Governing Gaza

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PART ONE

Producing Bureaucratic Authority
The management of the modern office is based upon written documents ("the files"), which are preserved in their original or draft form. . . the body of officials actively engaged in a "public" office, along with the respective apparatus of material implements and the files, make up a "bureau."

Max Weber, Economy and Society

Filing, as Max Weber reminds us, is among the most quintessential features of modern government. Almost everyone is familiar with the need to gather and compile a huge amount of paper in order to "succeed" in seemingly minor encounters with governing authorities. Rule in Gaza has been no exception to this general condition. The British, of course, are notorious documenters, and it is no surprise that Mandate rule was file heavy. Building upon the scaffolding of Ottoman documentary production, the Mandate developed an expansive system of paperwork. The Egyptian administrators who took over in Gaza after the departure of the British were trained in government paper by years of British colonial rule, and in addition they had their own histories and concerns which led to a proliferation of documentation. Bureaucratic authority in each of these governments depended in significant part on the work of filing—work that was mundane, repetitive, and (to the extent possible) unexceptional.

The conventions of filing, its methods for information presentation and retention, are not particular to a given government or to any office within
that government. The generality of this technology of documentation, which can be found in both colonial and national governments, in offices both private and public, with a multiplicity of intentions and effects, has had specific importance in Gaza. Because it is so general in form, the governing authority produced in filing does not immediately (or necessarily) connect to the specificity of a regime. Files can be authoritative and can impart authority to the government that does the filing without conferring legitimacy on that government. Even as files are embedded in the particular conditions and governments where they work, and even as they also are shaped by those conditions, the mechanisms through which their authority is produced tend to obscure this specificity.

The practices of filing in Gaza evidence the condensed presence of multiple forces and administrative arrangements—the formation of Ottoman modernity, the practice of British colonialism, the struggles of nationalism, and the shifting of regional and international authority. Even as I focus on British and Egyptian practices, the very important Ottoman beginnings of this form of documentary authority must be acknowledged. Carter Findley has traced the emergence of what Foucault calls “disciplinary writing” in nineteenth-century Ottoman filing practices. His descriptions of the new centrality of uniformity and rationality in filing, as well as the increasing attention paid to the individual as the subject of files, illuminate Foucault’s argument that by lowering the threshold of knowledge, disciplinary writing was able to make description “a means of control and a method of domination.”

One of the ways filing contributes to governing authority is by defining a space and style of interaction among people, whether civil servants or members of the public. Filing delimits both the terrain of possibility and modes of objection. As it occupied an ever-larger place within the governmental field of the Mandate and then the Administration, filing became the ground on which confrontations and challenges to policy, behavior, and political arrangements took place as well as the medium through which programs were implemented and refined. To a certain extent, then, this was an authority of expansiveness, one that worked by occluding other alternatives.

Expansiveness alone cannot ensure the potency of paper, though. This potency relies just as much on the mechanisms of filing, on the system within which a file circulates. The authority of government files was self-consciously
connected to the uniformity and regularity of documents. Uniformity produced both familiarity—each document was recognizable—and grounds for judging authoritativeness—resemblance to other documents. Regularity helped manage the placement of documents within the broader network of filing, which was crucial to the stability of that network. As Foucault underscores, one of the features of disciplinary writing was the development of mechanisms to “integrate individual data into cumulative systems in such a way that they were not lost.” Each of these aspects of filing authority is largely self-referential, depending more on other files rather than external forces to define and enhance this authority.

If the power of files is dependent to a great degree on the system of filing, it is perhaps not surprising that one can most often study this authority only when files have been re-placed into another system, that of the archive. Archives themselves play an important role in the production and shaping of governmental authority, but this role is not identical to that of files. Both files and archives, though, are deeply concerned with temporal relations: collecting information in the present which will be available to the future as a record of the past. This chapter opens with a consideration of the relations among and distinctions between files and archives, highlighting their respective roles in the production of bureaucratic authority. Discussion then turns to the moments of filing itself, exploring the writing, compilation, and storage of files. In so doing, I draw on different types and circumstances of filing, in both the British Mandate and the Egyptian Administration. Tracing the filing process in its multiplicity illuminates the effectiveness and authority of files as well as the confrontations and conflicts that are an inherent part of the process.

Archives and Files: Disruption, Loss, and Accumulation

Because of their history of dispossession, Palestinians are acutely aware of the importance of having evidence of their past and proof of their claims about history. To this end, they have generally been scrupulous in their preservation of evidence of their lives and property before 1948. Many Palestinian families have the deed to their homes and lands, the keys to their house, their land registry documents, or some combination of the above. Discussion of ayyam al-balad (lit.: village days; fig.: pre-1948 period) often
includes an offer to produce these documents. At the same time, the conditions of Palestinian existence have also made archival accumulation difficult. Whether at the national level—evidenced in the Israeli seizure of documents from the Palestine Research Center in Beirut—or at the local level—as when the Gazan Civil Servants’ Association destroyed its own records in 1967 to avoid their being captured by Israel and used in its efforts to suppress Palestinian resistance to occupation—11—the archives of Palestinian history have been directly affected by the violence in Palestinian life.

Even under conditions far less fraught than those in Palestine, the production of archives always involves procedures of exclusion. Archives have conventions that allow entry to certain materials only; they deploy techniques that can render lived experiences almost unrecognizable; they demand conformities of form that can reshape documents. Archives themselves, that is (and not just the historians who use them), work “extractively” on the files of rule.12 Whatever else they do, they necessarily displace and disempower the documents that constitute them. The various processes of archiving files, whether through state-issued regulations concerning deposit of official papers, seizure in war, or individual extraction, remove them from their systems of practice. In the transformation from file to primary source, these documents are stripped of their authorizing location and operations, a process which lessens and sometimes destroys their original authority. For files to work for government, they need to resist extraction from the immediacy of their practice.

