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Building Other People's Homes

THE PALESTINIAN PEASANT'S HOUSEHOLD AND WORK IN ISRAEL

SALIM TAMARI*

This paper aims to examine the manner in which peasant-workers in the West Bank have become involved in the work process in Israel, and to investigate the impact of this work on the peasant's family farm and village social structure. The study is based on interviews of peasant-workers in the construction sector conducted by the writer,¹ and on data derived from household surveys issued by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics.²

Changes in the character of the Palestinian village as a result of external work opportunities (in Israel, the Gulf, the Americas, and urban centres within the occupied territories) have been the subject of many recent studies. The dominant theme of those studies has been to demonstrate the growth of a new rural-based proletariat as a result of Israel's economic annexation of the West Bank and Gaza; or its opposite, a process of

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A bibliography at the end of the article contains the works to which bibliographical references are made in the text.

¹ The interviews took place during the first six months of 1979 with workers from the village of Ras al-Tin, Ramallah district. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed with the workers' foreknowledge. In this article fictitious names are used for both the village and the respondents.

² Those are published periodically, in Hebrew, as appendices to *Quarterly Statistics of the Administered Territories (QSAT)*, by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics.

declassment (Hilal, 1975; Zureik, 1976, 1979; Graham-Brown, 1979; Samara, 1979). Unlike earlier studies dealing with the formation of a rural proletariat in mandatory Palestine (Carmi and Rosenfeld, 1974; Taqqu, 1980) or in the Galilee under Israeli rule (Cohen, 1965), the present works focus primarily on the colonial aspect of this class relationship. Moreover, the controversy over the policy implications of employing Arabs within the Israeli economy considers its effects on *Israeli* social structure as well as Arab (Hilal, 1975, pp. 255-58; Farjoun, 1975; Bregman, 1976; Van Arkadie, 1977). Farjoun, for example, sees the Palestinian labour force as performing two important functions for the Israeli economy today:

1. As a non-organized sector of the work force it grants the Israeli economy a significant range of flexibility during periods of crisis, allowing it to lay off surplus labour during recessions, and to recruit workers at will – during economic booms – without being hampered by trade union restrictions.

2. The Arab labour force contributes to the strengthening of the Jewish private bourgeoisie in its conflict with the Histadrut-controlled industries and with the state bureaucracy, without the latter being able to mobilize the Jewish work force against the effects of unorganized Arab labour since their own industries [i.e., the public sector's] will be affected as well (Farjoun, 1979, p. 3).

Unfortunately, although we have a substantial amount of data on the aggregate number of Arab workers in the Israeli economy, and their role in the structure of the Jewish sector, very little is known of the process of “internal migration” and its impact on the rural household and village society (cf. Migdal, 1980, pp. 54-77). One significant exception is the work of Linda Ammons on social change in the village of Ballata (Nablus District) during the early seventies (Ammons, 1978). Her study assesses the influence of several factors – including wage-labour, pressures on land and water resources, migration, and the policies of the Military Government – on changes in the village occupational and class structure.

A key factor affecting those occupational changes, according to Ammons' work, is the availability of new employment patterns and land-leasing possibilities as alternatives to income from agriculture (only 6 percent of Ballata's labour force was employed in agriculture in 1974). These new patterns and possibilities were generated by the village's integration into the periphery of Nablus and its attachment to the Ballata refugee camp built on nearby village land (Ammons, 1978, pp. 105-157, 236-39).

Those conclusions, however, are limited guides for understanding rural change in the West Bank as a whole. Land in Ballata, being in the commercial suburbs of Nablus, has become important as real estate rather than for agriculture, and has led to the emergence of a new stratum of land

speculators and *rentiers* (who lease land to refugee farmers), a phenomenon which applies only to the rural periphery of the big towns. Such a situation, although relevant to a substantial area in the region, still leaves unexamined the type of relationship which obtains in those villages in the West Bank — over 70 percent — which do not constitute the immediate hinterland of the urban centres.

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 arose from 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, pp. 266-75); the other was during the 1960’s, under Jordanian rule, when the state sector, the army, and work opportunities in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States again uprooted Palestinian villagers from their land (Hilal, 1975, pp. 90-106; Yacoub, 1967, pp. 29-30). This was also the period of the great movement of migrant-labour in the Third World towards metropolitan centres 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 allows them to continue their relationship (albeit an alternative one) to their land, and to participate in village social life. In effect, they are commuting workers rather than migrants.

2. The class-, or potential class-, identity of Palestinian workers in Israel is constantly being modified by their ethnic identity; by the daily confrontation with Jewish contractors, bosses, workers and Israeli culture in general — much more than would be the impact in the case of Turkish peasant-workers in Germany, for example.

3. This class factor, as we shall see, is complicated by the preponderance of Palestinian village workers in one particular branch of Israeli employment, construction, which imposes certain work processes, modes of promotion and mobility, and general work instability.

4. The mode of recruitment of Arab labour in Israeli enterprises is much less institutionalized, and therefore much more subject to purely market forces and hence exploitation by labour contractors — both Arab and Jewish — and Israeli bosses than is the case with European migrant workers. This is

especially the case in the construction sector, where the fragmentary nature of the work force, and the presence of “illegal workers” (i.e., circumventing labour exchanges) prevail. Some control over these factors of manipulation (market forces and contractors) seems to come only from the efforts of organized Jewish labour to protect itself from the wage-depressing impact of unorganized Arab labour on its standard of living.³ Arab self-organization has so far played little or no role in this regard.

PALESTINIAN RURAL WORKERS IN ISRAEL: AN OVERVIEW

A considerable body of data on Palestinian wage-workers has been accumulated in the last ten years by official Israeli sources. Although some of this data, especially that involving employment outside labour exchanges, is of questionable value, there is no alternative source of information for the area as a whole.

The most useful and detailed source of statistics for our subject is constituted by the household surveys which are carried out periodically by the Central Bureau of Statistics, monitoring changes in employment patterns, family composition, household items, agricultural production, etc.

One of the most problematic aspects of rural labour in the West Bank is the increased marginalization of the family farm associated with work opportunities outside the village. By “marginalization” we refer to the manner in which the income of rural households from agriculture and agriculture-related activities has been superseded by other sources of income. We may mention here, in addition to wage-labour, five other factors acting as determinants of land marginalization: (a) The productive capacity of the land (primarily whether it involves irrigated or dry farming, and the possibilities for mechanization); (b) The fragmentation of land due to demographic pressures (partible inheritance, etc....); (c) Increased remunerations from family members abroad; (d) The number of household members who can be “spared” for work on the family farm, especially women and children; (e) The stability of the peasant’s tenure and potential exposure to land confiscation by the military authorities.

The search for a “viable plot” during the British Mandate, in which a hypothetical average peasant household could find self-sufficiency in agri-

³ Within the construction sector, however, Israeli workers have been demanding Histadrut and government intervention against the employment of workers from the West Bank and Gaza. In a Convention of Israeli construction workers held in June 1980, delegates held that the cheapness of Arab labour created a situation whereby “Israelis who do not hold permanent jobs with construction companies would find themselves in the streets while West Bank and Gaza Strip workers are retained.” (“Building Workers Demand End to Cheap Arab Labour,” *Jerusalem Post*, June 17, 1980).

culture, proved to be illusory in the years preceding the war of 1948 (Government of Palestine, 1930, pp. 60-67; Carmi and Rosenfeld, 1974, p. 473). It is even more illusory today when only a minority of rural households, and only 24.1 percent of the total population in 1979, live on income derived from agriculture. This is not to say, however, as we shall argue below, that the family farm has become insignificant; merely that it has acquired a new and subsidiary dimension in the peasant's life.

In this context, it seems that the overriding variable affecting the marginalization of land, aside from plot fragmentation, is the pull of wage-labour. In the West Bank today, only peasants in irrigated farming (which constitutes about 4 percent of the total cultivable land) seem to have resisted the pull of opportunities of employment outside the villages (Tamari and Giacaman, 1980, pp. 31-34).

TABLE 1
RURAL FAMILIES IN THE WEST BANK, BY NUMBER OF EARNERS,
CULTIVATION OF AN AGRICULTURAL FARM, AND RECEIPT
OF EXTERNAL SUPPORT, 1973-1974

	Rural Population				Total Population			
	<i>Village families</i>				<i>Total families</i>			
	No. of earners			Total	No. of earners			Total
	0	1	2+		0	1	2+	
<i>Total (000)</i>	12.9	33.2	19.7	65.8	17.6	53.7	30.4	101.7
<i>Total (%)</i>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>A farm and support</i>	8.7	8.7	12.2	11.9	14.8	6.1	9.2	8.6
<i>Support only</i>	13.3	13.3	10.2	21.0	63.6	23.8	19.7	29.5
<i>A farm only</i>	32.8	32.8	58.4	36.5	9.7	21.4	40.1	25.0
<i>Neither farm nor support</i>	45.2	45.2	19.3	30.7	11.9	48.6	30.9	37.0

Source: "Families in the Administered Territories," Central Bureau of Statistics, *QSAT*, Vol. 6, No. 1, May 1976.

