

The argument that Musha'a was widespread is hardly substantiated. High figures quoted for the size of Musha'a - one estimate for example, put the extent of Musha'a at 70 per cent of the total area of Palestine (Baer, 1976:106) - lacked adequate documentation (11). The only source cited, repeatedly used by various writers was information collected by a Mr. and Mrs. Finn who served as British missionaries in the mid 19th century (Ohana,1981; Taqqu,1980). However, since no land survey was ever conducted in Palestine prior to 1929, all estimates provided on the size of Musha'a land could best be considered as mere guess-work. In fact, as the first land survey conducted in Palestine in 1929 showed, most cultivated land was under the Amiri form, with title deeds established on almost every parcel (12). A similar observation was made earlier by one land specialist, who suggested that Musha'a was relatively very small and in terms of its contribution to the fallah's income, secondary to the Amiri or the Mulk (al-Murr,1924:66).

Moreover, the claim that the Musha'a, or for that matter, any form of land tenure presents an obstacle to capitalist development in agriculture is theoretically, and in the case of Palestine, empirically unjustified. Later in this study, it will be argued that every form of land tenure can be subjugated to capitalism once the latter penetrates agriculture.

At the empirical level though, it is known that the Musha'a form of land use was practiced, mainly, in the central district of Palestine, namely in the Marj area. The reasons for the emergence of Musha'a in this particular area, according to some authors, were geo-political. They argue that in order to avoid tribal raids in the hilly lands, peasants residing in those areas moved down to the valley, the Marj,