Before going too far into this consideration of how files work and how that work may be disrupted, it may be helpful to step back and define a file itself. In the most basic terms, a file is a compilation of documents that is part of a larger network of such compilations which relate both vertically and horizontally. Horizontal relations include the keeping of similar files (with the same subjects and numbers) in successive years and the keeping of the same type of file about multiple subjects (as, for example, in personnel files). Vertical relations include both differential scope of files (such as municipal files as compared to central government files) and hierarchical distinctions among producers of files (such as reports from low-level employees to their direct superiors as compared to correspondence among high-level appointees). In archives, all types of files are preserved, though these relations may not be.13
Whatever their power, as a technology of textual rule, files are notably mundane. Their concerns may be either trivial or weighty, but they are generally quotidian in their form. They are lowly texts, not often gracefully written or especially well formed. While those who write the documents of files take opportunities to reflect upon and critique the policies they pursue and the frame of government within which they operate, filing as a process does not encourage a bird’s-eye view of government. This kind of total reflection is left more to the archival stage, where files become part of history. Archives not only permit but encourage or demand the production of meaningful narratives of their producing states.\textsuperscript{14}

Unlike other kinds of documents, which may acquire authority through the status of their author, the elegance of their form, or the significance of their content, files are authoritative by virtue of their compilation. Files do not have clear lines of descent the way canonical texts might; the idea of the authoritative original does not play the same role.\textsuperscript{15} The accumulation and reiteration of mundane detail in files help produce facticity and potency. Furthermore, the mechanisms of filing, that is, their internal structure and their means of dispersal in a system that regulates people, places, and things, are crucial to the process of authorization. When files are archived, the bonds of this network are loosened, but the files do not become free floating. Rather, they are re-placed in the system of the archive, a system with its own conventions and demands that are effective in shaping their use.

The particular files that constitute the materials for this study have had distinct archival experiences.\textsuperscript{16} This book explores and relies upon many types of files, including administrative correspondence and official reports, personnel files, and records of police, \textit{waqf} (pious endowment) administration, municipal councils, and civic associations, all of which have distinctive conditions of production and retention.\textsuperscript{17} Not surprisingly, given the history of Gaza, assembling the archive of this project required engagement with several states and their institutions (including, Egypt, Israel, Great Britain, and the Palestinian Authority). Not being part of a nation-state, Gaza has no national archives. Because of the frequent wars and conflict, documents “belonging” to one state are often in the hands of another; Israel, for example, seized and holds both British and Egyptian records. Because Gaza had different administrative status from one period to the next, there is little
continuity in its documentary record (as one district among many during the British Mandate, Gaza was the subject of less specific attention than during the Egyptian Administration, when it was a distinct entity).

Many materials of Gaza are not in Gaza. The history of Mandate-era documents of Gaza, housed largely in the Israel State Archives, highlights the complications involved in archival collection. On the one hand, these documents are among the most regular archival materials available about Gaza. British mandatory officials both created a considerable amount of paper and formulated precise, comprehensive systems for archiving this paper. In these papers one finds classic archival conventions such as series a–z and files numbered sequentially and with clear referents and markers. Still, the unfortunate history of Palestine has had its impact on this archive as well. It was not supposed to be left behind when the British left Palestine. Apparently, the documents of the Palestine government were prepared for shipping back to Britain, but in the chaos that accompanied the departure something went wrong, and they never made it there. Most of the materials were lost, and those that were found were preserved in the archives of the new Israeli state.∞∫ As complicated as the history of these archival materials appears, this is the simplest collection in the documents of Gaza.

Consider Egyptian records housed in the Israel State Archives. These papers from a variety of bureaus within the administration were seized by the invading Israeli army in 1956 and 1967. These were active papers of government, and no doubt many of them would have been destroyed over time in the normal course of government business. And certainly those files saved would have been categorized according to Egyptian methods and guidelines about availability. Once in Israeli hands, this potential documentary trajectory was halted. The documents appear to have been kept in their entirety by the Israelis, though they have not been catalogued, organized, or, as it turned out, classified.∞Ω

Normal archival processes have not been applied to these materials, a condition which worked both to my advantage and disadvantage. Because the files were not closed, I was able to do research in these materials. However, the files had never been formally declassified, and concern was raised when another researcher requested permission to investigate “sensitive matters” in the Jordanian equivalent of the Egyptian papers. A decision was then
made to shut the files until such time as someone could examine each document and make a decision about whether to declassify it. Fortunately, I was able to photocopy large portions of the files before this happened. These records now lie in an in-between space, neither within the filing system that gave them authority nor re-sorted according to archival conventions. Investigating the authority of these, and all the files under consideration here, requires working back through the layers of their postwork histories to understand their systems of operation.

**Producing Files**

The moment of writing—the drafting of documents, the production of paper—lies at the core of the filing process. The conditions of document production were not identical during the British Mandate and the Egyptian Administration in Gaza, but during each both the content and the style of file writing were heavily regulated. Administrative writing during the Mandate often included translation (both cultural and linguistic) as a fundamental component. There were three official languages in Palestine during the Mandate, English, Arabic, and Hebrew, and document producers had different languages as their native tongue as well as differing levels of proficiency in the others. During the Egyptian Administration, the local population and the foreign administrators had a common language and cultural background. They shared as well the experience of British rule and thus were familiar with certain documentary forms.

The potential audience for files also varied between these periods. In addition to the possible public perusal of certain files, documents produced in Mandate Palestine had to consider three distinct governmental readers: local administrators, officials in Britain (in the Colonial or Foreign Office, say), and members of the League of Nations (under whose auspices Britain governed Palestine and to whom it had to report). The Egyptian Administration, on the other hand, did not proceed as a subsidiary of a larger body. The United Nations, the successor to the League of Nations, was a party to rule in Gaza, but as a partner (through UNRWA), not a supervisor. As these disparities remind us, even where files appear to be self-contained, to have only each other in mind, they are clearly also embedded in broader contexts and produced for a multiplicity of audiences.
The extent to which files were shaped by the conditions in which filing took place is highlighted in both the history and content of the filing regulations of the Chief Secretariat, the central executive office of the Mandate government. The extant records of these regulations are reiterations of the code of procedure destroyed in the bombing on July 22, 1946, of the Secretariat offices in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem by Jewish militants. In the aftermath of the bombing, which took the lives of more than ninety people and was part of a process that led eventually to Britain’s departure from Palestine, a series of office orders were issued restating the most important of these regulations.≤∞ As unfortunate as was the need for this restatement of office procedure, it did provide the opportunity to remind personnel of existing procedures they may have been lax in observing.≤≤ The orders also reflect the general character of filing practice.