Official statistics show (Table 1) that about a third of the total rural population (36.5 percent) has no “external” basis of support (i.e., remittances from abroad, welfare payments, etc...) aside from their farm income and family wage-labour. Out of 66,000 families in the rural sector (about 64 percent of the total population), 12,900 families (12 percent of the population) have no members of the households who are income earners — that is, belong to the labour force. From the data we also note that slightly over half the total rural families do not have any agricultural land or access to land whatsoever. Such a high figure, in a region where landlessness among peasants is not acute, is explained by the fact that the refugee population living in encampments outside urban municipalities is subsumed as part of the “rural” population. Of the total rural population that do have land, or access to land (i.e. 48.4 percent of total rural families in Table 1), about 5,400 families do not have any income other than family labour in their own farms. Thus about 5 percent of rural households in the West Bank, and about 8 percent of the total families (urban, rural and refugees) — if we are to trust the above figures — derive their livelihood from family farms.⁴

Although a distinction must be made between those households deriving their livelihood from family farms and between wage-labour involved in agriculture, most official data (to the extent that they count small holders within the civilian labour force) do not make such a distinction and collapse both categories under the “agricultural sector.” Table 1 is an exception but does not reveal much about the number of wage workers within the agricultural system.⁵ All the trends however show a decline in the number of *both* agricultural workers and household members involved in their family farms. This is caused by two opposite features of contemporary Palestinian agriculture: increased productivity in some lands due to the introduction of technology, and marginalization of hilly lands due to negligence. As a consequence, the most dramatic changes in the West Bank labour force have taken place in the agriculture sector. Between the years 1968-1976, the region witnessed a drop of 10,600 workers employed in agriculture: thus, while in 1968 half the total labour force was involved in agriculture, in 1976

⁴ The basis of calculation for these figures is as follows: those households listed as having “farm and support” and “farm only” amount together to 48.4 percent of the total rural households. Within those two categories 41.5 percent (i.e. 8.7 percent + 32.8 percent) or 5,400 households are listed as having no (“0”) earners. From this I deduce subsistence on farm income. The paradox of 8 percent of all families living from farm income can be explained by the fact that many urban localities in the West Bank have garden plots in their periphery. Hebron is an outstanding example.

⁵ Similarly, the work of women and children is not counted as productive labour and therefore is left out of data on the civilian labour force.

it constituted only 26.1 percent, a decline of 28.9 percent (Awartani, 1978, p. 6).

Out of a total of 211,000 employed from the occupied territories in 1978, about 143,000 — roughly two-thirds of the labour force — worked inside the territories (Gaza and the West Bank) and 68,000 (about one-third) worked inside Israel. Table A (appendix) shows the distribution of those employed by economic branch. The main difference in the distribution of the labour force between those working “at home” and the internal migrants working in Israel is reflected in the exceptionally large figure for those working in Israeli construction (46 percent from the West Bank, and 44.3 percent from Gaza) compared to only 15.2 percent of the labour force in the West Bank and Gaza employed in local construction (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, *Survey of the Labour Force in the Administered Territories*, 1979). Despite a slight decline in the percentage of workers employed in construction, their aggregate number more than tripled between 1970 and 1979, from 11,200 to 34,400 workers (Central Bureau of Statistics, *Family Surveys in the Administered Areas*, p. 23, Table 6).

THE PEASANT'S HOUSEHOLD

A clarification is necessary here of the use of the term “peasant's household” as a unit of analysis. The Israeli census data defines a household simply as “persons who live together in the same dwelling and take meals together.” This is in line with the concept of a peasant's household developed by the famous Survey of Arab Villages in 1944 conducted by the Mandatory regime, wherein the household was defined as “a family or group of people living together in the same quarters and having the same cooking arrangements” (Government of Palestine, 1945, p. 9). Besides the core group, that definition included “relatives, permanent agricultural labourers and servants living and eating with the family.” In the actual count, however, non-blood relatives (including resident workers) were excluded (*ibid.*).

The decline of the average peasant household from 6.1 members in 1944 to 5.0 in the 1967 census (Government of Palestine, 1945, p. 9; Central Bureau of Statistics, 1976, p. 37, Table 1) reflects the nuclearization of the residential unit rather than a decline in fertility, since net growth in rural population has actually increased, given the lower infant mortality rates. However, these averages are of little help for the purposes of this study since what we are concerned with is the continued functioning of the extended peasant family as a unit even after it becomes residentially nuclear. Cohen (1965) and Nakhleh (1975) have shown, using different interpretations, how the Palestinian extended family in the Galilee (Israel) has been reinforced by the regime as a result of political manipulation of traditional *hamula* alliances. The situation in the West Bank is somewhat different to the extent

that the structure of the peasant household has been dismembered by large-scale migration abroad. Ammons (1978) has shown how the differential impact of emigration and internal community of peasant workers has had unanticipated, and contradictory, consequences for the peasant household. While the former, migration abroad, contributed to the strengthening of the extended unit and a conservative social outlook among the remaining family members, the latter (internal commuting) has hastened the process of breakup and nuclearization, in part because younger bread-winners in the family established a source of earning independent from their fathers (Ammons, 1978, pp. 213, 219).

The adaptation of the peasant household to land marginalization, and to the loss of family members to work opportunities abroad has been variable and often dependent on the initiative of the head of household to maintain his sons' involvement in agriculture. The size of the plot in hilly dry farming seems immaterial to this continued cohesion of the extended family, since beyond a certain limit the land is usually farmed out on a share-cropping basis. We will suggest here three factors that continue to bind residentially nuclear extended households: (1) The ability of the patriarch to reconcile his married sons' urges (and now ability) to break away from their parental bonds, through his appeal for their help in working the land during periods of heavy demand for agricultural work; and (2) The degree to which remuneration from wage-labour and remittances leads the whole family to neglect the land and live as *rentiers*. In this case, as Ammons has noted for Ballata, the extended family is augmented by the wives and children of emigrants abroad, and the traditional authority of the patriarch is strengthened regardless of his relationship to the land; (3) The ability of the head of the household to harness the labour of the wives and children of migrant household members to work on the family farm or in related family enterprises. It should be noted that the term "head of household" no longer applies exclusively to the patriarch, or even to the male head, since extended absences by husbands, brothers and fathers frequently leave women in command of household affairs.⁶

We leave aside here the impact of women seeking work outside the village (and the family farm) on the structure of the rural household, since the aggregate number of rural women involved in wage-labour is too small to warrant generalization — less than 5 percent of the total, according to the Ministry of Labour — while where there is an increase in female employment

⁶ In the 1967 census, "small villages" in the West Bank had 723 males for every 1,000 females present in the 15-44 age category. There were 820 males for every 1,000 females in "large villages" (CBS, 1967, p. 37, table 1).

it seems to occur in the vicinity of refugee camp, that is, in areas of least access to family farms.

RURAL LABOUR AND WORK IN ISRAEL

Arab workers from the occupied territories working in Israel are still, after almost fifteen years of occupation, in their overwhelming majority unskilled (performing menial labour in construction, industry and the services), unorganized, and therefore unstable in their work tenure. Furthermore, considerable wage disparities continue to exist between Arab and Jewish workers within the same sectors, amounting to 40 percent on the average (Farjoun, 1979, p. 21).

Recent surveys of the Arab labour force in Israel show an uneven distribution of the work force by sector as well as by region. Over 40 percent of the labour force continues to work in construction, as against 25 percent in industry and 15 percent in services. There is an increasing tendency for young West Bank workers to take their first employment in Israel (55 percent of all workers in 1978). In the last few years there has been also a tendency of workers to stay longer in their jobs, compared with the first decade of occupation. For example, in 1978 40 percent of all workers had spent more than two years in their jobs, and 28 percent more than three years. Moreover, corresponding to the concentration of Arab workers in construction and industry, we find the largest proportion of workers employed in Tel Aviv and its suburbs (about 50 percent). (*QSAT*, 1978, pp. viii, 2).

How do rural workers figure in those aggregates? Table 2 gives us an indication of the weight and distribution of Palestinian workers in Israel originating from villages, compared to those coming from towns and refugee camps.

The patterns that emerge here show significant differences between urban and rural workers. While rural workers constitute 77.3 percent of the total labour force working in Israel, they still constitute a higher portion of those workers in construction (82 percent) or agriculture (83.3 percent). Conversely, out of the 28,500 workers from villages who work in Israel, about half (48.2 percent) work in construction, contrasted with their employment in industry (21.5 percent) or agriculture (12.3 percent). Industry, on the other hand is the main occupation of urban-based workers (38.7 percent), while only about a quarter (27.3 percent) work in construction. Only workers originating from refugee camps show similar patterns to those of village workers.

