

Chapter Ten

Re-Peasantisation: Refugees, Share-Croppers and Absentee Landlords in the Jordan Valley

"...under some conditions peasants do not dissolve and differentiate into capitalist entrepreneurs and wage labourers, nor are they simply pauperised. They persist, while gradually transforming and linking into the encapsulating capitalist economy, which pierces through their lives."

T. Shanin, "Defining Peasants" (1978)

The reconstitution of Palestinian peasantry, after their initial dispersal in the War of 1948, and in their second exodus in 1967, took its most dramatic form in their re-settlement in the Jordan Valley. Because of its irrigation potential the region, which until the 1950's was undeveloped and sparsely populated, became the only part of Arab Palestine (aside from a few hundred dunums in the Jenin and Tulkarem districts) which was capable of absorbing large numbers of farmers under conditions of intensive farming.

A survey conducted by a United Nations team a few years after the War of 1948 estimated the total Valley area under Arab control to be slightly more than a million dunums, of which 648,987 dunums were cultivatable (334,962 dunums in the East Ghor, and 314,025 dunums in the West Ghor regions) (UNRWA, 1954:6). On the eve of the influx of Palestinian peasant refugees only a fraction of that area was subject to cultivation, as evidenced from Table 10:1 below: