

(cf. Hoexter, 1973; Porath, 1975; Tamari, 1981).

With the gradual institutionalization of private property in land under British rule (the Land Settlement), two aspects of the natural economy of Palestine became the plagues of peasant tenure in the hilly region. These were parcellization of land, resulting from the archaic system of plot rotation prevalent in the musha' (communal) mode, and fragmentation, resulting from the partible system of inheritance. Parcellization and fragmentation amounted to the same thing in posing obstacles to the effective use of limited land holdings by the peasant household. Population increase in rural areas created new pressures, and opportunities, for landlords to utilize their estates more effectively. Wage labour in the cities, when available, was the external outlet for these pressures. Mughârasa share-contracts were an "internal" form of accommodation which utilized, profitably, the established procedures of an old traditional institution, based on patronage.

Firestone is cognisant of the centrality of patronage in the widespread attraction of cropsharing contracts during a period of risk and uncertainty in farming investment. The problem is that his schema does not allow for the explanation of sharecropping arrangements outside of patronage. The emphasis in his analysis is on how, to many landlords, and from a purely financial perspective, the losses far outweigh the gains involved in share farming ventures. They often lose by tying their capital to low-return investments in the form of consumption and loans to the cropper, or as capital loans to joint-farmers (Firestone, 1975a:178), and even by collection lower rent-shares than those called for by the prevalent market rates (ibid.:185). Yet they continue in doing just that with the conscious aim of consolidating their political base.