The Formation Process of Palestinian Collective Identities

The Ottoman and Colonial Periods*

Palestinian history reached a significant turning point with the signing of the Declaration of Principles by Yitzhak Rabin, the late Israeli prime minister, and Yasir Arafat, the late chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, on September 13, 1993. More agreements followed, and as they were gradually implemented in a part of historic Palestine—the West Bank and Gaza—they seemed at the time to point toward a full state of self-determination for the Palestinians. About a year before the signing of the Declaration of Principles, within the framework of a larger survey, the Arab population of the occupied territories was asked about their ultimate loyalties, interpreted here as an expression of their major collective identities.[1] The distribution of their attitudes at that time appears in Table 3.1.

From a historical perspective, the most striking finding is the almost complete rejection of a pan-Arabist collective identity, the persistence of fa-

Table 3.1 (in percent)

	Men	Women
Arab nation	3	1
Islamic nation	25	12
Palestinian people	30	37
Family	38	50

milial identity, and what seems to be an increase in Islamic identity among men and its rejection by women, in favor of familial identity and Palestinian nationalism. Palestinian identity is not a self-evident identity, just as many types of political nationalism are not self-evident, authentic, and natural, as many nationalist elites and theoreticians would like to argue. Historically, Palestinianism is a recent creation, which even Arab and Palestinian nationalists themselves sometimes admit. Palestinianism is hardly an invented tradition imposed by elites on a group of people without any common past or collective memory, but the past was interpreted differently in various periods in accordance with contradictory group interests.

Whenever an independent Palestinian educational system is built, it along with a more or less consensual national culture and civil religion will legitimize the sociopolitical order by creating a coherent Palestinian historiography. But such a historiography cannot be constructed on an ahistorical, mythological link to the Canaanitees on one side and the martyrs of the current armed struggle on the other. From antiquity to the present, however these are defined, the story of the creation of the Palestinian people resembles a Lego set, constructed and reconstructed from diverse components and colors. From this point of view, the Palestinian case study is excellent for testing theories of nationalism in its embryonic forms.

A collective identity is not necessarily a national identity; however, it is a necessary precondition for it. Collective identities are an essential part of the process of constructing, maintaining, and changing the constitution of different levels of social order, from small groups (familial or local) to large collectivities (class, ethnic, religious, or national) or even transnational entities.[2] They are also an integral part of the makeup of the individual level of identities and feelings of loyalty toward different sociopolitical entities. Collective identities allow individual members, in actual or desired, existing or imagined communities,[3] to make sense of "us" versus "them" and the creation of societal boundaries.[4] Identities are membership cards and social

passports, determining the objective and subjective location of individuals and groups within a society and articulating the social goods they are entitled to possess in terms of prestige, power, and wealth.[5] Collective identities are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and individuals and groups can be considered and consider themselves to belong to different collectivities at the same time. Individuals and groups are also tied to a nuclear or extended family, a community, a locality, a region, or a class. For larger collectivities—such as ethnic, racial, or religious entities, states, nations, multinational states, empires, cultures, or civilizations—collective identities craft physical and social boundaries, the domestic social order, and the accepted rules of the game that govern the collectivity. Social change is expressed and reflected by changes occurring within collective identities, and fundamental internal struggles take place around adopting competing collective identities.[6] Hegemonic sociopolitical orders are based on a single unchallenged collective identity, supported by strong political strata, classes, and ethnic groups, among other entities.

Collective identities are not free-floating ideas; they tend to organize themselves within concrete institutional and political arrangements and organizations. Existing societal entities and orders create, adopt, or imagine identities for themselves to gain legitimacy and stability and improve their ability to mobilize the members of a collectivity. Sometimes identities are forcefully imposed on diverse groups, especially subjugated and minority groups, as a part of their surveillance and control. In this spirit, paraphrasing Charles Tilly's famous saying, it is helpful to assume that states make collective identities—nationalist identities or any other type—and that collective identities make states. To expand this idea, it must be presumed that different types of states produce different types of identities, and that different identities will shape different types of collectivities and different degrees of stateness.[7]

The present paper has three main purposes. First, it seeks to analyze the creation, invention, production, and reproduction of the collective identity called Palestinian, as a distinct identity from other Arab identities, in its particular historical, social, cultural, and political contexts, as well as in competition with other competing friendly and alien identities. Second, it aims to understand the role of the rise of an ideology of Palestinism, which politicized and intellectualized the Palestinian collective identity. Finally, it explores the institutional arrangements and institution-building processes that accompanied or blocked the development of Palestinian identity, or perhaps identities. In many ways, the crystallization, failure, and later

partial and conditional success of the Palestinian attempt to survive as a distinct collectivity and identity has many parallels among the other new nations of the postcolonial era, but at the same time, the Palestinian case has several unique characteristics.

The Notion of *Asabiyya*

In the fourteenth-century, Arab philosopher Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun developed the concept of *asabiyya,* which in Arab cultures can be interpreted as a solidarity or identity group based on real or imagined blood or primordial ties, strengthened by actual or invented common ancestry.[8] The range (boundaries) and content of the *asabiyya* varied in time, space, and sociopolitical context. In the nomadic context it was interpreted as loyalty toward the tribe. In settlements it is expressed through participation in the *hamule*—the extended family or clan—a local rural or urban alliance for mutual protection.[9] Later *asabiyya* was expropriated for rival identities, such as the Islamic religious versus pan-Arabist secular *umma,* the cultural and sociopolitical equivalent to the European term of nation.[10]

The term *qawm* (people) has a similar connotation, but in a more politicized form, referring to loyalties toward the territorial space of the Fertile Crescent and Arabia, namely, Iraq and Greater Syria, including Palestine, Lebanon, Transjordan and Hijaz. The term *qawn* led to the adjective *qawmiyya,* mainly used as *alqawmiyya al-Arabiyya,* or a kind of a general Arab peoplehood. The complementary yet contrasting term was the adjective *watani,* or the noun *wataniyya,* which referred to loyalty to a local and particular region, standing apart from the *umma* or *qawmiyya.* Sometimes it is regarded in a pejorative form as regionalism (*iqlimiyya*) and condemned as a particularistic and factionalist orientation contradicting the principle of *asabiyya.*[11]