How does this sectoral distribution of employment in Israel compare with employment inside the West Bank? Unfortunately, in the data that are available, refugee camps are statistically collapsed within the two population

TABLE 2
WEST BANK WORKERS EMPLOYED IN ISRAEL BY TYPE OF SETTLEMENT
AND ECONOMIC SECTOR, 1978

Sector	Total (000)	Percentages				Total (000)	Cities	Villages	Camp
		Total	From cities	From villages	From camps				
<i>Total</i> (000)	36.8	X	X	X	X	36.8	4.4	28.5	3.9
<i>Percentages</i>	X	100.0	12.1	77.3	10.6	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Agriculture</i>	4.1	100.0	(4.7)	83.3	(12.0)	11.4	(4.5)	12.3	(12.8)
<i>Industry</i>	8.7	100.0	(19.5)	70.2	(10.3)	23.6	(38.7)	21.5	(23.1)
<i>Construction</i>	16.7	100.0	(7.2)	82.0	(10.8)	46.0	(27.3)	48.2	(46.2)
<i>Other</i>	7.3	100.0	(18.8)	70.6	(10.6)	19.0	(29.5)	18.0	(17.9)

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, *QSAT*, Vol. 9, No. 2, p. 2 (November 1979), Table 17. Figures in brackets refer to projections from small samples.

groups within which they live. But since employment patterns of refugees in Israel correspond roughly to villagers employed in Israel, the distortion is likely to appear in urban figures only, if at all. Table B (appendix) shows significantly different patterns of sectoral distribution of employment *inside* the West Bank for *both* urban and rural workers. In the cities the three primary branches of employment are industry (27.2 percent), commerce, and public services (each 20.6 percent). In the rural sector, agriculture, as expected, occupies 40 percent of total employment, followed by construction (24 percent) and industry (12.9 percent) (*QSAT*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1979, Table 12, p. 130). Thus we find that industry (for urban-based workers), and construction (for villagers) are respectively the main areas of common employment for those working on both sides of the Green Line.

What makes employment in construction the mainstay of village workers and in such a manner that it has kept a consistent pace over the last fifteen years of occupation? Traditionally, Arab construction, which constituted a job with an elaborate hierarchy of skills and stages of initiation, has been transformed by Israeli building firms into a relatively mechanized industry with a tremendous thirst for unskilled labour. This development took place

at an especially rapid pace after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, when an economic boom coincided with high demand for immigrant housing (for Jews) and the influx of tens of thousands of unskilled, cheap and politically powerless labourers. This demand for building workers withstood the economic recession during the years 1974-1978 (including the recession in the building sector), and, it seems, the more recent slowdown of economic activities beginning in 1980 (*Jerusalem Post*, January 31, 1979; *Al-Quds*, March 26, 1980).

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF "MARGINAL FARMING"

The nature of the Israeli demand for building workers is not sufficient to explain the uneven distribution of rural workers in construction. As will be seen in the case of Ras al-Tin village, there is a definite relationship between the nature of construction work in Israel and the demand for marginal farming in the Palestinian village. If we collapse those households whose earners depend on their farm only with those dependent on "farm and support" (Table 1, above) we obtain a total of 41.5 percent of total households whose income is supplemented by farming (albeit in declining proportions) — a sizeable proportion of the West Bank rural population by any standard. For those households it is important to have their bread-winners employed in jobs from which they can be released periodically when agricultural work in the family farm demands it. The building trades, in their modes of recruitment (reliance on family connections, short-term employment, lack of basic skills, etc...), and the preponderance of small and medium-sized sites, are quite suitable for the village worker who insists on maintaining his links with the land.

Land to the peasant — even to the "proletarianized peasants" of the West Bank — is not primarily real estate (although, as Linda Ammons has shown, it has become so in the peripheries of the main towns), but *security*. Security in this context has three meanings:

First, it supplements his cash earning from wage-labour, both as a means of subsistence and of extra cash crops by which he improves his standard of living.

Second, "the land is always there," in case he is laid off from work or is compelled to remain unemployed for a long period in search of work. In this sense the worker's land, like his family, is his last resort.

Third, the family farm constitutes the worker's physical and symbolic link with his immediate community, and hence with peasant culture in general. The common saying that "he who has no land, has no honour" (*illi ma ilo ard, ma ilo 'ard*) is thus not merely an expression of patriotic attachment, but reflects in the peasant's mind the central axis around which the village work cycle, and his relationship with his brothers, sisters, parents

and cousins, as well as his family’s visible source of livelihood, revolve.

However, the security generated by the peasant-worker’s possession of land or access to land (in case members of his family are share-croppers) should not disguise the declining role of the family farm in the worker’s life, at least as long as levels of high employment in Israel persist. One would thus expect that long-term dependence by the farmer’s family on income from wage-labour and from stipends sent by emigrants abroad would create new consumption patterns, new life-styles, etc., which would weaken his direct involvement with cultivation. The empirical data that we have on this subject is far from conclusive, but after more than a decade of occupation some trends have begun to appear. Table 3 indicates correlations between the length of employment in Israel, the field of employment, and the extent of cultivation of family land.

TABLE 3
WEST BANK WORKERS IN ISRAEL WHO ARE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS,
ACCORDING TO THEIR CULTIVATION OF LAND AND SENIORITY
OF WORK IN ISRAEL, 1977

	Cultivation of Land				Percentages		
	Total	Land cultivated	Land not cultivated	Total	Total	Land cultivated	Land not cultivated
		(thousands)		(000)			
Total	20.7	6.2	14.5	20.7	X	X	X
Present Economic Branch		(percentages)					
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	X	100.0	30.0	70.0
Agriculture	(9.2)	(14.3)	(7.0)	(1.9)	100.0	(46.8)	(53.2)
Industry	22.7	(19.1)	24.4	4.7	100.0	(25.1)	74.9
Construction	48.0	50.6	46.7	9.9	100.0	31.7	68.3
Other	20.1	16.0	21.9	4.1	100.0	(23.9)	76.1
Seniority in Work (years)							
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	20.7	100.0	30.0	70.0
0 – 2	(3.9)	(4.9)	(3.5)	(3.5)	100.0	(37.6)	(62.4)
2 – 4	22.5	(25.4)	21.3	4.6	100.0	33.6	66.2
4 +	73.6	69.7	75.2	15.1	100.0	28.4	71.6

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, *QSAT*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Table 8, p. 113.

The rural West Bank, it must be remembered, has a preponderance of owner-cultivators and almost an absence of an agricultural proletariat. It is striking, therefore, to find that among heads of households employed in Israel, 70 percent do not cultivate a piece of land.⁷ Furthermore, among those presently employed in construction — who are in the majority — there seems to be a higher tendency (31.7 percent) to cultivate a family plot (the only exception being the case of those currently employed in agriculture, but the size of the sample here is not big enough to warrant comparisons).

Perhaps the most significant correlation in Table 3 is between work seniority and the tendency to cultivate land. The more the years the worker spends employed in Israel, the less likely he is to cultivate his plot; and conversely, among those who have spent less than two years employed in Israel we find the highest rate of land cultivation (37.6 percent). This is the first concrete evidence linking length of wage-labour employment in Israel with increased neglect of the family farm in the West Bank. Thus, although we will be demonstrating in the case of Ras al-Tin the continued importance of marginal land for those workers who have been employed for years outside their village, it is important to note that, for the West Bank as a whole, land has a declining role for rural wage-earners. This condition is likely to continue as long as high levels of employment in Israel are available for Palestinian workers, and as long as there is a pull for migrant labour in Jordan and the neighbouring Arab countries.

THE CASE OF RAS AL-TIN

Ras al-Tin is typical of those hilly West Bank villages where the majority of peasants are owner-cultivators and where land is increasingly marginalized. The village (about 1,400 inhabitants, of whom about 300 are migrants abroad) shares several features, both social and ecological, with villages of the Nablus, Hebron, Ramallah and Bethlehem mountains, and with the Judean hills in particular. Its main crop, olives, occupies village labour totally for two to three months every two years, during the picking and olive-pressing season. (Olives have a bi-annual cycle.)

A substantial proportion of the village work force is employed in Israel (between 120-140 workers), and, like many Ramallah district villages, a considerable number of men (but not their families) are migrant workers in the Gulf, South America, and West Germany.

Ras al-Tin, in common with several villages in the Bani Zeid region, is divided into two peasant factions: Barghutis and Fallahin. The former were,

⁷ The data does not actually clarify whether the land cultivated is owned by the earner or not, but it seems to be an assumption on the part of the tabulators that owner-cultivators are involved.

until the end of Ottoman rule in Palestine, big landlords and tax-farmers, but have gradually lost their political influence and prestige. Their former status is still reflected today in the distribution of land parcels and in housing patterns. Although there is hardly any difference, for average households, in the *size* of agricultural plots between the two factions, the Barghutis (who constitute about 25 percent of village households) still own the most fertile land in the valley which they seized, according to a story prevalent in the village, 80 years ago from the Fallahin after a faction of the Barghuti clan from Deir Ghassaneh sought “refuge” in Ras al-Tin following a blood feud. The dwellings of the Fallahin were also concentrated in two separate areas of the village, divided from their former landlords by a paved road in one case and agricultural plots in the other. Only at the entrance of the village do we observe newly established dwellings where the houses of the two factions intermingle. Those units, unlike the stone houses of the rest of the village, were built in the late sixties and early seventies with German and American wages sent home, and to a lesser extent with Israeli money converted into dinars.

