

ABSTRACT

The war of 1948 has had a major dislocating impact on the various institutions of Palestinian society. This study attempts to examine the consequences of this dislocation on the agrarian régime in two ecological zones of central Palestine: the dry farming regions in the highlands of the West Bank, and the intensive farming areas of the Western Valley of the Jordan. Explanations are provided for the persistence and even prosperity of peasant communities which have undergone a process of protracted 'de-peasantisation' in areas of marginal and marginalized dry farming.

Variables of landlessness, wage labour, tenancy forms, and population movements are utilized to interpret current trends in Palestinian rural society in the light of four village case studies. Particular attention is directed towards the consolidation of a stratum of peasant-workers and their future in the context of Israeli annexation of Arab land, and integration of the Palestinian labour force into the Israeli economy.

At a different level of analysis, the study examines the manner in which the dispossessed peasants of coastal Palestine re-constituted themselves in a new rural economy under conditions of intensified agriculture and capitalization of farm inputs in a process identified here as 're-peasantisation'. In this context, the thesis discusses the decline of patrimonial relations and the subjugation of peasants to relations of dependency under the new agricultural technology.

Finally, changes in the social economy of Palestinian villages are compared to features of rural transformation in Europe and the third world today.