As with filing more generally, the significance of these regulations did not lie in their grandeur. On the contrary, the office orders provide instructions for the most minute aspects of document drafting. One such regulation governed the form of dating in correspondence: "No mention should be made when quoting the previous correspondence to the current year. When reference is made to a Secretariat letter it is not necessary to quote the file number, e.g., a reference to Secretariat letter dated the 21st June 1947, if made in the year 1947, should simply be ‘my letter dated 21st June’ and not ‘my letter No. sf—of the 21st June 1947.’"23 The reasons for such ordered uniformity are not specified, though the regulation ensured that each letter, each document, produced by government would resemble every other structurally similar document. By providing grounds for determining documentary equivalency, the enforcement of uniformity in written style contributes to the consolidation of a largely self-referential authoritative field. That is, a document could be judged accurate and authoritative by virtue of its equivalence to other documents. This equivalence is not the resemblance of a copy to its original—in the case of these files there is no original—but a resemblance of each to each.≤∂ At the same time, the specific form of a document marked it as belonging to a singular bureaucratic realm: personnel files, for
example, were all like each other and distinct from police files or committee reports.

The extent to which the regulation of style was also a regulation of content is made clear in another order stipulated in the above notice. This order decreed that letters from government officials to private individuals should not include a distribution list, but “if it is specifically desirable to bring the fact of such distribution to the notice of the addressee an appropriate addition should be made to the text.” Like the date format regulation discussed above, this order is concerned with producing uniformity, but it does something else as well. By dictating style, the regulation also served to control content. It seems directly concerned with minimizing the quixotic effects of civil servants on the content of government papers. It would not be possible to categorically forbid notice of distribution, as such notice was occasionally desired. At the same time, to permit the use of distribution lists would increase the likelihood that a careless clerk might provide accidental, potentially embarrassing information. Through this precise, somewhat picky regulation, an effort appears to have been made to forestall human error.

This regulation and others like it were immediately concerned with the boundary between government and the public and attentive to the unintended effects that documents might produce in their readers. Other aspects of style management were focused more specifically on the internal life of the civil service, a life that, to be sure, always had permeable boundaries. The files of Palestine government correspondence, for instance, were organized to permit conversation among civil servants. They generally share the same basic format: letters, drafts, and legislation form the body, or folios, of the file, which opens with the minutes, a running commentary by various interested officials on the papers in the file. The folios of a file represent the formal discussion of policy, and expressions of disagreement tend to be polite. The minutes, on the other hand, were much more casual and frequently appear off the cuff and most decidedly off the (public) record. Here officials allowed cynicism, prejudice, and frustration to show through. In the minutes one finds comments such as, “I regard the whole thing [a draft bill] as so bad that I think they ought to start all over again. The drafting is Mr. Bentwich in his worst style, and resembles a sort of incoherent chattering” and further, “Clause 3 occupies nearly two pages of drivel, in order to provide
what could be provided in a few lines.”28 The minutes appear to be a sanctioned arena for such expression.29

The form of administrative files offers insight into both relations among administrators and private individuals and the governmental milieu within which civil servants worked. The audiences for any comment or letter were generally multiple and were likely to exceed the named addressees. The distinction between the two styles of administrative conversation discussed above has a great deal to do with the presumed level of privacy of the correspondence. Minutes were designed to be internal commentary, whereas formal letters might reach the public’s attention. By providing a private space for written communication among government officials, minutes appear to have contributed to forming a civil service culture. Here, in the margins of files, civil servants were afforded opportunities to address each other and
each other’s work in spontaneous and natural ways—a more informal style permitted in these nonpublic parts of files. Infighting and jockeying for position, while present in folios as well, are particularly evident in the minutes.30 Even in the presence of an apparently clear line of distinction between the spaces of a file, conversation was carried on across that divide.

The various registers provided by this filing form did not simply offer civil servants a comfortable space for communication, though this in itself is significant. Rather, the form of administrative conversation was of considerable importance in shaping government policy and practice. The regulation of style served to police the boundaries of bureaucratic discourse—there is a “content of the form”31—as only ideas that could be rendered as policy and articulated within the framework of debate could be entertained.32 The following of proper procedure was as important as independent judgment in guiding government action. As I trace the details of bureaucratic operations, the ways in which administrative style was intricately bound up with administrative practice will become ever more clear.

EGYPTIAN STYLE: ADVICE FOR ADMINISTRATIVE WRITING

Preoccupation with the mechanics of administrative writing was no less important during the Egyptian Administration than in the Mandate. In this case the concerns were linked both to bureaucratic imperatives and to broader transformations in styles of Arabic prose.33 This interest was evident in the journal of the Egyptian Civil Service Commission, Majallat al-Muwazzafin.34 An article titled “The Literature of Memos” (Adab al-Mudhakkirat), published in the magazine in 1956, described the best style of document writing, teaching civil servants how to write the most effective memos. “Above all,” the article argued, a memo was a “sign of the understanding of the author of its subject matter. Secondly, it is a way of evaluating you and indicating your competence.”35 Memos thus have a double address. If done correctly, they give clear expression of their subject matter. And, whether well or poorly executed, they express the professional capabilities of the civil servants who write them.

The advice given in the article stresses the demands made by the Arabic language on memo writers. One need not become an Arabic expert, the article assures its readers, but one must “be able to express what you want with a ‘clear’ expression and with formulations that have ‘limited, precise
meanings.’” One should be careful not to choose words that have more than one meaning, as these can obscure one’s ideas. Arabic, the article stresses, can be a simple language, and in writing memos one should not affect a literary pose. Rather, one should focus on using correct syntax and grammar, mistakes in which can alter the meaning dramatically. The author of the article compares grammar to cooking: “Cooking is vital to the flavor of that which requires cooking. Can you eat qulqas [taro] without cooking it? . . . I don’t want to mention what Sibawiya [a medieval Arab grammarian] said . . . I want you to always remember what your teacher explained to you about nominal sentences and verbal sentences, and the arrangement of each of them. . . . This is the grammar that is needed in order to cook the meaning of your memo until it is ready.” The need for such instruction points to the difficulties of writing in Arabic, even for native speakers. It also suggests that nearly a century after the widespread use of print technology had provoked “the decline of a preference for rhyme in favor of straightforward prose, and the rise of a taste for simplicity and avoidance of little-known words” further education in style uniformity was required. The article ends by averring that good memo writing can be a means of advancement for civil servants and suggests that each should “strive to make your memos a means of achieving a good evaluation.”