By and large, both concepts of *qawmiyya* and *wataniyya* were initially a direct response to Ottoman rule over the region and its accompanying doctrine, Ottomanism, as well as to the dispersion of European ideas of nationalism among the Arabs. Ottomanism was not just an extension of Turkish nationalism, which added an Islamic dimension, including the protection and control of core Islamic territories, such as Mecca and Medina in Hijaz, Jerusalem, Damascus and Baghdad. It was also an extension of a multiethnic world empire situated between Europe and Arabia. This location opened up even the most peripheral territories of the empire to

different winds. Three not necessarily exclusive responses evolved out of the early twentieth-century transformation of Ottomanism into a secular Turkish particularistic nationalism, and its separation from the empire. The first response was political Arabism, which demanded Arab self-determination, but within the framework of the empire. The second response was a political disengagement from the empire, which took diverse forms in the different Arab polities and politics. Despite mixing the notions of *qawmiyya* and *wataniyya*, a wide variety of Arab states or would-be states were constituted. First there was Muhammad 'Ali's modernization, bureaucratization, and state building efforts in Egypt;[12] then Husayn ibn-'Ali Amir of Mecca's success in freeing himself and Hijaz from Ottoman influence and establishing a kind of autonomous state; Faysal ibn-Husayn's attempt to establish a modern enlarged Syrian state;[13] and the establishment of completely new entities, such as Iraq, Lebanon, and a reduced Syria. The third response to Turkish nationalism was the emergence of pan-Arabism, claiming that all Arabic-speaking peoples belonged to one great Arab nation independent of the existing empire. Some were inspired by the vision of recreating an all-embracing caliphate or empire, while others wanted to plant the seed for a local and particularistic nation-state.

The additional ingredient in the process of forming a collective identity on Arab-speaking lands, and the supplier of fuel for political motivation, is Islam. Islam has always been a highly politicized religion and a major force behind Arab conquests and empire building.[14] However, as Islam spread beyond the Arab world, the notion of *al-umma al-islamiyya*, the theory of existence of one organic and indivisible Muslim community, based on religious belief and a social and moral order of total obedience to the Qur'an, its practices (*sunna*), and the ruler (*caliph*) or other local representatives of Allah, replaced the notion of *al-umma al-'arabiyya,* the doctrine of the existence of one Arab nation. The Ottoman sultan, the secular and political ruler of the empire and the highest authority for all Muslims believers, and some court elite groups were the most prominent sources of this doctrine. Non-Arabic political orders, such as the Iranian Khomaynism, also tend to stress an all-embracing Islamic state theocracy, and most of Arab Islam tends to mix Arab local or general nationalism and Islam. Thus, Saudi professor Ahmad Muhammad Jamal asserted that "Arab familiarity with *asabiyya* was an authentic pattern of nationalism *long before* [my emphasis] the historical phenomenon related to this ideology took place in Europe or the Americas."[15] The same arguments are stressed by some Jewish historians,

including Anthony Smith, regarding the complete overlapping between religion and ethnic nationalism in Judaism.[16]

On the eve of the birth of contemporary Arab nationalisms, which are considered by many as a revolt or secular replacement for religion, Ottomanism and Islam were considered in the region to be congruent forces. The first Arab nationalist thinkers, such as Muhammad ʾAbduh (1849–1905), Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935), and ʾAbd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1854–1902), accepted the primacy of Islam but tried to harmonize it with the modern notion of nationalism. All Muslims were regarded as a single nation, regardless of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences. However, the thinkers argued that Islam was first and foremost an Arab religion, the Prophet was an Arab, and the Qur'an an Arabic book. Thus, an Arab renaissance was a necessary condition to restoring Islamic grandeur.

Geographic and Sociopolitical Boundaries

One of the most significant conditions, although not the only one, for the formation and creation of cultural, social, and political collective identities is the existence of geographic or physical boundaries, facilitating certain types of social and political configurations. Moreover, as stated by Armstrong, "geographic boundaries are not only tangible, they possess other important attributes, they often acquire intense symbolic significance, and the direct impact of political action is frequently earliest and strongest in a geographic context."[17] Even though the precise boundaries of the territory later denoted as modern Palestine were never defined, and from time to time the region was politically or administratively fragmented, the area has since time immemorial been a distinct territory, commonly referred to as the Holy Land (*al-Ard al-Muqadassa*). This religious territorial identity was mainly reinforced by its indisputable geopolitical and symbolic center, Jerusalem (or al-Quds in Arabic). The Jewish mythological kings, David and Solomon, established the city as their capital there three thousand years ago, making it the site of the Jewish Temple after it was captured from the Canaanites. The Holy Land was the land of Jesus's birth and Christianity's source; Jerusalem was where he preached his final sermon and was crucified. Finally, according to Islamic interpretation (Sura 17 of the Qur'an), Jerusalem was the site of the prophet Muhammad's ascension to heaven.

The territory has several natural boundaries. To the west is the Mediterranean Sea, to the east running north to south is the Jordan River, which

flows into the Dead Sea, and the southern boundary is a vast desert running from Arabia to the Nile. Only the northern boundary is somewhat blurry, even though the Litani River has usually served as a demarcation line. The country itself is divided into four natural regions surrounding Jerusalem. The first region is that of the central mountains, Jabal al-Quds, today commonly known as the West Bank, with its biblical cities of Nablus and al-Khalil (Hebron). This region was the central area of the ancient Jewish civilizations of the Judean and Samaritan kingdoms, and during the past three hundred years, it was the core territory of the traditional Arab peasant society. A narrow coastal plain extends from the small city of Gaza in the south through Haifa's bay in the north, passing through the Karmil region up to Sidon. Here the old maritime civilizations, such as the Phoenicians and Philistines, settled and left the cities of Gaza, Jaffa, Acre, and Haifa. The coastal area should be seen more as a frontier than as a boundary zone because it places Palestine within the Mediterranean basin's climatic, political, commercial, and economic system. The third and most fertile zone includes the valleys and hills of al-Jalil—the biblical Galilee—extending from the city of Acre to the territory's northern area, which incorporates the valley of Marj Ibn Amir Baysan (the Jezreel Valley). These lands were the major agricultural reservoirs of the territory and were cultivated by the mountain peasants when they felt secure from human predators. Finally, the other frontier region was the desert extending south from Bir al-Sab'—Beersheba—located on the crossroads of nomadic Bedouin tribes and desert-crossing merchant caravans traveling from Asia to Arabia. All of these regions served from time to time as bases of sub-identities reinforced by regional coalitions; however, for a long time, the most important and salient collective identities were built on localities. The small rural localities overlapped with the larger familial identities, loyalties, and authorities. Within this traditional order, the individual was not considered a distinct social category, except when one was fulfilling a prominent political or bureaucratic role.

Around 1850, the point from which reasonable estimations based on available Ottoman records are possible, the territory was populated by about 340,000 permanent inhabitants[18]—300,000 Muslims, 27,000 Christians, mostly Arabs, and 13,000 Jews. In 1882, when the modern Jewish colonization of the territory began, there were 462,000 inhabitants, 15,000 of whom were Jews. The most important process in the territory was the rapid development of the coastal cities, mainly of Jaffa and the new road that directly connected it to Jerusalem in 1869 and the hinterland with the

world market. The inland hilly villages and traditional townlets, such as Nablus, which competed for primacy with Jerusalem and the coastal urban centers, supplied the coastal cities with their products and crops as well as a growing labor force, which soon created a new semi-urban underclass, the *shabab*.[19] The most important characteristic of this new class was its detachment from the old traditional familial loyalties, without being committed to any new loyalties. As such, it was a stratum without any common identity. In exchange, the city granted occasional economic rewards and a degree of protection from the tyranny of the authorities, as well as a springboard for new opportunities and ideas.

