

differentiation of the peasantry. This was reflected in the increase in wage labor in cash cropping and in public works, and the increase in landlessness that accompanied the continuous concentration of Arab landholdings and the appropriation of land by European settlers. The loss of land in the late 1920s and through the 1930s by the peasants, while lacking meaningful alternative sources of income, led to the pauperization of the majority of most peasants. Wage labor in the 1920s and most of the 1930s, whether in agriculture or in public works, was casual and seasonal.

The differentiation in the ownership of land, or its use, during the Mandate period was quantitatively and qualitatively very different from the pre-Mandate period to the extent of its development during the latter. The rise of large estates during the last six decades of Ottoman rule was predominantly because of grants by the sultan and the purchase of uncultivated land from the government by local and non-Palestinian wealthy individuals and families. Some peasants lost their land because of debt, but their numbers were insignificant. Whatever their “legal” position with respect to land, peasants did not lose their access to it. In addition, as discussed in Chapter 2, the Western expansion of cultivation benefited not only large landowners and merchants but also small peasants and whole villages.

However, with the start of European settlement, the demand for land and willingness to pay high prices for it gave a new meaning to the ownership of land. This intensified under the Mandate with the spread of market relations. Thus, peasants who had registered their land in the name of some powerful individual, or