

Chapter Three

An Agrarian Society Dislocated

The consequences of factionalism became evident when the frontal collision finally came about between the Zionist and Arab forces in 1948. The vertical segmentation of the Palestinian society, on which the edifice of its primordial political fabric prevailing in the thirties and forties operated, was shattered from without -- with the resulting physical dislocation of both the agrarian and urban communities, (the city of Haifa, for example, had its population reduced due to the outflow of Arab refugees from 80,000 to 4,000 in one week only).

In a study of stratification in Palestinian society Peretz refers to "the pattern of vertical and horizontal stratification among the Palestinian Arabs during the mandate as a major institutional factor in the community's disintegration" during the 1948 war (Peretz, 1977:55). He notes that during the initial period of communal clashes (between Jew and Arabs) which extended over the latter part of 1947 and early 1948 a substantial section of the Palestinian elite (landlords, businessmen, and professionals) constituted the bulk of the 30,000 who fled the country in this period. Given the absence of an extra-governmental body in Palestinian society (equivalent, for example, to the Jewish Agency) which could coordinate the Palestinian resistance and provide basic services to a community steadily being deserted by its bourgeoisie and landlords, the impending breakup of its political will was unavoidable. More than the effects of military assaults and massacres, concludes Peretz, "the collapse of communal institutions probably caused more disruption leading to the exodus of some 80 percent of the Arabs living in Israeli-controlled