Mutual dependence led to a system of enmity and amity between the coastal region and mountainous hinterland, between a rapidly urbanizing and secularizing area and a more traditional and religious realm.[20] The mountainous peasant society regarded the urban notables and wealthy merchants as influenced by corrupt non-Islamic ideas and practices. Throughout the Ottoman period, except for a very brief period of time,[21] the land was divided administratively,[22] with physical, economic, and social conditions creating the contours of a more or less common stratified system of the country later called Palestine. This common system was reinforced by the rise of a weak but common field of authority. The one source of authority was the legal-religious prominence of the Jerusalemite 'ulama—the religious learned class—the *shari'a* courts, the heads of the *al-awqaf*, the Muslim religious endowment, and the special position of the *mufti,* which for Jerusalem tended to impose its authority over all of the other local religious authorities in the Holy Land, with accountability to Istanbul alone. At the time, Istanbul was the highest Muslim authority in the world after the conquest of the Fertile Crescent and Hijaz. Especially after the defeat of the Ottomans, the Jerusalemite 'ulama largely succeeded in acquiring control over the appointments of all of the clerical positions of the territory, including the appointment and dismissal of *quadis* (*shari'a* court judges) or Quar'anic school teachers. The emphasis of the special status of Jerusalem was legally expressed in 1887, when it was declared an independent administrative unit, directly responsible to Istanbul.

The other source of Jerusalem's authority was the concentration of large and notable families within its district. One of the aims of the 1864 District Act was to shift the responsibility for tax collection and conscription from the rural chieftains (*shaykhs*) to the more powerful and rich urban notables (*a'yan*), who in turn gained wealth and power. The Ottoman reforms of

1839–76, the so-called Tanzimat, included a law in 1858 on registering and parceling the land. This introduced into the territory the notion of private titles and the possibility of accumulating land and creating large estates.[23] It also created another precondition for the rise of notions of the individual and individualism.

The institutions appointed to carry out the new policy were the newly established local councils (*majalis al-idra*), which were mainly constituted by townsmen who paid high taxes.[24] The Jerusalem families—such as the Khalidis, Nusaybas, Nashshibis, Husaynis, Dajanis and 'Alamis—on the surface seemed less wealthy than other large families in the country; however, they were better educated, both in religious and civic terms, and were more powerful politically due to their century-long tradition of service in the Ottoman political, bureaucratic, and cultural system.[25] For centuries, these notable families, especially the Jerusalemites, generated an imperial Ottoman collective identity. In this case, Ottomanism meant that the empire was seen as the direct inheritor of the Arab caliphate and an embodiment of the universal Islamic state, which on one hand protected the faithful from European and Western colonialism and on the other hand permitted slow technological changes and administrative reforms to adapt the empire's economic, political, and social fabric to the changing world. Only Muslims were considered as political subjects entitled to full rights, while others, such as Christians (including Arab-Christians) or Jews, were considered as protected minorities (*dhimi*) who had to accept the supremacy of Islam, pay a poll tax (*ferde*), and accept certain social disabilities, such as a prohibition on bearing arms. Thus, the boundary of the collectivity and its identity was sharply defined politically by religious criteria. All subjects of the empire sustained a double loyalty toward the sultan as both a political head of state and the head of the faithful. Ottomanism was of course a very convenient ideology for the notables because, as go-betweens for the local population and the empire, they were the major benefactors of the sociopolitical order. For most of the period, Ottoman rule of the districts in southern Syria (Surya al-Janubiyya), later known as Palestine,[26] was weak enough that it was possible for local clans, strongmen, and even Bedouin chiefs to rule local areas de facto, imposing law and order in the name of the empire in exchange for protection tributes. The authority of Istanbul was mostly exercised within the cities, in some of the hinterland, and along the main roads. The other dimension of this situation was the perpetual political but no less bloody quarrels between the rival clans and rulers of the diverse regions.

The Forgotten Revolt

Starting in 1831 and for approximately ten years, Syria, including the future Palestine, was conquered, taken out of the orbit of Ottoman rule, and placed under the control of an Egyptian ruler, Muhammad 'Ali, a former vassal of the Ottomans, and his son Ibrahim Pasha, the commander-in-chief of the Egyptian army. On May 19, 1834 a meeting of important families and sheiks from Nablus, Jerusalem, and Hebron took the dangerous step of informing the Egyptian military governor that they could no longer supply their quotas of conscripts for military service. The peasants, they asserted, had fled from the villages into the mountainous areas, which were difficult to reach. This group was led by Qasim al-Ahmad, chief of the Jamma'in subdistrict of Jabal Nablus.

Ibrahim, who desperately needed more soldiers after he suffered heavy causalities in previous battles and was planning another round against the Ottomans, saw the notables' declaration as a betrayal and rebellion. The first clash between the local *fellahin* and Bedouin tribes broke out in the Hebron area, where about twenty-five Egyptian soldiers who arrived to impose the conscription order were killed. However, the center of the resistance against the Egyptians was Nablus, from which hundreds of rebels laid siege to Jerusalem, the symbol of the government. The turning point occurred when the Abu Ghush clan, which controlled the road between Jaffa and Jerusalem as well as the surrounding villages, joined the rebel forces. On the last day of May 1834, the Muslims of Jerusalem opened the city's gates and the rebels conquered the city, except for its citadel, where Egyptian troops found shelter. In June, Ibrahim launched a series of counterattacks using heavy artillery and managed to regain control of Jerusalem, but at a cost of thousands of casualties and without quelling the spread of the revolt. The small townlet of Haifa was placed under siege and the ancient towns of Safed and Tiberias fell under rebel control.[27]

Most of the territory of Palestine was removed from Egyptian control, and the defeat of the Egyptian army in Palestine endangered the success of Muhammad 'Ali's state-building project, which forced him to take immediate action. His fleet, including a reinforcement of 15,000 troops armed with cannons and led by Muhammad 'Ali himself, arrived in Jaffa. However, his first move was diplomatic: Through a skilled reading of the sociopolitical map of Palestine, he managed to split the coalition of rebellious notables by guaranteeing amnesty to the Abu Ghush clan and diverse concessions,

including positions in the Egyptian administration. From that point on, the roads both to Jerusalem and inland were open and secure for Egyptian troops. On July 4, 1834 the punishment expedition began, first against the Nablus region. Sixteen villages on the road were reduced to ash, and the town of Nablus was conquered on July 15. The last battle leveled Hebron on August 4, and saw the slaughter or conscription of most of the men, the rape of women, and the abduction of about 120 adolescents to serve at the disposal of Egyptian army officers. Parts of the Muslim population, some of the notables of Jerusalem, and all of the Bethlehem notables were removed, held captive, or killed. Ten thousand *fellahin* were recruited and shipped to Egypt, and the local population was disarmed.