While the suggestions in this article do not delineate as precisely as British regulations the form of the document, they do express an interest in standardization. If administrative writers followed its advice and steered clear of “perverse and infrequent words” and complicated constructions, the result would certainly be a minimization of stylistic diversity in official writing. By emphasizing the effect on civil servants’ careers of the form of their documents, this article seeks to invest them in the project of standardization. At the same time, this process enabled superiors and citizens to observe and document the practices of the civil servants. The uniformity of documentary style not only supported the authority of those documents, but also offered a means for comparing and judging civil servants. Not coincidentally, it also constituted a mechanism for shaping civil service personas (see chapter 3).

**Personal Form: Civil Servants Write About Themselves**

That a civil service culture did develop among government personnel and that these civil servants (muwazzafin) did feel invested in the projects of
regularity and standardization that defined civil service quality is evident in the ways they talk about their careers and positions. Their writings reflect their participation in these projects. When petitioning their superiors on their own behalf, as in asking for promotion, complaining about work conditions, evaluating their coworkers, they made use of a shared rhetorical style which largely followed prescribed contours. The personnel files of retired muwazzafin are filled with such missives and afford an excellent venue for considering the regularities of civil service style.

Administration-era requests for promotion, to take one example, display a high degree of continuity of style and content. In these letters, civil servants both express deference to their superiors and engage in self-promotion. The employee generally lauds the Administration as the defender of justice and refers to correct procedure as the best mechanism for fulfilling this objective. The petitioner details his work history, calling attention to the dedication with which he has served government and explaining the error or violation that has resulted in his failure to be promoted and therefore in a denial of justice. The letters usually close with a plea to the addressee to turn his attention to this case and to fulfill his obligation and desire to see that right prevails.

In one such letter, Musbah Ahmed, a tax collector, compares his circumstances to those of his colleagues:

Sir, I have worked as a government tax collector in the Finance Department since 1943—meaning 18 years—and I am in Grade 3. The breadth of my work and my qualifications are present in the government file. I have been in service for a long time but have not yet received a promotion. All of my colleagues who were appointed at the same date were promoted to Grade 2 three years ago, and I am still in my old grade. My work carries a lot of responsibility, and my region is a central and large one. . . . In light of all I have presented to you, I ask that you respond to my request for promotion to Grade 2. You, who still strives for justice and social equality.

According to this letter, the principle that has been violated here is that of equality. The procedural mechanism that has been infracted is that of promotion of employees with the same seniority to the same grades. According to Musbah’s argument, the length of his service is sufficient to warrant promotion, but he is careful to also highlight its importance and note that
these details are documented in his file, thereby suggesting that the violation of procedure is markedly unjust in his case.

Another employee, 'Ali Taleb, in a letter that begins almost identically (he began work in the Agricultural Administration in 1937), cites the end of the British Mandate as the precipitating cause for his failure to be promoted:

Sir, I was nominated to be transferred to Grade 3 under the previous Mandate government, as the opportunity for promotion and transfer was in the terms of the position. A number of my colleagues from this time were graded and reached Grade 2. However, before my turn arrived the Mandate ended and the Arab Administration came to the Strip. Naturally, I should not be deprived of my rights for transfer and promotion because of a lack of meaningful understanding of the position I am doing currently. Therefore, I petition you, Sir, to look into my transfer to permanent Grade 3 after my long service.

In this petition, 'Ali Taleb chastises the Egyptian Administration for not fulfilling its obligations to its employees and implicitly compares it unfavorably to the British Mandate in this regard. Like Musbah in the previous letter, 'Ali situates his service in the context of that of his colleagues, noting that they have been duly promoted, and emphasizes the length of his employment. The criticism of the Administration, while muted, is sharper than in Musbah’s letter. 'Ali’s mode of critique is common in civil servants’ letters. The Administration is never called unjust, but rather is simply called to account for instances of failure to achieve its own principles and goals.

This rhetorical style was chosen for its perceived effectiveness. Certainly not all requests for promotion were granted (in the case of the two letters cited above Musbah was promoted and 'Ali was not), but appropriate address seems to have been important for getting a hearing. Although 'Ali did not get his transfer, he did win the support of his direct superior in his efforts. Even if not every letter was effective in achieving its aims, as a body they were effective in contributing to a broader uniformity of civil service style. The resemblance imperative was clearly at play, as civil service correspondence echoed other such correspondence. Through the mechanism of accumulation, a style that was highly self-conscious and no doubt sometimes artificial could become also a real expression of civil servants.
Limits of Content

Style management offered an important means of regulating file content, but it was not the only such mechanism. Content was also governed by the demands of bureaucratic procedure. Files were not simply repositories of bureaucratic memory, but also actors in the bureaucratic field. Their content was effective in shaping administrative action, and vice versa. As Egyptian-era personnel files show, the particular document compilations that made up a file were connected to the concrete requirements of administration. Much of the content of the personnel files was dedicated to tracking the personal status of their subjects. All employees had to update their information annually, indicating their marital status and the number of their children (and in the case of men the number of their wives). Additionally, if an employee’s status changed in the middle of the year through marriage, birth, death, or children reaching the age of majority, he was required to report the new information immediately to his superior for inclusion in his file. There was nothing abstract about this requirement; the monthly allowances that complemented base salaries were calculated according to family size.43

As much as bureaucratic imperatives mandated the inclusion of content, they also, sometimes as an almost accidental effect, produced exclusions. Because personal information was reported for the purpose of determining allowances, those family members whose existence did not affect the allowances were absent from the files. Thus, when children reached their majority and were no longer considered dependents for allowance purposes, they simply disappeared from the files.44 Despite the wealth of information about family life contained in personnel files, therefore, they do not offer a straightforward opportunity for data collection. Like all files, archives, and documents, personnel files have interests which govern their content and their form.