Historically, of course, land was both a source of wealth and status (*wajaha*). Rich peasants were those who were either big landlords and tax-farmers (as was the case with the heads of the Barghuti clans in neighbouring Bani Zeid), or their agents (*wukala*). In either case, these patriarchal lords commanded both authority and a considerably higher amount of wealth than their fellow-villagers. Their authority was based on their ability to mobilize their clan members and dependents on the side of their urban notable allies in times of factional conflicts, while their wealth was based on the returns of the land in addition to the high rates of interest they charged on money lent.

Until the end of British rule, one of the main sources of internal differentiation in the Palestinian village was peasant indebtedness to wealthy landlords. In years of bad crops, the landlord would extend credit to the poor farmer as an advance for buying seeds and paying the ploughman. Against this credit, the farmer would sign portions of his land as security, and eventually — especially in the event of the occurrence of successive bad yields — he would lose his best land to village notables. According to this pattern in the Ramallah district, many peasants in Ras al-Tin lost their lands to Bir Zeit and Burham landlords; those in Abu Shakheidam to Bir Zeit landlords; and those in Mizra’a to the landlords of Deir Ghassaneh and Beit Rima. Thus the process of differentiation was not only internal to the same village, but also divided regions into “poor” and “wealthy” villages. The crucial determinant of this latter process of land transfer was the presence or absence within the village of notables with strong links to the government, and before that, to the tax-farmers.

In Ras al-Tin the only variation on this pattern was the alienation of the best village lands (including a substantial plain surrounding the village built-up area) to the Barghuti clan in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The Barghuti clan was also the first in the village to send migrants abroad. In the fifties, members of the clan migrated to Lebanon, where many of them became building workers and hotel and restaurant attendants in the city of Beirut. This was followed by larger waves of migration in the sixties and seventies to the Gulf, Latin America, and Germany, this time including both Barghutis and Fallahin. Migration created a new source of wealth in the village, which radically changed the importance of land ownership as a source of social differentiation — given the meagre yields of the reduced plot holdings by the middle of this century.

Today Ras al-Tin is a “poor” village compared with the surrounding towns in the Ramallah district, but not untypical of the average village in the hilly regions of the West Bank. It has several natural springs but no water-pipe and no irrigated agriculture. Of the 5,000 dunums of cultivated land under village control, 4,500 dunums are planted with olive trees (of those only 3,500 dunums are productive), and the remaining 500 dunums are planted with fig trees, almonds, grape vines, wheat and barley, lentils and fave beans. All yields, aside from olives and olive oil, are subsistence crops. There are at the moment three old olive presses, one of which is also used as a grain mill. Electricity is supplied for a few hours in the evening from privately-owned generators which are shared between several families.

Aside from the olive presses, the only form of productive investment in Ras al-Tin is a chicken farm which markets its produce in Ramallah, and four all-purpose village stores whose owners make credit arrangements (including loans with high interest terms) with their clients.

Before 1967, some Ras al-Tin farmers used to be share-croppers in the lands of neighbouring villages, but the opportunities for work in Israel and emigration have ended that. Today, all farmers in the village are owner-cultivators, while some of their household members, including those who work in Israel, hire themselves as agricultural labourers during the olive-picking season.

BECOMING A WORKER IN ISRAEL

Official statistics show that more than 70 percent of West Bank workers are registered through labour exchange bureaux. However, all workers from Ras al-Tin are “illegal” workers; that is, they find employment through local contractors or on their own, by contacts with work mates or relatives. In all the cases interviewed, work was obtained in construction sites in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv through a brother or a cousin who was already employed by a Jewish boss. Husam, one of my informants, has a typical work history.

Today, at 24, he is barely literate, having left school in the sixth grade. He started work in Israel in 1968 as an apprentice painter and whitewasher, assisting his brother, who was a *mu'allim* (master craftsman) in the trade.⁸ He worked for three years with his brother until he "mastered the trade" and made all the necessary connections to work on his own. Now he is a *mu'allim*⁹ in his own right and has a team of four workers (two cousins, a younger brother and a distant relative) working with him. His chief employer, off and on, was Solel Boneh – the major Israeli construction company ("the biggest company in Israel," according to Husam), but he also works for a variety of small and medium-sized construction firms, as well as for private home owners. He establishes his contacts by leaving his name with a Jewish workmate in Tel Aviv who has a telephone, and who arranges new assignments for him as each job is finished. As it stands, he currently has 13 regular customers.

BOSSES AND CONTRACTORS

Unlike the industrial sector and agribusiness in Israel, where a semi-proletariat is emerging among village migrant workers, the nature of work in the construction sector lends itself to a hierarchy of bosses and contractors. Such a hierarchy is implicit in the mode of recruitment of Arab workers: in a typical case, an Israeli firm contracts an Israeli businessman to recruit the necessary number of workers to finish the job. He in turn hires a number of Arab sub-contractors (their number depending on the size and complexity of the project), who undertake the recruitment directly. Among the sub-contractors one observes an overlap in the identity of boss, *mu'allim*, and worker, since most sub-contractors work with their team of recruits. Normally, these are composed of family members, relatives and other mates. Almost always, they come from the same village, and rarely do Jewish and Arab workers work together on the same assignment. Ahmad, 23, describes this process thus:

The company gives the assignment to a Jewish contractor, he hands it over to an Arab (sub)-contractor (my brother Sa'id), who in turn employs seven Arab workers. The Jewish contractor has no contact with us. He deals only with my brother, while we work with Sa'id.

Although at work there are some differences between such sub-contractors and workers in the degree of skill, age, their ability to make contacts and

⁸ Before Israeli occupation in 1967 many Ras al-Tin emigrants had worked in the Beirut harbour area as painters and whitewashers, and had acquired a reputation in the trade.

⁹ The word *mu'allim* is used by workers to designate two different meanings: a boss (or a sub-contractor), and a master-craftsman. Sometimes the term refers to the two attributes merged in the same person, as the present case demonstrates.

their command of the Hebrew language, these differences are not crucial since they can be acquired by many workers in a relatively short time, and — as we shall see — there is a continuous mobility of workers into the position of sub-contractors, and vice-versa. The *mu'allim* (in this case, meaning the sub-contractor) works the same hours, at the same site as his mates. He eats, drinks, sleeps, and plays cards with them. Two village workers explain how they became *mu'allimeen*:

(Husam): In the beginning (1968) I worked on a daily basis for my brother — always on construction sites; I never worked in a factory. He used to give me 20 pounds daily but it was never enough. One day a Jewish boss came and gave me 40 pounds, so I left my brother to work for him. Since then I changed many bosses, with each increasing my knowledge of the craft (*san'a*), and familiarity with the paints. Now I am a *mu'allim*.

(Mustafa; as told by his cousin Samih): when Mustafa worked with me in his first year, he didn't know a thing. He worked with me for a month and a half until I handed him over (*sic*) to a Jewish contractor. He assigned him a job without supervision, so I used to leave my work and teach him. Often he would mess up the work and I had to fix things up after him. To the boss he would claim that it was his own work. The Jewish contractor would give him 400 pounds from which I deducted 150 pounds for myself. Thus I made Mustafa become a *mu'allim* in spite of himself.

Although the degree of skills involved in becoming a *mu'allim* today requires little training beyond that of an unskilled worker (which is due in the main to the technological transformation of the building sector), the label of *mu'allim* is not used indiscriminately. In the above case, for example, Husam explained that Mustafa is still an unskilled worker (*shagheel*) despite his new designation. His problem, apparently, is that he cannot assess in advance what an assignment will cost and therefore is liable to end up losing money for the work done. This in fact is a crucial difference between a *mu'allim* and *shagheel* (using them as designations of status) in the work process. In most projects the Jewish contractor provides the equipment, the materials, and — where necessary — the police permit for sleeping on the site. The Arab *mu'allim* (in this case the sub-contractor) has to calculate beforehand the aggregate sum it will cost him to pay for his worker's wages, his own labour and profit, and the time needed to finish the job. In commuting he also has to add transport costs. In most medium-sized and small projects the deal is made over the cost of the assignment while the time needed to finish it (within a certain range) is not relevant to the Israeli contractor. But it is crucial from the point of view of the Arab *mu'allim*.

A *mu'allim* thus has to be very careful in calculating his expenses to ensure a reasonable income for himself. Here is how Hussein, 29, calculated his expenses for a Tel Aviv assignment which required three months' work (February 1979): Transport from Ras al-Tin to Tel Aviv and return for 7

workers: 750 pounds per week (since they sleep on the site during working days). Of the seven passengers, his own team consists of three workers: his uncle, his cousin and a member of his clan (*hamula*). He pays them an average of 180 pounds each per day (200 for “seasoned workers”; 150-160 for “beginners”). From this amount he deducts 80 pounds each (per week) for transport, and all food expenses, including tea — which are included in the team expenses. The four of them take turns in preparing meals, using firewood.