The 1834 revolt was triggered by the conscription duties, the gathering of arms from the Muslim population, and the tax collection that was imposed on peasants and city-dwellers by the Egyptians, who were more efficient than was the previous Ottoman system. Other important reasons for the rebellion include the facts that, for the first time, an almost countrywide coalition of Bedouin, *fellahin,* and notables formed, incorporating a wide variety of social and regional segments into a single cooperating movement. The Egyptian central administration's threat to the *a'yans'* traditional political and material power base as tax collectors[28] and administrators was another important reason for the upheaval. Introducing a secular legislature restricted the power of *shari'a* bureaucracy and made bureaucrats dependent on state salaries and rules. The rebels heavily emphasized the Islamic religious meaning of revolt, presenting Muhammad 'Ali as an infidel (*gavur*) and an ally of foreigners—Europeans, Westerners, and others. The Bedouin tribes' primary occupation of protecting merchants and other clients was diminished as a result of the vigorous Egyptian law-enforcement policy, giving them an incentive to join the rebellion.

Thus, the Egyptian conquest of Palestine, according to Shamir,[29] signified "the first application of the concept of territorial state . . . This was the inception of the modern history of Palestine." The 1834 revolt was the result of different segments of the territory's population facing a common threat stemming from the changes that had taken place in the relations between rulers and subjects, the fabric of social stratification and order, and perhaps the cosmic order. Momentary coalitions among the various segments of the population did not instantly create a new kind of *asabiyya* and loyalty, but they may have set the preconditions for a new self-consciousness or collective identity. The geopolitical, economic, and cultural conditions already

existed for such an identity, carried by local dialects of Arabic, customs, fellahin clothing, and other factors. These were complemented by a distinct, stratified system in an embryonic state, which facilitated the coalitions and the budding identity consciousness.

Another scholar writes that

> the decade of the Egyptian invasion can now be seen to have cut across the spectrum of Middle Eastern history like a band. The old ways of life were profoundly altered. The balance of power and expectations in which the Druze, Christians and Muslims; the townsmen, villagers, and Bedouins; and the *amirs*, *sheikhs* and peasants had lived was shattered. The relationship of the government to the governed, the market to the producers, the foreigner to the native were radically changed.[30]

Despite this, the Egyptians could not or did not have enough time to provide a sense of collective identity, at least for the notables and other elite groups, which Ottomanism had partially succeeded in doing. Individual or familial loyalties, such as the Abd al-Hadis of Nablus toward Muhammad 'Ali or Ibrahim, only contributed to the depth of the internal cleavages that occurred in this society in the making. The divisions also seem to have been a contributing factor to the revolt, which introduced a bud of a common Islamic identity, disconnected from the original Ottomanism: a prototype of popular Islam, in which Islam provides not only a basis for *asabiyya,* but an organizing principle in which the mosque becomes an institution for mobilization, revolt (at least in Jabal Nablus), and the dissemination of information.

In Palestinian collective memory, this bloody event has fallen by the wayside—in contrast with the contemporary Great Arab Revolt of 1936–39 or the intifada—and is not considered in Arab or Egyptian historiography as anything other than the Syrian Peasant Revolt, even though it focused on the quadrant of Jaffa, Nablus, Hebron, and Jerusalem, with only the ricochets reaching Lebanon, Syria, and the southern desert. But this is not surprising, for until recently, the Palestinians were a people without a codified written history and a highly fragmented collective memory, mainly based on local and regional traditions, a common feature to other developing nations in the world.[31] The 1834 revolt, just as Bernard Lewis described, "is the history of events and movements, that is to say, at some stage and for some reason rejected by the communal memory, and then, after a longer or shorter interval, recovered by academic scholarship—by the study of

records and the consequent reconstruction of a forgotten past."[32] The humiliating and traumatic events of 1834 were conveniently erased from the collective memory and were documented mainly by the Egyptian bureaucracy, as the local social and political actors had no interest in remembering and glorification. Once Ottoman rule was restored in 1841, following diplomatic bargaining and arrangements between Muhammad 'Ali, the Ottomans, and the European powers, seemingly no one in the territory had any interest in mythologizing a revolt mainly involving interior hill-region peasants[33] and against taxes and conscription, which continued to be both in the local notables' and Ottoman rulers' interests. The notables of the territory were deeply interested in maintaining a cordial relationship with the neighboring Egyptian power, one of the main commercial and cultural links to the outside world; at the same time, they wanted to readjust themselves to Ottoman rule, which vigorously continued the Egyptian reformist policy under the label of the Tanzimat of the 1840s and 1860s, insofar as they had the power to initiate change.

Identity, Boundary Formation, and World Order

Connections with the outside world—mainly European markets, merchants and their merchandise, missionaries, pilgrims, tourists, consuls, and settlers—had different effects on the native population of the territory. On one hand, especially in a xenophobic traditional milieu, contact with aliens is one of the strongest triggers for forming boundaries between "us" and "them," and a base from which a separate and distinct collective identity can be created. On the other hand, the penetration of local space by strangers can fragment local structures, deepen existing cleavages, and create and encourage particularistic vested interests. In the pre-colonial Holy Land, both trends existed and complemented one another.

The Crimean War (1854–56) and the American civil war (1861–65), though remote, accelerated several developments in future Palestine. Until then, the territory had pretty much escaped the effects of the Industrial Revolution. Short-term consequences of the two wars, however, created shortages in certain raw materials and crops, especially cotton crops, which hurt the English and continental industries and increased the demand for agricultural cash crops, raising prices in the world market. Merchants and investors from the Mediterranean basin expanded their search to the east of the basin, reaching the coasts of Gaza, Jaffa, Acre, Haifa, and Sidon. They

found as go-betweens the local rural *a'yan* and merchants. Acquiring crops and cash advances provided incentives for local merchants and notables to accumulate land and establish relatively large estates. A new land-owning self-conscious class, backed by the Tanzimat reforms, was created.

