

peasantry prevailed and persisted to this day.⁴ That Firestone does not come to this conclusion is related to the limitations of the historical period to which he confines his analysis, and to his preoccupation, in his essay on sharika contracts (1975b), with problems of correspondence between juridical forms and economic practice.

We must now re-examine problems of sharetenancy when market relations prevailed over patrimonial bonds.

Sharetenancy persists with the decline of patronage

The dissolution of Arab landed classes during the 1948 war led to the dispersal of hundreds of thousands of peasants, who flocked to the West Bank, Gaza and Transjordan, and to the shattering of the system of patronage that existed until then. Nevertheless, the system of sharetenancy persisted. This phenomenon may be attributed to two main features of the new (dislocated) agrarian regime. One was the acquisition of vast tracts of irrigated land in the Jordan Valley (on both sides of the river basin) during the early sixties by resident and absentee landlords. In this endeavor, the landlords utilized the presence of refugee camps in the vicinity as recruiting ground for agricultural workers.

A second factor was the migration of young members of peasant households to the Gulf, and (during the seventies) to Israeli construction sites. The two population trends thinned out the surplus rural population and induced new sharecropping arrangements devoid of the traditional relations of patronage.

In this context, we may speak of countervailing trends in sharetenancy. The commoditization of land and most other factors of agricultural production was facilitated by the availability of cheap and landless refugee labour, creating ideal conditions for plantation agriculture