Different sorts of files, of course, have different interests. Unlike personnel files, police files appear to consider no information irrelevant, a principle of content management that says include everything.45 The imperative to collect all this information was rooted in the security concerns that shaped Egyptian rule in Gaza: the threat of Gazan action provoking an Israeli attack on Egypt, of political parties challenging government policy, of despair and
disillusionment driving Gazans, natives and refugees alike, toward destabilizing protest. In tracking the contours of public behavior and attitudes, the Egyptian-era files of *Idarat al-Mabahith al-ʿAmma* (General Investigations or Criminal Investigations Department, part of the Interior and Public Security Administration) seem to collect as much information as possible about individuals. The tremendous breadth of scope of these files does not indicate a lack of purpose. While much of the information collected could not have been of immediate practical value, it did function as a database that could assist the administration in controlling the behavior and attitudes that the files tracked.

These files include incident reports about specific events, daily and weekly reports by police officers to department inspectors, and monthly reports by regional governors and inspectors to the head of the Interior and Public
Security Administration. The reports focus on public matters like political activity, public opinion, and organizational formations but treat private life as well. All public meetings were attended by an officer of the mabahith, and private gatherings were noted and observed. Conflicts between and within families were detailed, and their mediation by mukhtars (village leaders) discussed. Individual behavior, especially if unusual or potentially political, was included in the files. Mabahith reports were concerned as much with talk as with action and thus reported on public opinion and on prevailing rumors. For the most part, these files do not analyze or (in terms of rumors) distinguish between fact and fiction. The work of making meaning out of these files takes place elsewhere; the files themselves focus on the work of compilation.

Accumulation works to give weight and significance to seemingly insignificant moments. The mabahith files are filled with events of no apparent import and people of no obvious significance. These kinds of reports were effective in their compilation, not in their individuality. Not one of them contains complete information about an incident, but rather serves as data in the building of a profile or picture of a situation or person. Many reports give, in considerable detail, accountings of incidents that seem entirely trivial. For example, according to one such report, several people drove cars to Khan Yunis and stopped at a school for several hours before leaving the town. The cars and their passengers are described in detail. The times of their movements are carefully noted. This is the sum of the report’s information, except for a note that the teachers at the school were familiar with the people involved and believed they were there to have a meeting, subject unspecified.

The import of such a report is necessarily relational. If any of the participants already had files, then their personal profiles could lend an interpretation to the event. Similarly, if something threatening were to happen in the future, this report could be included in a dossier. Or if a previous report indicated that something was likely to happen, this report could serve to confirm it. Police reports created an archive of information which could be drawn upon if need be. Their role was to police the possible, to inform about what could happen as much as about what had happened. Such an orientation no doubt contributed to the authority of the files, raising the level of fear among people as to what they might contain. The files operated through accumulation: no moment was too mundane for inclusion in them, and thus no moment was guaranteed to be free from surveillance.
COMPILED CATEGORIES AND ACCUMULATING AUTHORITY

This compilation imperative is important not only for security files. Compilation and accumulation are crucial to the production of filing authority. In filing, compilation both gestures toward the future and expands the reach of files horizontally across the social and political field. It is part of the way in which documents are made into files and through which files are located within a network populated by other files. This process of accretion makes files effective as records of the past and indicators of the future. This feature further makes filing effective in the formation of ruling subjectivities and spaces, as the threshold of knowledge is lowered and individual lives are accounted for in files.49 Filing is not a practice that simply captures individuals. Rather, it forms an arena for regulated self-expression, as in complaints, petitions, and analyses, and self-fashioning.

In addition to the incidental accumulation of almost undifferentiated information evident in mabahith files, compilation in filing also worked to distinguish and define categories of people and place. Gaza, not surprisingly, does not have pride of place within the British Mandate filing network. A provisional district and town, Gaza did not warrant the same kind of attention as, say, Jerusalem. In files that cover Palestine as a whole, Gaza occupies the periphery, often no more than a sentence or two, sentences frequently devoted to comment on the backwardness of the region.50 The Municipality and Local Government files offer more extended examples of compilations about and from Gaza.51 The Gaza files included budget estimates, election regulations, citizen complaints, and municipal ordinances. They contributed to the consolidation of Gaza as an administrative category in at least two ways. First, through the compilation of municipal policy and procedure for central government approval, Gaza was located within a hierarchy of rule. Second, by providing an arena within the files of central government for the enactment of local conflict (particularly clear in complaints and petitions addressed to government), the accumulation of Gaza files within the group Municipalities and Local Government participated in distinguishing Gaza as a locale. Files, then, not only document, but also help make a place.

Palestine’s government during the British Mandate was highly centralized, and almost all local decisions required approval from the central government. Gaza’s municipal ordinances, such as those which determined the
rates of market fees (vendors to be charged a 5 percent tax on all fruits and vegetables sold and purchasers 2½ percent) or prohibited pollution of the public water supply (no bathing allowed), had to be forwarded to the chief secretary for approval and confirmation. Municipal budgets required similar approval. Thus, when several towns of the Gaza district wished to pool their resources and hire a municipal engineer, the chief secretary’s permission was required. The Gaza district commissioner wrote on the municipalities’ behalf (the towns in question were Gaza, Majdal, Khan Yunis, Beersheba, and Faluja) and noted that “this appointment would supply a longfelt want, and I wish to recommend it. I should be glad if advance sanction would be given for the provision of his salary in the estimates of the Municipalities concerned so as to enable him to start work as soon as possible.” These kinds of requests and passings up for approval of local decisions are repeated
throughout the local government files, thus marking the subordinate position of municipalities (Gaza’s and others) in the structure of Palestine’s government.