Most of the southern hinterlands around Gaza were devoted to growing wheat, barley, and maize for export. Other parts of the territory, such as the valleys and northern coastal plain, grew cotton and sesame. In more mountainous areas, olives—manufactured as oil and soap—and grapes were cultivated. On the coastal plain between Gaza and Jaffa, orange and lemon orchards appeared, demanding sophisticated cultivation, irrigation, financing, and marketing skills. Cash crops such as olives and sesame had long been known as specialties of the territory, but widespread cotton cultivation and intensive orchard planting, requiring large long-term investments, were a major economic and social innovation.[34] All of them were triggers for major changes in land holding; the rise of a new wealthy urban stratum; the continuous enlargement of the urban underclass of the major coastal cities, especially Jaffa, which became a relatively modern Mediterranean city;[35] and a new Arab leadership, which would stay in power until the collapse of the Palestinian polity in 1948. The Jaffa-Jerusalem railroad connection in 1892 symbolized the opening up of the country to new technologies and communications systems, preceded by the telegraph services from Jerusalem in 1865. The Holy Land had been linked in both directions to the world system.

However, the Holy Land drew the attention of foreign powers less because of its economic importance and more for its religious, cultural, and later, for some of the great powers, strategic significance. After the destruction of the Christian Kingdom by Saladin, Christian interest in the Holy Land lay dormant for an extended period; however, in the mid-nineteenth century, the interest once again rose to the surface. Probably most of the 340,000 inhabitants of the territory were completely unaware of the importance of their locale to the rest of the world, and of how much planning, discussion, and competition among the elites of Christian, Western, and capitalist societies over the Holy Land had taken place.[36] As long as the Ottoman regime was powerful enough to protect the territory from an influx of strangers, it was a screen from the outside world. But as the capitulation system grew, patriarchates such as the Latin-Orthodox, Greek-Orthodox, and Anglican Church were established in Jerusalem in 1845–47, causing frictions between Greeks who were new to the area and native and nonnative Christian Arabs,

who began to import Arab nationalistic ideas from Europe reinforced by reform-oriented Muslims.[37] Even more important, between 1838 and 1858, all of the great powers had heavy consular presences in Jerusalem, each of them protecting communities of expatriates, missionaries, churches, and later settlers in the city in particular and the Holy Land in general.

The first modern European settlers in the Holy Land belonged to the German Templar religious sect in the 1870s, followed in the 1880s by the first wave of traditional Jewish immigrants. Both groups primarily established agricultural colonies, and as such, from the local population's point of view, they had limited impact. However, they were a part of a larger cumulative process of the country opening up to aliens, which built a sense of the Holy Land as distinct from other parts of the region. This created imagined boundaries, distinct from the borders of the Ottoman administrative districts:[38] They lacked geographic, social, and political clarity, but had a clear and fixed center, the city of Jerusalem.

The Greater Syria Episode

Except for the development of Arab-Jewish relations as an incipient political conflict, little happened during the late Ottoman period within the territory. Retrospectively, the first wave of Jewish immigration proved to be the first step in a massive colonization enterprise, but at the time, it was small in scope and lacked explicit political aspirations and support. After 1904–05 a very different kind of Jewish immigrant arrived in the country: young, single, mainly male, highly politicized, and very poor. These immigrants turned to the existing Jewish colonies pushing the ideology of Jewish labor and Jewish defense, which entailed excluding Arab workers from the colonies and replacing the local strongman protection system with Jewish armed guards, forming the nucleus of a Jewish army.[39] They talked in terms of modern secular Jewish nationalism—that is, Zionism—about the goal of creating a Jewish political commonwealth. Several years later at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, Chaim Weizmann, the president of the World Zionist Organization, stated that the Zionist goal was to make sure that "Palestine becomes as Jewish as England is English." For the first time the Jewish presence became noticeable, but because of its very limited scope, not yet threatening. During World War I the country suffered Turkish oppression, conscriptions, and famine, which not only halted Jewish immigration, but also decreased the scope of the Jewish presence in

the country. After the British arrival the economic and social situations slowly improved. In general, however, British rule over the country had far-reaching consequences.

Even before the territory's occupation by British forces was complete, the well-known Balfour Declaration of November 1917 was announced, in which the British government viewed "with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people."[40] From the point of view of the majority Arab-Muslim population of the country, their own Islamic Ottoman rule had been replaced by an alien European and Christian power, which had a declared policy to transform the land into a Jewish country; the very presence of the British mattered.[41]

On October 5, 1918, Amir Faysal ibn Husayn proclaimed in Damascus an "independent Arab constitutional government with authority over all Syria," that would provide equal rights to its Muslim, Christian, and Jewish subjects. Local British military officers, including General Edmund Allenby, seemed to support the move and perceived it in the same spirit as Sir Henry McMahon's promise to the Sharif of Mecca, but in even greater harmony with British interests.[42] The French were ready to recognize the partial independence of the so-called Syrian nation if it remained under French control and influence, which was agreed after long negotiations in Paris with premier George Clemenceau and officials of Quai d'Orsay. This should have been be a major achievement for Faysal, but the agreement was rejected by most of the young and enthusiastic nationalists in Damascus, such as the members of al-Fatat and al-'Ahd (the Covenant). They would not accept relinquishing the great Syrian Arab national state and losing Palestine to Jewish colonialism and British imperialism.[43] At the end of July 1920, the French concentrated their troops and entered Damascus. Faysal and his men left the city and General Henri Gouraud was appointed high commissioner. The first twentieth-century attempt to establish a modern Arab nation-state failed,[44] but the idea survived.

Faysalism was, for a moment in Arab history, a great new hope—a new *asabiyya*, based on the postwar promise of a new world order and in line with Woodrow Wilson's promise of self-determination for all nations. It was a combination of a Syrian *wataniyya* with an all-Arab *qawmiyya*,[45] achieved by Arab forces. Damascus was "liberated" from the Ottomans not only by British and French troops, but also by the so-called Northern Arab Army, with its Sherifian flags and banners. Faysal's court was filled by the best Arab intellectuals and young professionals of the region, including Syrian,

Iraqi, Palestinian, and former Ottoman officers and civil servants. Even if Faysal's agreement of 1919 with Weizmann was attacked by his own adherents and considered by some to betray the Arab cause, it was an original political move with the aim of freeing Faysal from complete dependence on British and French control, through a limited cooperation with the Zionist movement.

The Palestinian association of al-Nadi al-'Arabi (the Arab Club), established in Damascus in 1918, was a substantial part of the Faysalian regime, together with other local nationalist groups such as al-Fatat, founded in Paris in 1911 by two Palestinian students, Awni Abd al-Hadi and Rafiq Tamimi, and the Arab Independence Party (Hizb al-Istiqlal al-'Arabi). However other groups, such as the local Damascus intellectuals and notables and the Al-'Ahd Iraqi nationalists, had their own agenda, each concentrated around the specific interests of their own territories. On June 3, 1919 the General Syrian Congress assembled in Damascus and included, in addition to the abovementioned groups, delegates from Lebanon, the Druze Mountains, and al-Karak (Transjordan). Faysal sought to exchange the French protectorate for English Mandatory power. The majority of the congress was more extreme, rejecting any idea other than an independent greater Syria, including Palestine, Lebanon, and the eastern region of the Jordan territories, and declared Faysal as the king of the independent state. The congress was still convening when the French troops occupied the city on July 28, 1920 suppressing what they defined as revolt.

