

Chapter One

Introduction: The Study of Agrarian Transformations in Palestine

This thesis deals with the social transformation of an agrarian society whose political contours underwent major and periodic restructuring in the last half-century. I have attempted here to describe and interpret the consequences of dislocation suffered by Palestinian society in the war of 1948 and its aftermath. More expressly, I have tried to explain why various forms of peasant communities, though perhaps not a peasant society, have persisted and even prospered in areas of marginal and marginalized dry farming, despite overwhelming challenges to their tenure in the land. At a different level, this study addresses itself to the manner in which the dispossessed peasants of coastal Palestine re-constituted themselves in a new rural economy under conditions of intensified farming in the process identified here as 're-peasantisation'.

Part I of the thesis deals with the devolution of Palestinian society as a whole in the last hundred years and provides the historical context in which agrarian dislocation occurred. Part II discusses the 'mechanisms of agrarian transition' in Palestine which I locate in landlessness, wage labour, tenancy forms, and population movements engendered by factors internal and external to the village economy. Part III examines and attempts to ground these variables in village case studies which exemplify the two processes of 'de-peasantisation' (the disintegration of traditional peasant production units and their reformulation), and 're-peasantisation' (the ascendancy of refugee landless farmers into a new peasant status through a variety of cropping arrangements) in the post-1948 period.