

Chapter 13

Conclusion: The Demise or Reformulation of a Peasant Society?

In the concluding remarks below I will discuss the essential features of the two processes of transformation in the Palestinian agrarian economy, de-peasantisation and peasantisation, in the context of the current debate about rural change in the third world. I will summate the argument by discussing features in the Palestinian cases that are common to trends that appeared in transitional agrarian forms elsewhere, and those that are specific to Palestine. Within the latter specificity, I will also attempt to distinguish those features of rural transformation that are brought about by mechanisms 'internal' to structure of Palestinian social economy, and those engendered by Israeli occupation.

- 1 -

Throughout the third world, the integration of native agrarian régimes into the network of the world capitalist market has given rise to transitional rural structures which drastically affected the composition of traditional peasant communities. In some cases, like Indonesia in the post-colonial period, the traditional communal organization of the peasantry displayed resilience in the face of capitalist penetration by undergoing a process of 'involution'. This allowed the peasants to sustain their livelihood at a low threshold of survival - involving a complicated re-arrangement of their land and labour resources (Geertz, 1963).

A more familiar pattern, however, especially witnessed among African peasantries, has been the process described as the subjugation and subsumption of peasant household production by capital (Bernstein, 1977). The result has often been thought to reduce the status of peasants to that of 'disguised proletarians' or 'proletarian equivalents'