Membership in a newly established Arab state was a solution to the desperate situation of the Arab inhabitants of Palestine. Thus the proclamation of the Faysalian state provoked in Palestine a stormier response than the reaction in other places. Implementing the Syrian Congress's aims meant nullifying the Balfour Declaration and the hope of freedom from British colonial rule. Without hesitation the Muslim population of Palestine adopted the identity and political program of Southern Syria and most of the newly created nationalistic feelings and energy.[46] The first public appearance of the young Palestinian leader Hajj Muhammad Amin al-Husayni was the organization of a mass demonstration on March 8, 1920, the day of Faysal's proclamation as King of Syria (and Palestine). Countrywide riots broke out when in April, during the holiday of al Nabi Musa, Amin al-Husayni raised a portrait of Faysal and shouted "Here is our king." The crowd replied with "Allah save the king" and attacked the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem.

During the short period of Faysal's rule in Damascus, thousands of Palestinian notables, teachers, professionals, and intellectuals signed and sent petitions to the British rulers as well as to the representatives of the great powers to express their willingness, in the name of the local population, to be included under Syrian rule, and their belief that the territory was a part of Syria, namely, Surya al-Janubiyya. A newspaper with this title was launched in Jerusalem in September 1919 to propagate the same idea. The other two veteran local newspapers, al-Karmil in Haifa and Filastin[47] in Jaffa, were mobilized for the same purpose. The First Palestinian Arab Congress, held in Jerusalem at the beginning of 1919, stated in its resolution that "we consider Palestine nothing but part of Arab Syria and it has never been separated from it in any stage. We are tied to it by national (*qawmiyya*), religious, linguistic, moral, economic, and geographic bonds."[48] After the fall of Faysal and the disappearance of the pan-Syrian option for the Palestinians, the Surya al-Janubiyya collective identity disappeared almost completely from the local political scene, though from time to time, it was brought back to life briefly.

The British Colonial State and the Building of Palestinism

If one major factor could be singled out that shaped and built the Palestinian collective identity and made the Palestinians into a people, but at the same time contributed to their failure, it would be the role of British colonial power. Not that Zionist colonization, the changing world order, the Arab world, and the Palestinians themselves were not important actors in this process, but the British were the crucial factor. Though somewhat out of the ordinary, the Palestinians were similar to other new and not-so-new nations at the time and a by-product of the colonial system. The British colonial state, in its legalistic mandated dress, gave the country its name—Palestine[49]—and defined for its people its final geographical, political, and social boundaries and identity.

Mandatory Palestine was a minimalistic state that supplied only the basic needs for its subjects: law and order, a monetary and fiscal system, basic but modern communication systems, a postal service, transportation infrastructure, such as roads, railways, telegraph, phone, and broadcasting services, and modest but not insignificant welfare, health, and education services. The welfare services were mainly for Arab subjects.[50] The British made considerable efforts to regulate and rationalize the agrarian and land system, mainly

by trying to transform the *mu'sha* communal land holding into parcelized private titles, but also encouraged agrarian marketing cooperatives and the use of fertilizers through material incentives.[51] Municipalities and local self-management were also encouraged. For practical but also symbolic reasons, the colonial state provided to its subjects identity cards, passports, and a limited, conditional sense of citizenship and citizen rights in their Western meaning. In exchange for these services and "goods," the colonial state demanded minimal loyalty: acceptance of its legitimacy to rule, cooperation within the administration, and obedience to its laws.

At the same time, the British state provided the political and administrative umbrella for the creation of the Jewish-Zionist polity within the country, creating favorable conditions for immigrating to the country and purchasing land there. Under the Ottomans, more severe restrictions existed on both Jewish immigration and land acquisitions.[52] After the initial period of British rule, Zionist satisfaction with the scope and the rate of British immigration quotas and land policies ended, as the British began to limit the short-term growth and development of Jewish colonization. The policies were intended to ease the local Arab population's fears of increased development of the Jewish community, and from time to time, increased limitations were imposed on the growth of the Jewish presence in the country. Despite these obstacles,[53] the Zionists managed to create a continuum of Jewish territory, mainly on the coastal plain and the great valleys, with hundreds of new settlements, including a new city (Tel Aviv) and new neighborhoods in old cities (Haifa and Jerusalem). They constructed a viable economy, including industries, intensive agriculture (horticulture, orchards, and vineyards), educational systems (from kindergartens to a university) and their own culture (Hebrew vernacular, newspapers, publishing houses, and theaters). Most impressive was the Jewish immigrant-settler society's success in building separate and parallel political institutions and leadership to the colonial state, based on semi-volunteer participation and mechanisms for resource absorption and distribution, supported by a partially mobilized diaspora.[54]

Perhaps the local Arabs' greatest frustration was the nationalists' inability to wield enough social control over local landlords to prevent the sale of lands to Jews. The high prices that the Jews were able and ready to pay for land was a major temptation for the owners, and a perceived threat to the peasant society. The Arab community thus constantly demanded that the British restrict not only Jewish immigration, but also land transfers

from one national group to another. Two institutions were established to combat the Jewish National Fund land purchases: the Arab Bank (1930) and the Arab National Fund (1931). Both failed to recruit enough funds for their purpose because of a lack of external resources. All of the major inquiry commissions on the "situation in Palestine" (Shaw Commission, Strickland's report, John Hope Simpson, Lewis French and Peel Commission reports)[55] found that even though it had not been established that a critical mass of Arab peasants and tenants had lost their holdings as a direct consequence of the Jewish land acquisitions,[56] the issue had become very threatening and had raised anxiety among the Palestinian peasant society. The Jewish land purchases directly reduced the land and territorial reservoirs of the local population, which was growing quickly. Together with the usual xenophobia in any traditional society, the land issue was one of the major causes of the creation of two kinds of consciousness that formed the bases of sub-identities: a popular nationalism rooted in enmity toward Jewish society and a popular class awareness rooted in enmity toward the *a'yan*, *effendi,* and other urban notables, who not only failed to protect them from British imperialism and Zionist colonialism, but were perceived as partners to the foreign powers, betraying the peasantry and the Arab peoples' interests. Both feelings were strongly expressed during the final stages of the Great Arab Revolt, when the national rebellion against the British and Jewish settlement turned into a bloody civil war of peasant gangs against city dwellers.

