

estates and, in some cases, as a result of the peasants' failure to pay debts.²⁵

Some estates were formed in the plains on previously uncultivated lands as security improved and the government encouraged agricultural expansion.²⁶ Then there was the well-known situation of Palestinian peasants, fearing conscription and increased tax collection, they either did not register their land or did so in the name of some influential or wealthy individual. Initially, this did not result in a loss of access to land by the peasants in most cases, and they continued to cultivate it using the *mushaa* system. It was only later on, when the demand for land by wealthy families, but also mainly by European settlers increased, and land became a sought-after market commodity, that peasants found out that they had no legal rights to land when the land was sold.

Although the rise of large-landed estates may have resulted in loss of access to land by some peasants, it is extremely difficult, as Owen points out, to assess its extent.²⁷ This is more so given the fact that the extension of agricultural production in the plains did not only include large estates but also individual cultivators and whole villages that took advantage of the new conditions. In a related vein, Scholch points out that the *mushaa* system actually expanded as a result of this agricultural movement into the coastal and plains areas.²⁸ This may

²⁵Warriner, "Land Tenure," 73.

²⁶Owen, *Middle East*, 267.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸Scholch, 111.