

peasants and partly due to British taxation policies, had speeded up the process of class differentiation within the peasantry. In the early 1930s, Palestine's rural formation was characterised by three major classes.

1- The Big Absentee Landlords:

Until the early 20th century, this class was composed mainly of the big absentee landlords such as the Sursuk family, discussed earlier. By selling their land to (Jewish) colonial companies, this group, which had previously formed the greatest economic power in the region, virtually disappeared from the class map of rural Palestine. The disappearance of this class has reinforced the class of indigenous Palestinian landlords who were the heads of big Hamulas.

The Heads of Hamulas were partly absentee and partly residents of the villages. As rural residents the landlords maintained a direct relation with the peasants. As absentee landlords, they conducted their business through a family member, sent to the village to collect rent and oversee production. Although the size of this class and the extent of their property is not known, an unofficial estimate put their number at 30 families and their ownership at about 250,000 donums. Each family, according to this estimate, owned about 40-50 thousand donums. (1) This class can be classified as Palestine's rural bourgeoisie. Yet, under colonial and Zionist pressure, this class too had undergone fundamental changes. While some of the families sold their land and left the country (Stein, 1984:226-235) those who remained were largely stripped of their power.