Even as Gaza was like other municipalities in its formal relations to government, the local government files also mark its distinctive character. If the first major subject in the files was the seeking of government approval for local administration, the second was local complaint about local administration. In the files, central government came to provide a venue for, as well as serve as an arbiter of, local conflict. These files also display another aspect of Gaza’s hierarchies, as it was for the most part the elite who could make use of this filing opportunity. For example, in 1930, a number of Gazan notables, most of whom were members of the municipal council, wrote to the high commissioner complaining about the town’s mayor, Fahmi Husseini. These notables were particularly incensed that the mayor had been granted permission to maintain his private law practice while serving as mayor. According to the complaint, “The Mayor of Gaza is kept occupied with his own private business to an extent as to neglect the interests of the town which is more needy of organisation and attention probably than any other town in this country.”

Because the mayor’s business kept him away from town so much, the complaint argued that conditions in Gaza, rather than progressing under his leadership, had in fact deteriorated. The complaint notes, among other problems, that “winter is well in season, the roads are in a deplorable state, while the walls of many houses are falling to bits. The mud in the streets actually makes it impossible to walk, while due to the hopeless lighting system it is an actual danger to be outdoors at night.” The notables call government’s attention to the strength of public opinion against the mayor and close by reminding the high commissioner that “the public demands that only he who possesses the best conduct and enjoys a good reputation and who has the faith of all the people should be eligible for this position. This is a point which we believe Great Britain respects more than any other nation, and we feel sure that you have intimate knowledge of all the people in Palestine, including our most undesirable and unpopular Mayor.”

In this complaint and in the many similar ones which can be found in these files, the category of the local—and particularly of the Gazan locale—was invoked to frame and forward the petitioners’ arguments. The peti-
tioners even used the centralization of Palestine’s government to make an argument for the importance of the local: “The fact that the Government still grants some right of authority to the Palestinians in the form of Municipal Council is a recognition by the Government of the necessity of the existence of Municipalities. That high Government Officials are engaged in formulating municipal laws re-enforces this argument.” Good local administrators were, that is, vital to Gaza’s progress. The specificities of Gaza were highlighted in the conflict between particular parties for power in this local arena, in this case between the mayor and opposing notables. In the accumulation of charges and countercharges found in these complaint files, the category of the Gaza locality is continually consolidated. Even as Gazans ask for help from government, the files further consolidate this conflict as local, one in which government could intervene if it so chose, but vis-à-vis which it...
was always an outside party. The varieties of accumulation found in files work not only to articulate relations between and among different participants in government, but also to shape and manage those relations.

**Access and Control**

As concerned as bureaucracies are about the stylistics of writing, equal attention is paid to the pragmatics of managing file circulation and accessibility. This attention includes regulations governing availability of files, procedures guiding the circulation of files, and layouts organizing offices to control exposure of files. The practices of the Mandate and the Administration were no exception to this general condition. Weber stresses the secrecy principle of bureaucracy, arguing that it “always tends to exclude the public, to hide its knowledge and action from criticism as well as it can.” It seems, though, that this formulation does not entirely capture the relationship of bureaucracy to information, a relationship which is marked by a tension between the principles of public access to information and the protection of government secrecy.

While Weber may well be correct to suggest that “the concept of the ‘official secret’ is the specific invention of bureaucracy,” without a principle of publicity, there would be no requirement for such a regulation of secrecy. That is, if no government files were available to the public, there would be no need to define some of them as secret. Certainly, concern with both containment of and access to information was evident in filing in Palestine. In these practices of filing management, as in the writing process, regularization and repetition formed crucial means of effecting information management. Furthermore, as in the writing process, the regulation of circulation was concerned with producing and safeguarding the authority of files.

**Regulations of Secrecy**

Mandate Secretariat regulations recognize three types of files: top secret, secret, and open. Top secret files were not allowed to be sent out of the Secretariat; were “to be seen and handled by British officers only”; could only be transferred by hand, not sent in dispatch boxes; and could be typed in the top secret registries only. This regulation is reflective both of the broad colonial character of Mandate rule, which limited access and opportunity for
natives, and of the specificity of the Palestine Mandate, where conditions of so-called national conflict demanded that Jewish and Arab civil servants be kept away from certain materials. Access to secret files, as compared to that of top secret files, was circumscribed not by nationality but by rank. The regulations delineate which officers were permitted to handle such files and specify that “in no circumstances may a secret file be handled by a messenger.” To guard against accidental exposure, regulations stipulated that “top-secret and secret files when not in actual use must be kept in a locked steel box or steel cupboard. It is permissive, however, if an officer leaves his room for a short while to go to another room in the Secretariat, to leave a top secret or secret file on his table provided he takes such steps, by locking doors and windows, as will ensure that no person can enter the room in his absence.” The regulations further state that “the fact that an officer is authorised to handle top-secret and secret files concerned with certain subjects does not entitle him to see top-secret or secret papers dealt with on other schedules.” These regulations are interesting for a number of reasons. First, they further elucidate British interest in limiting the quixotic effects of individual action upon files. Like those regulations which sought to minimize individualizing style in the writing of documents, these orders anticipate and attempt to forestall accidental exposure of confidential information by imposing a uniform management style. Second, the regulations highlight dynamics of the relation between publicity and secrecy.

A central aspect of this problematic is the question of access by the public to government information, but this is only part of the matter. The secret files regulations mark distinctions internal to the civil service as well and serve as a reminder that the category civil service is by no means monolithic. Distinctions were drawn by nationalities and ranks as well as by job description. Lurking around the edges of these regulations—not articulated but present nonetheless—was a degree of uncertainty about government’s own civil servants. The possibility had to be considered that, faced with issues of nationalist significance, civil servants might have loyalties to something other than government.

