

What if these absentees will return? They will go in a procession to the courts. (Ha'aretz, 20.10.1978/Harris, 1980:116).

At the centre of the conflict between Jewish settlers and Palestinian farmers in the Valley lies the future control of the Valley's cultivable land and sources of water. The low ratio of Israeli settlers to the Valley's Arab population (10 to 13 percent, depending on the estimate) should not disguise the enormous unevenness in power and access to resources in the hands of the settlers. By 1980, 70 percent of the total Valley arable lands were under Israeli control -- 40 percent of which belonged to absentee owners who were denied access to the West Bank (Aronson, 1980: 21).

Three main forms have been used for the seizure of land in the Valley. One was the usual sequestering of holdings of residents who fled to the East Bank in the War of 1967 (hence called "absentee property"); the second was the seizure of communal and unregistered land under the rubric of state domain; the third -- a major form in the Jordan Valley -- has been the sealing off of "security zones" for military use. Subsequently many of those "security zones" were transferred to civilian Jewish settlements for agricultural use. Almost the whole Western strip of the Jordan basin, including all the fertile Zor areas, are today declared military areas, off limit to their Arab owners. A fourth, but secondary, procedure of seizure involves transfer of private Arab land to Jewish ownership in return for state or "absentee property" in areas adjacent to the villages from whom the land was taken. This form of seizure is called "land concentration" (Harris, 1980:116-117). Under Labour rule, when most of the Valley settlements were established, about 9,000 dunums were thus "concentrated" (Harris, ibid.:118). Map 10:1 shows the extent of Arab