Institution Building and New Palestinism

Palestinism is a general belief that the Arab population of the British colonial state of Palestine became a collectivity distinct from the other surrounding states and states-in-making of the region, and at the same time a part of *al-qawmiyya al-Arabiyya,* from which the right of self-determination is drawn within the geographical boundaries of the Mandatory state. This belief appeared within a relatively short period of time, nourished by three factors: the regional political reality created after World War I, that is, the creation of other independent or would-be independent Arab *watani*; the actual creation of the British colonial state; and the rapid development of Jewish settlement, which aspired to the same goal for Jews over more or less the same territorial entity.[57] The development, spread, and penetration of this new *asabiyya* among various strata and groups of the Arab society of

Palestine was accompanied by an accelerated institution-building process in various spheres.

More or less concomitantly with the conquering of the territory by British troops, Muslim-Christian associations (MCAs) were formed in almost every city, town, and major locality. The MCAs sought to express an Arab-Muslim and Arab-Christian solidarity[58] in the face of the new ruler, which, in the Balfour Declaration as well the nomination on July 1, 1920 of a self-proclaimed English Zionist Jew, Sir Herbert Samuel, as high commissioner, appeared to endorse an explicit policy of making the country into a Jewish homeland. Most of the local notables and also considerable segments of the younger, educated professionals and intelligentsia were recruited to the MCAs. The MCAs launched petitions and formed delegations to voice their concerns to the representatives of the new rulers, demanding that Britain change its pro-Zionist policy and pay heed to the political rights of the country's Arab majority. The simultaneous, spontaneous, and grassroots creation of the MCAs exhibited impressive political skill and awareness on the part of the local elite,[59] though the MCAs' most important step was to acknowledge the Jerusalemian MCA as the de facto coordinator and leader of the new movement.

On December 13, 1920 the Third Palestinian Congress was held in Haifa by delegates of MCAs and other local clubs from all over the country, the second congress having been forbidden by the government following the April riots of the al-Nabi Musa feast. The congress elected an Arab Executive Committee, designed to be a unified representative of the Palestinian Arabs to the British authorities, a consensual political leadership for all of the Arabs of Palestine, and a counterbalance to the Jewish Agency.[60] The most important difference between the first and third congresses was not only the establishment of a local institutionalized leadership, but its inward shift of focus. Palestine was no longer regarded as a part of Syria or any other larger identity, but rather as a distinct polity unto itself. Among others resolutions, the Congress adopted one calling upon Britain to establish a national government (*hukuma al-wataniyya*) responsible to a representative assembly of members that would be chosen from "the Arabic-speaking people who inhabited Palestine until the outbreak of the War." In other words, the resolution was a demand to start the process of building an independent Arab state, within clearly defined sociopolitical boundaries and excluding non-Arabic speaking Ashkenazic Jews and Jews who immigrated during and after World War I.[61]

The Islamic Factor

The other focus of power in the emerging Palestinian society was created by the colonial state in cooperation with some the local leadership, but soon became an almost independent factor. Since the territory was cut out of the Ottoman state, it remained without central religious leadership for the majority Muslim population. To fill this vacuum, the Muslim population was defined as an autonomous religious community, or *millet.* Symbolically this was degrading to the Muslim population, because it meant leveling Muslim status to the status of the minority religious groups: the various Christians and Jewish communities.[62] However, institutionally, redefining the Palestinian Muslims as a religious community allowed the creation of local religious institutions and leadership. The Supreme Muslim Council, created in January 1922, had its presidency unified with that of the *mufti* of Jerusalem, and the young and militant Amin al Husayni was appointed to both of the offices, not without considerable resistance from the old religious and traditional leadership. Al-Husayni was a student at Egypt's most prestigious Qu'aranic institute, al-Azhar, where he was exposed to the teaching of Muhammad Rashid Rida. He was also a son of the powerful Husayni clan, and was suspected to be responsible for the 1920 riots following the Nabi Musa festival.[63]

The council and its president were British civil servants, but they gained a critical power position, creating a new Palestinian Islamic hierarchy. Control of the countrywide *al-awqaf,* the Islamic endowment, and the authority to appoint and dismiss all Islamic officials, such as *shari'a* court judges and clerks or mosque and Qu'ranic school system teachers, made al Husayni the most powerful Arab leader in the newly created colonial state. Sunni Islam held considerable power in the basically traditional Palestinian society, but because of the Ottoman legacy, it was not a dominant politicized ideology, except for a short trial during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1896–1909), when attempts were made to fight the European powers by using Islamic symbols.

Even before his appointment to the office of *mufti,* to which he added the adjective "the Great," Amin al-Husayni realized the political power of religion[64] and certainly perceived himself as the religious leader of Jerusalem and the Holy Land. He tried with some success to build himself international stature as an Islamic leader, convening an Islamic world conference in Jerusalem in 1931 and launching a successful worldwide campaign to renovate the al-Aqsa mosque in that city—only two of his many activities

to accumulate more power within Palestinian society. He also knew that too heavy an accentuation on Islam and Islamic symbols would alienate the very important Arab Christian population from the national movement,[65] and almost from the beginning, al-Husayni tried to use his religious power for nationalist purposes. He launched a *fatwa,* a religious verdict, which entailed excommunicating any believer who sold land to Jews. As was done throughout the Muslim world, he used the mosques for political preaching and as a fast and efficient communication network in a traditional society. However, in the aftermath of World War I, Islam and pan-Islamism was not a salient movement, and its usefulness as a means of political mobilization was limited. Of course, from time to time, violent outbreaks in Palestine were connected with religious feelings and xenophobia, based on the suspicion that the Jews intended to destroy the al-Aqsa mosque and rebuild their ancient Third Temple. Fears such as these fueled Muslim anxiety, Muslim leadership exploited them, and all of the violent outbreaks were in one way or another connected with them. The Great Revolt of 1936–1939 was preceded by a challenge from a small militant Muslim group, using esoteric Islamic slogans and led by the charismatic sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam, who was killed in 1935 by British troops. Al-Qassam became the first martyr and hero for the Palestinian national movement.

Generally, Jewish settlement was perceived as a penetration of pure traditional Islamic society and its corruption by *kufrs* (non-believers), who were regarded as secularist, colonialist, imperialist, and communist. It was a general xenophobic and antimodern attitude, of which religion was only one ingredient. The life of the traditional religious peasantry was regarded as healthy and right, similar to the Russian Narodnik movement's views. The Jews and their women, who were pictured as the incarnation of evil, were perceived not only as a national enemy and an intruder on the land, but also as an entity that violated Islamic cosmic order.[66] This led to a binary perception of the sociopolitical world order, of the good, pure, Islamic peasant society versus the Jewish, British, corrupt, evil, yet always tempting wider society.[67] Thus Islam, especially its popular forms, was politicized and used for mobilization and socialization, but at the initial stage of the crystallization of the Palestinian collective identity, it was not a determinant factor. The Muslim Brotherhood, a political party established in Egypt by the sheikh Hasan al-Bana in 1928, spread into Palestine and formed several local branches in the 1930s. The sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam and his followers were an offshoot of this movement. However,

during the colonial period, they never succeeded in becoming a country-wide political power.