In Egyptian-era filing practices, the management of access to files was no less central, though the worries underpinning such management were distinct. Orders governing file disclosure can be found throughout the record of
the Administration. In one such order, the director of administrative affairs reminded officials of the laws and commands governing the protection of secret documents:59 “1) No employee is permitted to receive any visitors during official work hours or to show them any papers. 2) Each violation of the above clause will expose the responsible employee and his direct superior to severe and deterring action. 3) It is the responsibility of the heads of departments and directors of administrations to see that this order is implemented with precision.”60 Like British regulations, this order both marks a line between members of the public and government employees and internally distinguishes the civil service. By making an employee’s direct superior responsible for his misdeeds, this order solidifies the hierarchies of the organizational structure of the civil service. The order seems designed to result in extremely close supervision of employees by their bosses, an effect that should ripple up the chain of command. This order does not distinguish among types of files but rather serves as a blanket prohibition of exposure. Some government files were allowed to be seen by members of the public. However, by categorically forbidding disclosure to visitors to government offices, the order mandates a regularity of procedure and minimizes the possibility of error on the part of individual civil servants.61

CIRCULATING FILES

As the regulations discussed above indicate, even the most secret of files circulate, albeit under tight restrictions. The guidelines which governed the circulation practices of files during the British Mandate and Egyptian Administration indicate that the movement of open, nonsensitive files was also carefully regulated. The circulation of files encompasses the multiple kinds of movement that files undergo, as parts of files (documents) move from one to another, as whole files circulate among government offices and as information in files is selectively disclosed to private citizens.

The Mandate Secretariat regulation of correspondence determined that “where copies of papers on one file are placed on another, the file should always show clearly which is the copy and should indicate the number of the file on which the original is to be found.”62 This order, which seeks to mark all documents, seems to work to ensure that documents remain embedded in the networks that generate their authority. A copy that is marked as such
would not risk losing the meaning derived from its place in a network of signification, but rather could accrue further meaning by becoming part of yet another chain of relations. In this manner, a document could operate in multiple locations and do so in an orderly, systematized fashion. This order demands that documents not make accidental or unmarked appearances in other files. Rather, when they come to rest, documents should signal their multiplicity and call attention to their paths of movement. This material attention (within the file itself) to the trajectory of the document and its network of relations could operate to make a compilation of a single paper.

The circulation of whole files among government offices in the Mandate appears to have been perceived as an unavoidable, but at the same time undesirable, facet of administration. Each time a file was removed from its home department, there was a risk of disorder and mismanagement. Probably for this reason, the unnecessary circulation of files was discouraged: “Far too many files are being referred to Departments and it would be appreciated if, except in certain unavoidable circumstances, letters could be written instead of the file being sent out. The principle to be observed is that files should only be sent out when the amount of typing necessary for a letter (especially enclosures) is so great that this extra work far exceeds the inconvenience of absence of the file from this office.” Administrative preference was to keep the file within the office where possible, and where not possible to carefully manage the conditions of its movement: “Officers minuting such files are requested to indicate clearly on the margin a specific date by which they wish the file to be returned to this office.” Once again, relations among differently located civil servants were important for the proper functioning of the circulation system. Another order in this series reminded officers of the importance of properly instructing messengers in circulation practices, noting that they should “explain to their messengers the systems of the distribution number card and when necessary, notify them, at the time of the collection of the files, of the names of the officers to whom they are to be taken and the location of their rooms. In default of such explanation the files are likely to be misdirected and to reach their intended destination only after some delay.” These practices of file movement operate to maintain and regularize the general system of information management.

Increasing standardization of movement was a concern during the Egyp-
tian Administration as well. In one instance, a bureau was established precisely for the purpose of systematizing the flow of information from one office to another. In 1960, the Gaza Executive Council mandated the formation of the Personal Investigation Bureau, as an office of the Interior and Public Security Administration, to respond to requests for individual criminal records. By serving as a central storehouse for information, the bureau could regularize the transfer of information, both in and out of the office. At one end of the process, police and court officers provided information to the bureau. The courts, for example, were ordered to forward to the bureau “1) judgments issued in capital cases, 2) judgments issued for imprisonment of six months or more” as well as judgments for a specified list of other crimes. After the papers arrived at the bureau, following detailed instructions, files of individual criminal records were to be prepared. The first steps of the procedure required that “when a charge sheet for the accused is sent from the police, the sheet is registered in the appropriate registry, and numbered in sequence. After sheets have been registered and have been so marked, they are sent to the head of the alphabetical filing department who will undertake a search for criminal records of the accused in the alphabetical files.” In this process of file transfer, new files were created, as court and police records were used to constitute individual criminal files. The attention to detail at each step in the process indicates the felt importance of regularizing this file circulation.

This concern was also evident in procedures for making information available to members of the public. Content from the Personal Investigation Bureau files were intended to be made available “upon request of the convicted person or request by public authority [sulta ‘amna]” for certificates of conduct. The regulations also specified what information was to be included in the certificates. They would not list “1) judgments that were overturned on appeal; 2) judgments where the punishment did not exceed six months in jail . . . and no other crimes were listed in the file in the Personal Investigation Bureau.” These regulations appear concerned both with protecting individual privacy and with increasing the efficacy of the criminal justice system. The centralization of criminal records ensured that they could be more easily accessed when needed. The precise delineation of the information to be kept in these records, as well as the conditions for their release or expurgation, minimized the risk of accidental exposure or erasure.
Since these files were of people, rather than, say, government policy, privacy concerns played a central role in the regulation of their disclosure. The exposure of other types of files was governed by concerns specific to those files, but general to all files was an interest in having control over when and how the public (whether as a whole or particular individuals) had access to the files.

File Storage

The government emphasis on file accumulation was bound to raise pressing problems of storage. By opening with a discussion of archives, in some ways this chapter began with the end of the process. The destiny of files, after all, is either the archives or the garbage (now perhaps the shredder). Practices of record retention were internal to the filing process. Sometimes these systems of retention were immediately connected to the constitution of historical archives—the British especially were careful about building archiving into their filing system—but office archives were not always intended for inclusion in a national archive. Choices about what documents to keep (and how) and which to discard (and how) impact the regulation of information as well as the practice of compilation in filing.

The Mandate chief secretary’s office provided guidelines to its employees for determining the fate of files. These regulations indicate the multiple levels of file retention. Active files were stored in the filing cabinets of the central registry of the Secretariat, according to an internal indexing system. In order to relieve overcrowding in the storage cabinets, it was necessary, on occasion, to destroy or archive unused files. It is noteworthy, considering the general attention to detail in these regulations, that the regulations provided almost no specificity in terms of what kinds of files should be kept. Rather, such decisions were left to the discretion of the employees, though they did have to be approved by a number of officers:

Clerks in charge of sections of the central registry will go through old files year by year, starting with the earlier years, to ascertain which in their opinion (a) can be safely destroyed and (b) should be placed in archives. They should bear in mind the possibility of such files being required for ready reference in the future. . . . lists should then be submitted to the Assistant Secretary or Administrative Assistant in charge of the schedule
for examination. Each file on these lists should be examined both by the section clerk and by the senior officer concerned before submission in final form to a Principal Assistant Secretary for approval of the action proposed.