Thus, while the workers receive daily wages from Hussein, he works by commission and it is in his interest to finish the assignment as quickly as possible. The usual working day is 10 to 12 hours long, with liberal breaks for tea and coffee. Hussein’s net income during an average month amounts to 12,000 to 14,000 Israeli pounds (1979); workers in his team net an average monthly wage of 5,000 pounds, from which nothing is deducted since they are not registered workers. This should be compared to the salary of a school teacher in the West Bank holding a B.A. degree, which amounted during the same period to 4,000-5,000 pounds per month.

JEWISH BOSSES AND ARAB EMPLOYERS

Why do the workers from Ras al-Tin prefer to work “illegally” through sub-contractors, than through labour exchanges? And why do they prefer to work in Israel, and face a daily routine of national humiliation than to work for an Arab employer in the West Bank, when such work is available for equal wages?

There are a number of advantages involved in being a registered worker, including health insurance and work compensation for accidents and lay-off periods. Against this, an average of 30 percent of the worker’s salary is deducted by his employer as social tax, of which only about one half is paid as social benefits.¹⁰ However, these benefits are not always accessible to the worker, and many have to go to great lengths to claim them. Hussein explained that only totally unskilled workers go through labour exchanges. Workers in Ras al-Tin, together with an estimated one-third of all workers from the occupied territories and perhaps more, prefer to forego these privileges and work illegally. The following reasons are given: (1) Work with sub-contractors is arranged informally and through relatives. It assures quick assignments, no red tape, and almost no waiting periods between one assignment and another; (2) Considerable saving is assured by not paying the

¹⁰ “Robbing the Arab workers from the territories,” *Al-Hamishmar*, July 13, 1978. Quoted in *MERIP Reports*, no. 74, January 1979, p. 17.

social benefits tax amounting, on average, to 30 percent of one's income; (3) Work accidents are covered by the Israeli employer who, although not obliged by contract to do this, is already violating the law by not paying his share of the social tax.

When Hussein broke his hand while on an assignment in 1977, his Tel Aviv boss refused to pay the I.L. 500 bill for his hospital treatment until Hussein threatened to take him to a labour court, after which the man yielded. However, Hussein was laid-off at home for 3 months without any compensation. Had he been registered he would have received compensation. Still, Hussein is willing to take the risks and continues to work "illegally." It should be pointed out that hardly any attempts are made by the government to control "illegal" work, either through employers or by curtailing the flow of workers.

Farmers from Ras al-Tin are aware of the resentment against their work in Israel among nationalist circles in the West Bank and abroad, but they view it disdainfully. "Before 1967," says Ahmad, "my elder brothers used to work for a landlord in neighbouring Burham for 30 piastres [about 40 pence] a day, and we had nowhere else to go." All of the workers interviewed had had jobs in the West Bank, mostly in building sites in Ramallah and East Jerusalem, but they prefer to work in Israel.

Preference for work in Israel as opposed to the West Bank is dictated by factors other than the availability and diversity of jobs in the Jewish sector. West Bank businessmen and building contractors often complain about the difficulties confronting them in recruiting workers, even when they offer the same salaries as Israelis (thus saving their workers the added costs of transportation). At the heart of this preference are the conditions of work: Jewish contractors work mainly for big construction firms and they have to maintain a steady and reliable supply of labour. Payment for jobs takes place promptly and according to the conditions stipulated in the written contract. Against this, most Arab construction sites are small-scale family concerns; agreements are made orally, and payments for finished assignments are often delayed. "With Arab contractors," says Husam, "I have to remind them four or five times to pay me, and by the time they do, I lose a good part of my money because of inflation. The Jewish [boss] cannot afford to cheat you since he [usually] has four or five sites to finish, and he wants to get this work done." Equally important from the point of view of the Arab worker is the more relaxed atmosphere at work in Israeli sites. Although in the sub-contracting system described above, the number of working hours per day in Israel is not lower, daily supervision over the workers is in the hands of the Arab *mu'allim*, who is mostly one of their work mates. In the West Bank, workers are subjected to the continued scrutiny of the owner of property or, in the case of bigger enterprises, of the building contractor

himself. In addition, work in major cities like Tel Aviv has the added benefit of providing access to a variety of entertainment facilities which do not exist in the West Bank, including the availability of Jewish prostitutes.

While Arab workers in the construction sector have numerous contacts with Jewish contractors, they rarely work with Jewish workers on the same site. In fact, most of their contacts, both in going to work and on the construction site, happen to be with people from their own village, and often from their own clan. In villages around Ras al-Tin (e.g., Deir al-Sudani, Beitillo, Deir Ghassaneh, Deir 'Ammar, 'Abud), buses transport villagers to their work site in Israel and bring them back in the evening, thus reinforcing this village identity. When they do have contacts with Jewish workers, politics are rarely discussed; social interaction is amiable but is kept at a minimum. On the Israeli side, the villager's contact is mostly with the contractor, the boss, the police, the prostitute and the border guard. Despite his deep penetration into the Israeli economy and his workable command of Hebrew, the Arab peasant-worker's conception of Jewish society remains that of a closed and undifferentiated mass.

FARM LABOUR AND WAGE-LABOUR

Everybody in Ras al-Tin owns land. A majority of those farmers who work in Israel spend one to two months every year away from their work to pick their olives. Some take a few extra weeks to work for big landlords in neighbouring villages (Mizra'a, Burham, Deir Ghassaneh).

In the hilly regions of the West Bank, very few households live exclusively from their family farm. In Ras al-Tin, there are about eight families (less than 5 percent of the total households) whose members work a substantial portion of the year on their family land. (Husam's father-in-law is a member of one of those. Relying on his sons' and on hired labour during the picking seasons, he makes 120 canisters (2,400 litres) of olive oil during good years. This amount yields him enough income to make him independent, if he so chooses, of having to send his sons to work outside the village.)

The economics of olive farming in the West Bank make it worthwhile only for a limited number of peasant families to devote their households' labour to the orchard. A survey of 840 farms conducted in 1974 revealed a net return of I.L. 724 (then about £ 52 sterling) per dunum of Roman olives against an investment of I.L. 425 per dunum, and that during "good" (*masiehb*) years — i.e., every two years.¹¹ The yields for regular trees —

¹¹ Sumayyeh Farhat-Nasir, 1980, p. 59 (table 22). The net yield for "regular" trees was estimated at 338 I.L. against an investment of 172 I.L. per dunum during good years, and 80-114 I.L. during bad (*shalatuneh*) years. (See also note 25 below.)

I.L. 338 per dunum in good years and I.L. 80 in bad years — hardly offer an inviting prospect during periods of high demand for wage-labour in Israel.

However, the choice facing the Palestinian peasant is not simply between working in Israel and working on his farm, but rather that of the proper utilization of his household members' labour (including the labour of his womenfolk and children) throughout the year so that he can derive optimum benefits from the opportunities for wage labour, without, at the same time, neglecting his farm totally. Since there are a certain number of constraints limiting the participation of women (modesty code, etc.) and children (education) in wage-labour outside the village, it is the household's elder sons who are the first to be released in response to wage-labour opportunities. Subsequently, the thirteen years of Israeli occupation of the West Bank have seen increased participation by women and children in certain aspects of the agricultural process which were previously the domain of men; for instance, the shaking of branches and picking from the tree top (*jadd*), as opposed to collecting the olives from the ground, is now often performed by women and older people. Women are also increasingly observed handling the plough — previously a man's preserve.¹²

On the other hand, the size of the family may encourage the head of the peasant household to keep one or more of his sons to work on the farm. The process of agricultural production in olive orchards, and, more important, its bi-annual cycle, lends itself conveniently to the demand for casual labour outside the village. However, there are basic tasks which have to be done if the orchard is to maintain reasonable productivity. These are ploughing (at least twice a year — March and April); weeding (April, May); pruning (September); and fertilization.¹³ The picking season begins in September and continues throughout October and November. During these months also household members participate in taking the olives to the press and in marketing the oil.

Sumayyeh Farhat-Nasir has estimated in her study that an average farmer needs to work, on average, six days per dunum of olives throughout the year — picking of olives excluded.¹⁴ Picking requires an additional amount of

¹² For a discussion of the sexual division of labour among Palestinian peasants in the hilly regions, see Munir Nasir, 1974, p. 77.

¹³ S. Farhat-Nasir found, however, that 76 percent of the farmers in her survey do not believe that fertilization is essential for olive trees, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.

