

II. Changes in Land Tenure

The Ottoman land reforms (tanzimat) which aimed at changing communal (village or clan) ownership of land to private ownership, started as early as 1858 (Ma'oz, 1968). However such reforms were fully effected only during the British Mandate. As a result of these reforms, the village tax responsibilities (el-'ushur, the tenth) became an individual responsibility. The change in forms of land tenure in the long run resulted in the creation of big absentee landlords and the deprivation of smaller peasants of their lands (Graham-Brown, 1982). In many areas of rural Palestine, although not necessarily in Deir Ghassaneh, this meant the demise of communal holdings in land (musha') in favour of private ownership (whether by landlord or peasant).

As a result of the above changes the village subsistence crops gave way to cash crops (Scholch, 1982), resulting in a decline in the village autarky and self-sufficiency. This development eventually resulted in the integration of the village economy in the regional and world economy and hence the commoditisation of the village crops. The collapse of the subsistence agricultural system, along with other developments, resulted in the migration of village residents to seek work in urban centres (Migdal, 1980: 24-32). The village no longer depended primarily upon agriculture as the means of subsistence, and this weakened the peasant's "organic" attachment to the land.

In the particular case of Deir Ghassaneh, communal land holdings were weaker than elsewhere in the highlands due to the dominant impact of the Barghouthis - nevertheless the marginalisation of agricultural land that was generated by privatisation and work opportunities outside the village had the same consequences it did elsewhere: the village ceased to be a self-enclosed unit whose subsistence and hierarchies were shaped within the village community and its agricultural land. Wage labour, markets, urban jobs and cash linked the village to a network of forces which increasingly integrated it into a world whose centre of gravity was the city, and whose frame of reference was the nation.