

PART II

THE MECHANISMS OF AGRARIAN TRANSITION

In Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I have tried to locate, isolate, and interpret the agrarian component within the general social structure analyzed above. This provides the prelude and the framework for the analysis of the village case studies in Part III of this thesis.

I commence the discussion with an analysis of share-tenancy in Palestinian agriculture. Share-tenancy is seen here as an 'internal mechanism for the productive disposition of the rural surplus population' (Chapter 5), as opposed to wage labour opportunities and migration, which act as 'external outlets for the release of demographic pressures on the land' (Chapter 6). Chapter 7 provides an analysis of the relationship between the peasant household and wage labour under conditions of marginalized farming, and the current tendencies towards peasant proletarianization.

The significance of share-tenancy in Palestine lies in that it provided a highly adaptive mechanism for the allocation of rural labour in a wide spectrum of agrarian relationships ranging from the semi-feudal cropping of big estates by landless labourers, to partnerships between co-cultivators with each party providing uneven inputs in terms of labour, land, and capital. In West Bank agriculture, this institution played two primary functions: a 'levelling' mechanism akin to that described by Geertz for Java (Geertz, 1973:98-103) by which smallholders augmented their income by cropping the plots of intermediate and rich peasants (as well as the land of migrant farmers); and second, it acted as the means by which refugee (landless) peasants were incorporated into the new agrarian economy, especially in the irrigated farming of the Jordan Valley. I