez-faire*, spearheaded by Lloyd George and Winston Churchill, moved ahead the interventionist state in its inauguration of old-age pensions. But Swift is undoubtedly correct that the exigencies of the First World War significantly changed the role of the state and laid important groundwork for the welfare state that was to come after the Second World War.

Before the war itself, Beatrice and Sidney Webb had advanced the idea that all the poor, not only the deserving poor, were entitled to help from the state. Although it is not a theme he explores, Swift almost seems to be arguing that the patriotism of the working class during the war itself demonstrated their entitlement to play a more central political role. In effect, the Labor party and the workers strengthened their status by being on both sides of the debate about the war. The more traditional story emphasized opposition to the war, particularly by some of the prominent figures on the left. Although his career suffered in the first instance because of his antiwar stand, ultimately Ramsey MacDonald was highly credited for having seen the tragic consequences of the war and having opposed British participation.