

Firestone's original insight lies in his re-interpretation of the nature of sharetenancy, under transformed economic conditions, in what most observers took to be the same immutable agrarian institution. In a classic case of old forms camouflaging new relationships, we obtain here a historical synchronism among the components of a triad: (1) the demands of new investment opportunities in land; (2) religious regulation of partnership contracts, which so far have been circumvented to legitimize a stagnant and exploitative relationship (i.e. Warriner's and 'Ashour's notion of sharetenancy); and (3) a "socially approved" customary form of association -- muraba'a and mugharasa: the "primitive" and "advanced" forms of sharecropping.

Firestone's insight, however, becomes limited in illuminating the nature of the Palestinian agrarian regime in a variety of ecological terrains, and in subsequent periods of change. Initially, he confines his interpretation to the Jenin area ('Arrabeh and Zar'een). Then he decides to expand it to incorporate the hilly regions of Nablus (Samaria), then to the mountainous regions of Palestine in general, and finally to "the agrarian economy of the Levant in periods of transition (Firestone, 1975a:3-4, 179, 186; 1975b:311, 316, 322, 324).

But how do we explain the completely different agrarian development which occurred in the big estates of Gaza, Jaffa, Lydda, Jericho and elsewhere in Palestine where -- from the beginning of the century and up to the forties -- wage labour and investment of surplus by resident and absentee landlords were wedded to create the opposite of a smallholder's regime: the form of capitalist citrus plantation known as the bayyara? All three components of the triad (sharetenancy, Islamic law and market expansion -- in the form of exports) existed here; but two additional ingredients led to a radically different outcome. Those were the