¹⁴ Farhat-Nasir, *op. cit.*, p. 47. The writer does not clarify, however, if her calculations are based on labour utilization in an average family farm, or on abstract units of labour based on the time needed by one farmer working in one dunum by himself. Moreover, in the calculation of per dunum productivity costs, she established her model estimates on the basis of wage-labour costs, and neglected family labour as a variable (see, for example, table 22, p. 59).

labour-time ranging from 20 percent to double that needed for general care of the field, depending on the size of the tree, its kind (Roman or regular), and the cycle (*masieh* or *shalatuneh*) (Farhat-Nasir, 1980, p. 48). Wage-labour outside the village, as well as migration of young men to the Gulf and the Americas, however, have led to widespread neglect of the olive crop. In 1974 most West Bank olive farmers spent between 15 to 29 percent of the needed days tending their farms; only ten percent of the farmers spent more than half the needed days (*ibid*, p. 49). Farmers in the Ramallah district, which has the highest rate of migration in the West Bank, exhibited a higher degree of olive negligence than all the other districts; their trees were in the worst condition and they used the most damaging techniques for picking olives (89 percent of olive farmers in Ramallah used the labour-saving method of beating the branches with a stick, as opposed to 33 percent in Nablus, 2 percent in Jenin, and 39 percent in Tulkarm) (Farhat-Nasir, 1980, p. 47, table 13; p. 50, table 16).

In Ras al-Tin, only the better-off families who own more than 40 dunums can keep some of their older sons at any length of time on the family farm to take care of the fields, and unless they receive regular stipends from their immediate kin abroad, only those families can afford to send their sons (and occasionally their daughters) to school beyond the ninth grade.¹⁵ It is usually only those families who pay the necessary extra attention to the land. This includes ploughing the orchards at least twice a year (and until recently three times a year, the third being in the spring, called *tathleeth*), weeding, fertilizing, and supplementing the olive crops with vegetables. Almost every household in Ras al-Tin is dependent on the family farm to create some savings; the olives are pressed and the oil is sold only in Jordanian dinars, which is "hard" currency in Israel. In addition, the supply of the annual household provision of olives, olive oil and other basic staples is assured.

Under Jordanian rule, many farmers in Ras al-Tin used to hire themselves as field workers to the big landlords of neighbouring Burham. Husam's father, for example, worked for 10 piastres a day in the fifties as a hoe tiller (*bahbash*). His elder brother earned sixty piastres a day working in a nearby quarry. Work chances in wage-labour outside the village were then limited, unless one had the initial investment (and contacts) to enable him to migrate to the Gulf.

With the opening of employment opportunities in Israel after occupation,

¹⁵ For a discussion of the relationship between illiteracy rates and agricultural labour in the area under review, see Rima Abdel-Nour, *Illiteracy in the Rural West Bank: A Case Study of Five Villages* (Bir Zeit University Publications, forthcoming, 1981).

many family farms were marginalized and increasingly neglected. Several workers from Ras al-Tin claimed that they can make more money working one week in construction than their farm income in olives for a whole season. Not only must the pull factor of wage-labour be considered in this context, but also an ecological factor, that is, whether the olive year is fertile (*masieb*) or infertile (*shalatuneh*). To illustrate the wide fluctuations in production implied by this factor, we cite the results of the survey referred to above:

TABLE 4
DIFFERENTIAL INCOME FROM MARKETING OF OLIVE OIL CAUSED
BY THE ANNUAL FLUCTUATION OF THE OLIVE CYCLE:
WEST BANK, 1973-74 (I.L./dunum)

Net income per dunum of olive trees	"Roman" trees		Regular trees	
	Fertile year	Infertile year	Fertile year	Infertile year
1) Local marketing	724.3	337.0	337.9	80.5
2) Export to Jordan ¹⁶	493.9	70.8	124.5	60.7

Source: S. Farhat-Nasir, *The Olive of Palestine and Its problems*, adopted from Tables 22 and 23, pp. 59 and 61.

Bearing in mind that 80 percent of the produce has to be exported, due to the limitations of the local market (*ibid*, p. 62), the profit margin in fertile years varies from twice to as much as seven times the income from infertile years. In 1978, Mustafa's family produced 60 canisters of oil; in 1977, only 3 *ruttles* (9kg.) During *shalatuneh* seasons, workers make little effort to absent themselves from their work sites in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and leave the whole crop for their womenfolk and children to pick.

Another crucial determinant of involvement in the family farm is the decreasing size of agricultural land resulting from partible inheritance. (In the region of Ras al-Tin, and in the Ramallah district in general, unlike

¹⁶ The considerably lower income derived from the marketing of olives is due to the presence, in good years, of a large surplus of West Bank olives (which constitute 80 percent of local production, according to Nasir), and to competition from Spanish and Italian imports in the Arab market. The acidity content of olive oil increases with storage, thus preventing farmers from making full use of market demands during infertile years.

Nablus and the Jordan valley, there have been only a few cases of confiscation of agricultural land for Jewish settlements.) Here is how Husam describes this process:

If our family plot produces 30 *jarras* of oil a year and it supports four sons, each son's portion becomes 6 or 7 *jarras*. For example, I currently make 50 canisters a year (when it is *masiehb*), and I have a son and a daughter. In the future each one of my sons (*sic*) will have a share of 20 or 10 canisters.

Thus the release of household labour is dependent on the relationship between five crucial variables: the size of the land; the number of adult sons in the household; the annual cycle of olives (*masiehb/shalatuneh*) and the degree of attraction of wage-labour outside the village. To this we must add, for medium and big landlords, the cost of hiring labour during the picking and pressing period. It is obvious by now that with the (relatively) high wages paid to workers in Israel (and Jordan since 1974), the last variable has become the decisive factor determining allocation of household labour, while land fragmentation (due to inheritance) and negative attitudes to agricultural work (all workers interviewed, without exception, expressed disdain towards work on the land) have become contributing factors to the marginalization and neglect of the family farm.

Although we subsumed migration (above) under work opportunities outside the village, it should be treated as a separate factor affecting the allocation of household labour. Migration involves the physical absence of able-bodied sons, and, unlike work in Israel, it cannot be tapped for periodical help in the family farm. Moreover, money sent from abroad often becomes the most crucial variable in alienating family members from their agricultural land, since the sums sent allow the remaining members to become village entrepreneurs, or in some cases, to engage in businesses in the district centre.¹⁷

Nevertheless, when all those factors are considered, individual initiative plays an important role in improving the family land. To illustrate this, we will cite the example of Husam and Mustafa. Their fathers were brothers who inherited 20 dunums from their father during Jordanian rule. The two brothers worked their land jointly, and continued to work in neighbouring fields as well as in Ramallah as hired labourers (*ujara*). When Mustafa and his brothers grew up enough to help, their father decided to devote himself

¹⁷ It should not be assumed, however, that migration is alienating the remaining family members from staying in their *villages* (as distinguished from their family farms). My observations lead me to believe, to the contrary, that remittances sent from migrant relatives have vitalized the living conditions in many villages, thus helping them to *stay* on the land, though not necessarily as farmers, when the temptation to leave may otherwise have become more pressing.

entirely to his portion of the inheritance — so the two brothers divided the lot between them.¹⁸ Husam's father, now 90 years old and sick, had neglected the land and all his sons work outside the village, one of them in Germany. Mustafa's father, on the other hand, increased the land's yield by planting a vineyard and fig trees. One of his brothers now works mainly on the land. Not only does the family get a richer harvest, but it has also accumulated some savings from the land, in contrast to Husam's family plot, which can barely meet household needs.

Thus while extended family land is often held and worked jointly by brothers in the hilly areas of the West Bank, the pressures created by wage-labour outside the village often lead to different consequences for segments of the same family. Brothers are compelled to work their inherited portions of land separately, so that the labour contributed by members of one household may not be affected by the negligence of the other household. To what extent this further fragmentation of land is affecting overall productivity has yet to be examined, although there is no doubt about its prevalence today.

WORK OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE AND PEASANT DIFFERENTIATION

One of the most important changes in village stratification has been the decline in the value of unirrigated land as a source of village wealth. This decline has been accompanied by the emergence of new sources of income: wage-labour; income from migrant relatives abroad; salaries of educated sons; investment in village enterprises (oil presses, shops, electric generators, etc.); investment in building equipment (compressors, cement mixers, etc.); and — in some regions — investment for leasing purposes in agricultural machinery (tractors, harvesters, sprayers).

Since the turn of the century, the great "rural divide" separating the mass of Palestinian peasantry tilling the land within the confines of the village *musba'* (communal) land tenure system from their landlords and tax-farmers (*multazimun*), has been modified, supplemented, and transformed. This transformation took place gradually through a combined process of increased monetarization in the agrarian economy; through the dismantling of the *musba'* system accompanied by land registration and the emergence of the big estates; and by the introduction of a new set of relationships with the

¹⁸ There was no land settlement in Ras al-Tin under the British Mandate, nor during Jordanian rule. Title deeds, therefore, are not registered in the Tapu, and villagers rely on land-tax receipts to establish their right of possession. In practice, however, there are few cases of disputes over individual plot boundaries. "Division of the lot" in this context remains a formal procedure within the extended household.

urban-based merchants, absentee-landlords, and government officials. By the middle of this century, the destruction of the Palestinian landed élite through the creation of the State of Israel led to dramatic demographic changes in the character of the agrarian regime. Thousands of landless refugees were re-settled inside or near scores of West Bank villages and towns, and a second wave of out-migration — from both the refugee and non-refugee population — was triggered off. The difference between the two waves is that while the former was a collective, politically induced exodus, the latter wave was individual, generated by the declining economic fortunes in village and town and by the attraction of work opportunities abroad.

