

external tensions. On the contrary, as discussed earlier (chapter 2), the village of Deir Ghassaneh was ridden with perennial conflicts between the Bani Zaid Sheikhdom and other neighbouring Sheikhdoms, wars between the two fallaheen factions (Qais and Yemen), and feuds between the different village clans or members of the same clan.

However, all of these conflicts were essential components of the prevailing "system" ; their structural consequence was to reinforce the status quo, resulting in continuous adjustments of the different aspects of village life with a stable pattern. It was the nature of these modifications that made the present and the future bear a close resemblance to the past, hence enhancing a sense of normative stability and continuity in community life.

In the process of this 'natural' change, the culture as a whole was able to retain some measure of autonomy. The community was capable of controlling a process of selection by which new forms or new techniques were adapted. This selectivity operated in such a way that certain innovations found a place within the old fabric. The most important characteristic of this kind of change was that conflicts and tensions were accommodated within the existing normative order. Such changes neither presented substantial threats nor offered real challenges to the structure of the existing institutions. Hence there was no sense that anything essential had been renounced. Consequently, the chain of transmission of traditional patterns and norms remained unbroken.

One can argue that the essence of such change was that it did not affect the village structure, whether socially or physically.

An Inwardly-Looking Community

Until the turn of this century, the community in Deir Ghassaneh had very limited transactions with the regional or world market. Land was the main source of livelihood and status. The community retained a system of agricultural subsistence, employing simple agricultural technology. The village as a whole and not the