

The Changing Land Tenure System

The rise of tenancy, especially sharecropping, was the main aspect of change in land tenure accompanying the influx of refugee farmers. Although land was relatively available for purchase, the scarcity of money and water resources forced many refugees to enter into unfavourable compacts with absentee and resident landlords in the Valley.

Discussion of the various forms of land tenure and terms of tenancy in the Jordan Valley has to take into account both regional differences and the consequences of governmental land reform. Unfortunately, most of the empirical data available applies only to the Eastern Valley where irrigation schemes and land development has been pursued by the Jordanian Government since the early sixties. Our case study of Ghor al-Far'a region (next chapter) attempts to rectify part of this imbalance in the existing literature.

In the period following the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 and up to the early sixties certain generalizations can be extended to the Valley as a whole, with important differences cutting the North-Central-South Ghor continuum on both sides of the river. Thereafter, the major irrigation and redistribution schemes were confined to the East Ghor region with important differentiating consequences for Palestinian farmers in the Western Valley.

But even before the redistribution schemes patterns of absentee landlordship and ecology configurated in different directions as can be seen in Table 10:3.

Length of occupation of land was found to be significantly longer in the Western Valley than in the Eastern Valley and, on the average (7 years vs. 3 years), with a higher turnover of sharecroppers in the Eastern Ghor, and a much lower number of mixed tenure (i.e., peasant owners) who