The village economy today remains poor and underdeveloped, lacking in basic infrastructures for growth. But its occupational-social structure has been visibly transformed. These occupational changes are based on work opportunities in Israel and the West Bank district centres (construction, industry, and the services, for men; textiles and fruit picking/packing, for women); on salaried positions in the civil service and in private firms; on semi-professional jobs produced by the massive influx of university graduates; and on local investment generated by income sent from abroad.

Standards of living in the Palestinian village today — measured by food consumption levels, housing density, household items, and health standards — have definitely improved over standards during the forties, fifties, and sixties¹⁹ for those Palestinians who remained in the West Bank. But the village economy, in terms of local investment, has remained as stagnant as ever and the conditions of the rural population are even more integrated with, and dependent on, an urban sector which ceased to develop meaningfully after 1948. Today, in Ras al-Tin, as in most West Bank villages, one of the highest ambitions for the better-off peasants is to own a block of flats or commercial space in the regional town, and to lease it out, living off its returns for the rest of their lives.

In Ras al-Tin, between eight to twelve peasants are seen by their fellow-villagers as “wealthy.” Those include the two *mukhtars* (one for the Fallahin, the other for the Barghutis); owners of the three olive presses; owners of electric generators; one owner of a commercial shop in Ramallah;

¹⁹ In Ras al-Tin, for example, an average peasant family used to eat meat once a month in the sixties; today, once or twice a week. An average worker used to buy a new pair of trousers every year; today each worker has between five and eight pairs. There has also been a substantial increase in the number of durable goods in peasant households (in 1979, 30 percent of all Ras al-Tin households had TV sets, run on small generators and on batteries). For comparative data on the growth of rural standards of living in the West Bank, see “Survey of Household Items in the Administered Territories, 1978,” supplement to *Quarterly Statistics of the Administered Territories (QSAT)*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Hebrew), pp. 59-68.

and one owner of an apartment building, also in Ramallah. In addition, there are four shop owners in the village who extend credit to villagers, both in commodities purchased and in cash. The rest of the village resident population displays substantial occupational homogeneity. Aside from two proprietors of small chicken farms (one of them a widow), four school teachers, one civil servant, and one employee of the religious endowments (*awqaf*), the rest are peasant-workers. Almost every household has at least one member who commutes to work in Israel or the West Bank.

Significantly, none of the “wealthy” peasants is a big landowner — even by West Bank standards. Moreover, land is no longer a criterion of wealth. The wealthiest, a son of one of the two *mukhtars*, has only five dunums to his name, and the highest holding amongst those considered rich does not exceed a hundred dunums. Indeed, there does not seem to be a correlation in dry farming areas today between a peasant’s wealth and the cultivable area he owns.

THE POST-1967 CHANGES

Israeli occupation of the West Bank in 1967 was a landmark in the further reordering of the occupational structure among peasants. It opened up employment opportunities outside the village on a scale unprecedented before, but without forcing the peasant out of the country. The consequences of the new political situation in creating a new stratum of peasant wage-workers can be better observed by contrasting the two periods in Ras al-Tin:

Before 1967: Both the increase in surplus labour and the scarcity of outside employment in the fifties encouraged many farmers to plant new olive seedlings and to pay extra attention to the existing groves. The result was an increased yield of olive oil per dunum of olive trees by the early sixties. By then the first emigrants to Lebanon, Colombia, and the Gulf States began to send money to their immediate relatives who had stayed in the village. Divisions between the Barghuti and Fallahin clans were still important, since the former families controlled the best lands and they had better connections with government circles and urban merchants. The Barghuti also constituted the bulk of the small professional intelligentsia of the village, whose members — upon receiving a university education — had moved to Jerusalem, Amman, and Ramallah. However, new lines of differentiation emerged, separating those who received income from brothers and sons abroad from those who depended exclusively on local employment and/or their farm income. Village stores became an important instrument for the accumulation of wealth, both by selling items at a considerably higher price than their retail value in neighbouring Ramallah, and by extending credit to the poorer peasants.

After 1967: The village witnessed an increased wave of migration to the Gulf and the opening of a new wave to West Germany, both involving the “export” of painters and whitewashers. The remaining social cleavage between Barghuti and Fallahin families, based, as it was, on the former’s *wajaha* and ownership of more fertile land, has now been virtually eliminated as a result of the influx of peasants from both factions to jobs in Israeli construction. However, horizontal separation between the two factions has persisted in the form of separate residential quarters and marriage endogamy. On the other hand, the gradual neglect of the olive groves, already affected by the absence of migrant sons and their families, has now been reinforced by the absence of peasant-workers from the village during working days. The village has witnessed an increased involvement of women and children in agricultural work since in Ras al-Tin, in contrast to several neighbouring villages, no women were engaged in wage-labour outside the village;²⁰ however, their labour has hardly compensated for the loss of the men’s work.

Thus the availability of wage-labour opportunities in Ras al-Tin on such a scale after 1967 has created the conditions for a new homogeneity in the social structure of the village population which, since 1948, was differentiated along lines of status and wealth based on peasant factions, and reinforced by membership in families with migrant sons, and, to a lesser extent, on the size of family land.

This new situation is reflected in the emergence of new cleavages in the village scene which have very little to do with peasant factions. These cleavages are observed in the attempts by the village Youth Association, in which annual elections take place and various ideological trends vie for leadership, to transcend the influence and authority of the patriarchal heads of the four main sub-clans (*hamayil*). These attempts are increasingly successful and revolve around issues which are crucial to village collective life, such as the establishment of an electricity cooperative, the building of a girls’ preparatory school, and the exploitation of the village *waqf* land for development projects.

These activities invariably come into conflict with the narrowly defined familial interests of the village elders and *wujaha*, whose traditional links with the Jordanian authorities across the river continue to ensure a political

²⁰ Why do we observe a preponderance of women in some villages engaged in wage-labour, and a scarcity in others? This is a problem requiring further inquiry. From the available data there does not seem to be a relationship between the amount of poverty in the village and the number of women engaged in wage-labour. In Ras al-Tin the social conservatism of the Barghuti clan (i.e., their status claims) may have been a trend-setting example against the employment of village women in Israel or even the neighbouring towns.

base for their authority. The elders also attempt to keep a working relationship with the Israeli military government, which views the projects adopted by the Youth Association with suspicion. Their fears, however, lie in the ultimate challenge posed to their authority by the Youth Association — the only organized civic institution in the village. A mark of this challenge can be seen in the composition of the executive of the Association in its last election (1977) when it ceased to be a Barghuti-dominated structure and became representative of a cross-section of all the village clans (5 seats for the Fellahin, 2 for the Barghutis).

It must be emphasized, however, that the village social structure does not lend itself to class politics. It is perhaps indicative of the extent of the social homogeneity of the local clan structure that Marxist politics, which have a pervasive influence among the youth of Ras al-Tin (as evidenced by the periodic interrogation and imprisonment of members of the Youth Association by the Security Forces for their Communist activities), have no class content whatsoever. Their thrust is almost exclusively confined to patriotic activities, or to such general civic projects as described above. The Youth Association, or at least the radical elements within it, views the development of cooperative enterprises which undermine the patriarchal basis of village authority as both its objective and its *raison d'être*.

Nevertheless, these political trends rarely take the path of direct confrontation with the village elders, the two *mukhtars*, or even the few rich entrepreneurs in the village. For they represent forces who continue to maintain the closest bonds with their patriarchal families through the joint possession and control of the family land. And while the son of a peasant patriarch becomes, as a wage-worker, financially independent of his father, often moving into a separate dwelling and even occasionally dividing the land in his father's own lifetime, he keeps setting aside a portion of his earnings, and — more important — days of his labour time, for the benefit of the patriarchal household and its land. In return, his extended family, although no longer joined together in the same physical household, lends him its name and offers him protection in times of crisis.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We have analysed in this article the ambivalence inherent in the identity of the peasant-worker in the West Bank today. The case of Ras al-Tin demonstrates the conditions of peasant proletarianization in the hilly, predominantly olive-farming regions where small-sized ownership of land (5-15 dunums) prevails. Although no empirical generalizations are attempted for the West Bank as a whole from this case, it is possible to draw some conclusions on changes in village social structure and on the process of occupational change in rural areas.

While the West Bank is no longer a peasant society in the sense that it has ceased to have a majority of owner-cultivators who derive their main livelihood from agriculture (cf. Thorner, 1971, pp. 203-206), it would be a mistake to consider the new transformation as constituting the creation of a rural-based proletariat. This “transitional” status of the Palestinian peasantry is at the centre of their ambivalent class identity, and can be accounted for by the following factors:

(A) Family and clan connections play a crucial role in the recruitment process and mobility of the Palestinian worker in the Israeli economy. More experienced brothers, fathers and cousins are often the first and *last* bond in the peasant’s introduction to the wage-labour system outside the village. This constant interaction with, and dependence on, his kin reinforces the worker’s village identity.

