

Peculiarities of "Internal Migration" in the West Bank

Work opportunities outside the village are, of course, not new to the Palestinian village. There were two other important "pull" periods when peasants, in tens of thousands, left their homes in search of employment. One was the demand in the public sector (railroads, public construction and army camps) during the British Mandate, especially during the early years of World War II (Taqqu, 1980:266-275); the other was during the sixties, under Jordanian rule, when both the state sector, the army, and work opportunities in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States again uprooted Palestinian villagers from their land (Hilal, 1975:90-106; Yacoub, 1967:29-30). This was also the period of the great movement of migrant-labour in the Third World towards metropolitan centres both in their own countries and to Western Europe and Australia.

There are several features which distinguish the situation of West Bank rural migrants (and to a lesser extent those in the Gaza district and the Galilee) from that of rural migrants to Europe, and from a majority of peasant-workers in the metropolises of the Third World (Rio de Janeiro, Calcutta, Cairo, Tehran, etc.). Most significant among those features are:

1. The physical proximity of Palestinian peasants to Israeli work centres which allow them to continue their relationship (albeit an alternative one) to their land, and in village social life. In effect they are commuting workers rather than migrants.