

nature of the bulk of the land in Palestine in spite of the rise of large-landed estates in the nineteenth century. The great majority of peasants owned the land they cultivated. As elsewhere in the world where land is the main source of income and livelihood, peasants strongly hold on to their land. According to figures cited by Granott for the second decade of the twentieth century, there were 3,130,000 *dunums* held by large owners of which 2,000,000 were in the southern part of the country (*qadas* of Gaza and Beersheba),⁸³ that is, in the agriculturally marginal and sparsely populated area of the country. As Zureik points out, the 1,130,000 *dunums* held by large owners on the northern populated half of the country comprised less than 10 percent of that area.⁸⁴

The small landholding nature of the bulk of land and the peasants' tenacious hold to it, in spite of hard times, are borne out by the distribution of land sales (about 55 percent of total) by different holders between 1878 and 1936: 90.6 percent from large landowners (52.6 percent from absentee large owners, 24.6 percent from resident large owners, and 13.4 percent from the government, churches, large foreign companies, and wealthy businessmen), and 9.4 percent from *fellaheen*.⁸⁵ By June 1947, according to Granott's figures, of the total land held by European Jewish settlers, 73 percent were acquired from large owners both

⁸³Granott, *Land System*, 39.

⁸⁴Elia Zureik, *The Palestinians in Israel: A Study in Internal Colonialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 43.

⁸⁵Granott, *Land System*, 277; Granott's calculations are based on figures collected by the Statistical Department of the Jewish Agency for Palestine.