(B) The peasant’s proletarian identity, or rather his potential proletarianization, is continuously obstructed by the instability of his work tenure. In the construction sector, for example (which accounts for half the rural labour force employed in Israel), the peasant-worker enters into a work process which involves unskilled (or de-skilled) labour, non-contractual agreements, high turnover, and small aggregates of workers on the work site.

(C) The prevalent notion that Arab workers in Israel are a “proletarianized underclass” disguises a complex hierarchy of work relationships which the peasant-worker encounters in the construction sector. The analysis of this hierarchy is important for understanding the mechanism through which Arab village workers are recruited into the Israeli economy. We have illustrated here the significance of the distinction between workers and *mu‘allim*, the manner in which Jewish employers and contractors are distanced from their Arab sub-contractors and employees, and the way village work teams relate to their Jewish and Arab bosses. These hierarchies create not only a sense of “false consciousness” among rural workers, but an efficient system of labour management in the absence of workers’ organizations and work tenure stability.

(D) The family farm continues to play an important, though declining role in supplementing the income of the peasant-household. However, while wage-labour has raised the household’s standard of living, it has not contributed to the internal differentiation within the peasantry. On the contrary, it seems that work opportunity outside the village has created a new homogeneity in the village class structure. This is due to two related factors: (1) Wage-labour opportunities have contributed to the marginalization of agricultural land and diminishing social differences based on variations in the ownership of family plots; and (2) Wage-labour has not created any significant amount of wealth to generate capitalist investments in the village. Differentiations in wealth continue to come from income sent

from family members abroad rather than from wage-labour or the size of family plots.

(E) To the extent that some wealth has been accumulated in the hands of a few individuals, it has been invested safely: in olive presses, hauling trucks, electric generators, and real estate in the district centres, and the like. The average peasant, after saving some money, tends to put it into a separate housing unit for his own nuclear household, and converts the rest into gold jewellery. Capitalist relations in agriculture have little possibility of development, given the ecological conditions of land in the hilly, unirrigated regions and the size of land holdings. The basic impediment to economic growth in the West Bank village remains, however, the absence of infrastructural institutions in the rural areas such as electric grids, efficient transport systems, and credit facilities.

(F) In the context of unstable work tenure, moreover, and with the determination of employment opportunities by the prevailing political trends in Israel,²¹ the family land remains an important source of security for the peasant-worker. The continued involvement of the peasant-worker in his family farm has adapted itself conveniently to the conditions of wage-labour in the construction sector, both Israeli and Arab, where periodic and seasonal release of the peasant-worker during periods of heavy demand for his agricultural work becomes necessary (for harvesting, pressing olives, etc.). And, conversely, the possibility of such release explains the high involvement of peasants in such "flexible" sectors as construction. We witness, however, a progressive displacement of men's work on the farm by that of women, children and older men. It seems that we can explain the low participation of rural women in the labour force by the contingencies of agricultural work rather than merely by factors of social conservatism in the Palestinian village.

The situation in Ras al-Tin demonstrates the importance of wage-labour in diminishing the cleavages in peasant society which in the past were based, in part, on differences in the size of land holdings, and on reallocating family labour to the optimum benefit of the peasant household. But it has also created the conditions for new and unforeseen conflicts. The prolonged absence of young men from the village — whether for six days in Tel Aviv, one year in Amman, or three in Colombia — has had a dramatic impact on village social structure, whose dimensions we are only beginning to compre-

²¹ The possibility of employing Egyptian workers in Israel after the beginning of "normalization" between the two states became of considerable concern for Gaza workers in the beginning of 1980, who feared both their displacement by cheaper Egyptian labour and the lowering of wages such an influx might entail. See, for example, "Gaza District Workers Unaffected by Unemployment in Israel," in *al-Quds*, March 26, 1980 (Arabic).

hend. Men are increasingly being divorced not only from performing agricultural labour in their farms, but from the cultural patterns that go with it. Women, old men, and children have assumed a greater role in the agricultural cycle, challenging and shattering the traditional sexual division of labour. The result is not a trend towards greater homogeneity in the worlds of men and women, but its opposite. Men bring in the outlook of the city, of the alien ideas of foreign lands, and of Israeli-Jewish society; women become the sole bearers of traditional culture and the preservers of peasant traditions. We will not even speculate about the consequences of this new schism in this paper.

However, several questions of a more immediate bearing on our subject remain unanswered and call for further research. Do the conditions of labour recruitment among peasant-workers observed in the construction sector have any parallels in other sectors (industry, the services, etc.)? Through what changes in the rural household and the family farm are we likely to witness a substantial entry of rural women into the labour market? Are there any tendencies for whole villages, or combinations of villages, to “specialize” in certain forms of unskilled labour, or is this a peculiarity of Ras al-Tin? And finally, what are the likely consequences of a major recession in the Israeli economy, or the closure of the Israeli labour market for Palestinian peasant-workers, and for the seemingly established occupational and socio-cultural trends described here?

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APPENDIX A
GAZANS AND WEST BANKERS EMPLOYED, BY ECONOMIC BRANCH, DISTRICT,
AND PLACE OF WORK, 1978

	<i>Total</i> (000)	<i>Total</i> %	<i>Agri-</i> <i>culture</i>	<i>Indus-</i> <i>try</i>	<i>Construc-</i> <i>tion</i>	<i>Other</i>
<i>Total</i>	210.9	100.0	25.6	17.5	20.9	36.0
1. <i>Working inside</i> <i>Occupied Territories</i>	142.7	100.0	29.8	15.2	9.5	45.5
(a) <i>From West Bank</i>	94.0	100.0	34.4	15.2	10.9	39.5
(1) Jenin	14.9	100.0	54.3	5.4	4.7	35.6
(2) Nablus	19.0	100.0	23.2	19.5	9.5	47.8
(3) Tulkarm	11.9	100.0	47.9	6.7	5.9	39.5
(4) Ramallah	18.0	100.0	32.8	17.2	16.1	33.9
(5) Bethlehem & Jericho	11.4	100.0	18.4	21.1	16.7	43.8
(6) Hebron	18.8	100.0	32.4	18.6	11.7	37.3
(b) <i>from Gaza</i>	48.7	<i>percentage breakdown not available</i>				
2. <i>Working in Israel</i>	68.2	100.0	16.8	22.2	44.8	16.2
(a) <i>From West Bank</i>	36.8	100.0	11.4	23.6	46.0	19.0
(1) Jenin	3.7	100.0	16.2	24.3	43.3	16.2
(2) Nablus	3.4	100.0	2.9	38.2	35.4	23.5
(3) Tulkarm	7.1	100.0	19.7	35.2	32.4	12.7
(4) Ramallah	8.6	100.0	8.1	24.4	40.8	26.7
(5) Bethlehem & Jericho	5.1	100.0	2.0	13.7	58.8	25.5
(6) Hebron	8.9	100.0	14.6	13.5	59.5	12.4
(b) <i>From Gaza</i>	31.4	100.0	23.2	20.4	44.3	21.1

Sources: Central Bureau of Statistics, "Survey of the Labour Force in the Administered Territories," *Quarterly Statistics of the Administered Territories (QSAT)*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Nov. 1979), Table 2, p. 108; and Table 23, p. 147 (Hebrew).

APPENDIX B
EMPLOYED WEST BANK RESIDENTS, ACCORDING TO ECONOMIC BRANCH
AND URBAN-RURAL DWELLING, 1975-1978

Branch	Total			Urban Dwelling						Villagers		
	1975	1976	1977	1978	1975	1976	1977	1978	1975	1976	1977	1978
Total (000)	132.3	129.7	127.3	131.5	36.2	35.7	35.4	34.7	84.5	83.1	80.8	85.4
Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Agriculture	27.4	27.7	27.8	27.8	5.5	4.7	5.0	4.6	38.9	39.6	39.7	39.9
Industry	16.6	16.6	17.3	17.6	26.2	25.4	26.9	27.2	12.3	12.6	12.7	12.9
Construction	22.6	21.3	19.7	20.7	13.3	12.0	10.4	11.5	26.3	24.9	23.2	24.0
Commerce	11.8	12.9	13.6	12.5	19.3	20.7	22.4	20.6	8.2	9.3	9.6	8.8
Transport	4.5	4.8	4.6	4.2	6.9	7.5	6.7	6.3	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.1
Public services	13.3	13.3	13.1	13.0	21.8	22.3	20.2	20.6	9.1	8.8	9.6	9.4
Other	3.7	3.4	3.9	4.2	6.9	7.4	8.4	9.2	1.8	1.3	1.7	1.9

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, "Survey of the Labour Force in the Administered Territories," *Quarterly Statistics of the Administered Territories (QSAT)*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Nov. 1979), Table 12, p. 136 (Hebrew).