The objective behind this process of file storage and destruction was to both simplify the daily practices of office filing (by minimizing the number of files that would have to be sorted through in the process) and to make easier any future move of the Secretariat to a new office (by decreasing the amount of paper that would have to be transferred).

In this process of the culling of files, the destroyed or archived files did not entirely vanish from the active filing system, but rather left two distinct traces. First, material components of the files were to be saved for reuse in other files. The order specified that prior to destruction of files, “serviceable material, e.g. file covers, tags, unused minute sheets, pins and clips, will first be salvaged.” Second, “the lists of files destroyed and sent to archives will be passed to the indexing section for recording on the appropriate card the date [of action]. The lists will then be returned to the registry for filing.” That the office-file storage practice continued to account for those files that were absented from its workings ensured that the integrity of the system—which included its mechanisms for referencing file location—would not be undermined by the removal of physical files. Even files that no longer had an internal life (that is, their content was no longer important) continued to be part of the scaffolding of filing.

When the British began to prepare for their departure from Palestine, the question of file storage took on a new dimension. Questions arose as to whether files should remain in Palestine, and if so, which ones, to become part of the administrative apparatus of a possible successor government or should be removed to Great Britain to enter the historical record of British overseas rule. While there are obvious political and ideological interests underpinning such questions, they were addressed almost entirely in practical terms. What were the administrative requirements for such files, and how would they be most efficaciously utilized?

For example, as the Mandate wound down and the need to prepare for pension payment became increasingly urgent, the Civil Service Commission issued a set of orders for how to manage personnel files. It was decided to set
up an Accounts Clearance Office of the Palestine Government in Cyprus to handle any ongoing financial obligations of the government. To this office were to be dispatched “all the personal files and history cards of all the non-expatriate officers belonging to . . . departments” as well as “all personal files and history cards of non-British expatriate officers held by the Civil Service Commission.” Not going to Cyprus were records of British expatriate officers—those held by the commission were to go directly to London and those in the departments were to be either destroyed or given to the officers themselves—and the files of nonexpatriate officers held by the Civil Service Commission, which were to remain in Palestine to be handed over to the UN Palestine Commission.

In its final weeks and days, Mandate administration largely fell apart. As Henry Gurney, the last chief secretary, described the situation at the end of April 1948, “The Courts have stopped, and so has the Post Office, except for urgent and official telegrams; nearly all our prisoners have escaped, and the prisons are not functioning either.” The chaos which accompanied the end of the Mandate meant that the orderly plans for the files were not executed (indeed the UN commission did not assume any authority), but they do highlight the sorting out of the Mandate whole into its parts that accompanied the end of the Palestine government. Differences between British officers and local-hire civil servants were evident throughout the Mandate, in both regulation and practice, but the process of ending that Mandate also ended any semblance of equivalence among these people. Thus, the final moments of mandatory archiving, even where they did not succeed in creating an archive, did form a record of civil service differentiation and stratification.

Unlike the British Mandate, the Egyptian Administration of Gaza did not come to a planned end. It ended, of course, with the war of June 1967 and the occupation of Gaza by Israel. There were, therefore, no preparations for final storage, compilation, or culling. Of the many documents that survived the Administration, it is nearly impossible to determine which might have been intended to be saved, which would have been discarded entirely, and which might have been subsumed into other files, leaving a trace of their original production. Within the various offices of the Administration, there is some information about how files were stored. The head of the Personal Investigation Bureau, for example, supplied a list of the guidelines for file retention in his bureau. The guidelines indicate that during the Administra-
tion file retention continued to apply principles similar to those that were prevalent during the Mandate. These principles accorded primacy to the file system as an operational unity, making the mechanisms for filing sometimes more important than the files themselves.

According to the bureau's regulations, registers of charge sheets and fingerprints were to be kept permanently, whereas the registers of requests for certificates of conduct as well as the registers of the certificates themselves (which were the files produced from the above registers) were to be kept for only two years. The lines along which distinctions were made seems relatively straightforward and logical. The primary data files, which served to create other files, were kept permanently. There was no need for the second-order files to be permanently saved, as they could be re-created if necessary out of the first set of files. These specific practices of retention and regular culling of files highlight the mobile processes of signification which are always integral to filing.

Filing as a practice exceeds the significance of any individual file. Maintaining the capacity to keep filing is more important than any particular content. Limitations in the space available for storing files was a real and pressing issue, and thus file culling was essential for continued filing. At the same time, the regular replacement of certain files within the filing system kept awareness of future filing at the center of this practice. Each file that was discarded created space for another, structurally similar file. The process of file replacement has an additional significance. In limiting the importance of any particular file, and emphasizing practice over product, the significance of the loss of particular files (something which happened a lot in Gaza) was minimized. Filing envisions future filing and in its self-referential structure renders the systemic location of files as crucial as their content. Practices of file storage illuminate how filing operates as both a compilation of the past and an anticipation of the future.

**Conclusion**

Filing, while a fundamental part of government, is also in some ways an odd sort of practice. It is executed primarily by civil servants and forms a record of information about both civil servants and private citizens. At the same time, many of the defining features of this regime of practices operate to
minimize the apparent agency of these persons. Filing is a fully “peopled” regime of practices, but one in which those people cannot appear as primary (or prior) actors. Files cannot work without civil servants, but they exercise an authority that often seems to refer only to other files. Filing is a domain that often appears autonomous. Files seem to have their own principles, unconnected to any single administration or regime. To a great degree this is true—and this chapter has highlighted this general character—but files are also embedded in the particular bureaucracies they make work and are formed by those demands. They are both shaped by and shape people and places. Files are part of a broader governing dynamic that relies equally on the practices of civil servants. No single bureaucratic instrument can be fully effective on its own. It was the interactions among these instruments that consolidated ruling authority, even as such authority may never have acquired legitimacy.