Epilogue

The inner logic of the post–World War II era and the decolonization process was that the framework of the major state institutions and the colonial state's power and authority were usually transferred to the representatives of the majority population group. In Israel, however, this did not happen. When the colonial power left the country in 1948, no authority was officially transferred, either to the majority Arab-Palestinians or to the Jewish state in the making. The reasons for the Palestinians' collapse in this period preceded the 1948 war and are beyond the scope of the present analysis;[68] however, the results were far-reaching. The territory of colonial Palestine was broken up into three parts: Israel, the West Bank annexed to Transjordan, and the Gaza Strip, which was placed under Egyptian control.

Systematic and coercive attempts were made to de-Palestinize at least two of the regions, mainly through harsh political control and surveillance as well as educational attempts to reconstruct Palestinians' collective identity. The Hasemites imposed a Jordanian identity, and the Israelis created an Israeli-Arab identity. The rest of the Arab states preserved the Palestinian identity, but mostly within the framework of pan-Arabism—that is, the solution to the Palestinian problem was to lie only in the framework of a victorious establishment of an all-embracing Arab *qawmiyya*. But the Palestinian identity did not disappear. It was preserved in refugee camps, mainly by belonging to a certain village or city; thus third-generation camp-dwellers still perceive themselves as Jaffanians, Miarians, or Dier-Yassiners. After 1967 the three territorial parts of colonial Palestine were reunited under Jewish-Israeli control, which in many ways recreated the initial Palestinian condition. The major cleavage for the Palestinians was then between those who found themselves in their own country but under hegemonic Jewish rule, and those who remained in *gourba* (exile), out of the historic territory of Palestine and dispersed in different countries and continents. The Palestine Liberation Organization, led by Fatah[69] in its second stage, also contributed to building new kinds of Palestinian identities, mostly connected with the concepts of "armed struggle" and "popular resistance." The last turn in this process was the mutual recognition that has recently taken place between the Israelis and the mainstream of the Palestinian national movement, and

the gradual establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in a small part of Palestine, as the territory was defined by the British.

Some Conclusions

The Palestinians are stateless yet working toward an ambiguous autonomy, at least for those who have lived in the territories occupied by Israel since the 1967 war. Like most new nations, the Palestinians' initial collective identity was in great measure shaped by a colonial power, which created for its own convenience the Palestinians' geographical, social, and political boundaries. These boundaries were far less arbitrary than in many other colonial cases, such as most of sub-Saharan Africa. Some contours of the future Arab Palestinian society, located between the Mediterranean coastal plain and Jordan River valley, existed long before the British colonial state. Classic scholars of nationalism perceived Palestinism as a natural and authentic expression of ancient primordial communities. Anthony Smith followed them demonstrating the ancient ethnic bases of political nationalism and the nation-state.[70] Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm, from very different perspectives, saw any national identity as a fabrication of elite groups and somehow an artificial product of Western modernity. Benedict Anderson refers to nationalism as a "cultural artifact transformed into an imagined community,"[71] which does not necessarily contradict any of the other approaches. This essay does not present an overall alternative thesis about the formation of national identities. The aim is only to present the sociopolitical preconditions and mainly external forces that lead to the formation of such an imagined entity. One of these preconditions in our case was the presence of the Jewish settler society, the effect of which grew as time passed and the Jewish presence became increasingly tangible. Yet Jewish settlement was only a part of the greater British colonial venture. Neither the Jewish settlers nor the British rulers perceived each other as extensions of their own systems, but by and large, the British rulers and Jewish colonizers complemented each other, at least from the point of view of the local Arab Palestinian population. Jewish settlement provided the British rulers with some of the functions of classic settler roles—in the economy, civil service, and in some cases, as a factor for control and surveillance of the local population. The Jews also drew some of the violence of local populations to them rather than to the colonial power. For the Jewish immigrant-settler society, British rule provided a limited political and military umbrella, ensuring within

colonial law and order the possibility of growth by purchasing lands and enabling immigration, and the development of a society that was ready to switch from a state in the making to a sovereign nation-state when the colonial state ceased to exist. It was also very helpful for the Jewish polity in 1948 that the British colonial state's bureaucracy and institutions were not transferred to the Arab majority when colonial rule terminated; the Arabs of Palestine were not administratively or politically prepared for such a takeover. The colonial government allowed the Jews to build strong political institutions, but was not as friendly to Arab institution-building efforts. Meanwhile, the Jewish state in the making did not depend on the colonial state, and was institutionally prepared to replace it. This probably caused Palestinian political anxiety, and is one of the reasons that they relied so heavily on the help of the already sovereign Arab brother states, mistakenly transferring responsibility for their own fate to them.

Several Arab and Palestinian social scientists and historians assert that the Palestinian case is exceptional among colonial and postcolonial identities, especially its need to confront the so-called Jewish challenge.[72] However, even if Jewish settlement introduced an additional factor into the institutional and identity building and dismantling processes, in the historical stages that preceded 1948, the Palestinian case was not exceptional and does not significantly differ from the experiences of other colonially produced collectivities of the time. The Palestinians were not merely passive objects of the initiative of others, as they often portray themselves. Immediately after the Egyptian invasion, they manifested an ability for collective action stretching across familial, class, urban, rural, and regional cleavages, without having a distinct collective identity.

Ottomanism was a convenient identity and ideology for the urban elites, merchants, and notables, in that the Ottoman regime supplied fluctuating levels of law and order, the feeling of participation in a sociopolitical order, and offices and other material and status benefits, such as tax collection and other concessions. At the same time, for the peasantry and lower classes, the most meaningful identities were those of the clan, the region, and perhaps the ancient primordial grouping around the Qays and Yaman factions. Islam provided some common denominators to bridge gaps between *fellahin* and *effendi*, poor and rich, ignorant and literate, but it did not offer a sense of being a partner in an all-embracing *umma al-islamiyya*. In short, Islam was a part of the more embracing Ottomanism. The ability to adopt a new kind of modern collective identity—the pan-Syrian identity, which could

be interpreted in both a particularistic context of *wataniyya* (near to the na-
tion-state notion) or its more universalistic context of *qawmiyya*, or the first
stage toward the integration into *umma al-arabiyya*—proved the flexibility
of the embryonic Palestinian society and self-consciousness. The adoption
of the Southern Syrian identity as a reaction to Faysal's success and failure,
and the formation of an implicit Palestinian identity, have far-reaching im-
plications. They hint that collective identities, at least before they become a
kind of secular or civil religion, such as nationalism, should be regarded as
an additional sociopolitical strategy of coping with changing threats. They
draw and redraw the collective boundaries, constructing loyalties and imag-
ined communities, but all based on changing sociopolitical realities.