The Evolution of Palestine
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The term 'entity' is not used in political terms by historians in discussing the Palestinian history or the evolution of Palestine. We do not hear the term used in relation to Egypt, Iraq or Algeria. Why then is it used for Palestine? Reading the history of the Arab awakening during the Ottoman period, we realize that Palestine and the Palestinians were an integral part of that history; in fact, Palestinian activists were nationalist pioneers in drafting and working for the first Arab national doctrine for freedom and independence.

The Arab countries were under Ottoman rule for a period of four centuries, and the Arab National Movement was an inevitable result of the Ottoman oppression, persecution and domination of the Arab people. The roots of the movement can be traced back to the Arab heritage, language and history: this is what made it genuine and gave it its originality and continuity.

The first organized political efforts - an expression of Arab identity - were as follows:

- *The 1875 program of a secret society in Beirut:* The society called for the recognition of the Arab language as the official language of the Arab countries, for an independent and united Syria and Lebanon and for employing outstanding Arab figures in the internal service of Arab countries.

- *The establishment of the Literary Club (Al-Muntada Al-Adabi) in Istanbul in 1909:* The club included in its membership Arab students from higher institutions, literary personalities, and members of parliament. It published a magazine, carrying its name, which dealt with the history, language and aspirations of the Arabs, thus making a significant contribution to the national awakening and to the revival of Arab glories. It placed an emphasis on the Arab identity, and was the first Arab organization to revive the Arab flag.

- *The founding of the Qahtani Society in 1909:* The 'Qahtani,' which derived its name from the legendary ancestor of the Arabs, called for dividing the Ottoman Empire into two parts to be linked in a federation. The society wished to see the creation of a united kingdom, to include the Arab states.

- *The Arab Fateh Society, founded in Paris in 1911:* The society moved to Beirut in 1913, and then moved again, in 1914, to Damascus. It was the first pro-independence group of Arabs and was responsible for planning the first general Arab conference in Paris, in 1913. The conference included delegations from various societies in and outside the Arab countries, and the topics discussed included national life, the struggle against occupation, Arab rights in the Ottoman state, the necessity for reform regarding centralization, and immigration from and to Syria.

- *The founding of the secret Al-Ahd Society in Istanbul in 1913:* Al-Ahd was founded by a number of Arab officers preparing plans for independence through revolt.

On 5 November 1914, when the Ottoman state entered the war at the side of Germany against the allies, the Arabs stood at a junction. Either their link with the Ottoman state would continue, or they were to drop the connection and turn their attention to their national liberation movement, in which case their aim would be to

unify its leadership, adhere to its independence goals, carry it to a new phase, and seize the opportunity to look for allies to help them achieve their goals.

The concept of the 'nation state' reached maturity and became the moving force behind Arab political thought and action. The Arab struggle shifted from demands for Arab autonomy to the call for a nation state and the struggle for its translation into a legal political reality.

The Arab search for allies to support their movement manifested itself in the following actions:

- A delegation of Syrian notables paid a visit to Lord Kitchener, the British High Commissioner in Cairo, requesting that Britain annex Syria and Egypt on condition that Syria enjoy independent administration.

- Talib An-Naqib, the representative of Basra in Iraq, made a similar offer to British envoys in Egypt and India.

- A number of Arab officers in Istanbul paid a visit to the British Ambassador to inquire about the position Britain would take in case certain conditions emerged. (Aziz Ali Al-Masri had been imprisoned for resisting the Ottoman authority and was awaiting sentencing.)

- The British government was fully informed about Sharif Hussein's (the Prince of Mecca) resentment towards the Turks. The resentment drove Sharif Hussein to seek independence using all possible means.

- Sharif Abdallah paid two visits to Cairo where he had secret talks with Jerusalem Governor Ronald Storrs about the possibility of taking action against the Turks to gain independence.

The mutual interest of the Arabs and Britain in working against the Turks was their motive for an alliance, despite the differences in their final goals. The Arab National Movement entered a new phase in which it moved in two parallel directions to achieve its independence goals. The two directions were as follows:

1) formulating and legalizing its relations with the allies (Hussein-McMahon Correspondence);

2) unifying its ranks under one leadership. (The secret societies in Syria and Iraq, Fateh and Al-Ahd, presented to Sharif Hussein a detailed proposal, the 'Damascus Protocol,' for a military revolt against the Turks and looked to him to assume leadership of the Arab National Movement.)

On 2 November 1917, Britain issued the Balfour Declaration, which promised a "homeland" for Jews in Palestine. Palestinians were confronted with three contradicting historical documents: the 1915 Hussein-McMahon Correspondence in which Britain pledged independence to the Arabs, the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 providing for the colonization of the Arab World, and, finally, the 1917 Balfour Declaration. Palestinians had no other representative or leader but Sharif Hussein, and they were prevented from traveling to seek external help: moreover, they were never asked for their opinion vis-à-vis the governing and administering of their country.

On the major political scene, they supported the Sharif and his sons, Faisal and Abdallah, in their new chapter of confronting the allies. On the domestic scene, they started to establish the Muslim-Christian Society to lead their national movement: this, however, was inseparable from the Arab Movement embodied in Faisal's first government in Damascus.

It should be mentioned that one of the Jerusalemite leaders, Abdul Qader Al-Muzafar, called for Jihad in the early days of November 1914.

In 1918, the first Zionist delegation visited Palestine and created confusion among the people concerning the Zionist plans, of which the Palestinian media, i.e., *Al-Karmel* and *Filastin,* were already warning. The Muslim-Christian Society held its first convention in Jerusalem on 5 March 1919, when it elected the first Arab executive committee to lead the National Movement and endorsed the very first Palestinian National Covenant. The covenant, whilst calling for Syrian independence in the context of Arab unity, emphasized Palestine's status as an integral part of Syria. With regard to the British it condemned both the Balfour Declaration and British military tutelage. It also expressed total rejection of Jewish immigration.

The Muslim-Christian Society, since its establishment in 1918 up to 1922, was the center for political activities and local representatives, who addressed numerous issues. They were particularly active in sending statements to the League of Nations and the British Government as well as in forming the first Palestinian delegation to London.

The 1919 Versailles Peace Conference established the system of the League of Nations and a system of mandates. It was also responsible for the arrival of the first fact-finding mission (King-Crane) to the region and its attempts to assess peoples' political aspirations. The Palestinian position focused on the rejection of the division of Syrian territories in addition to Zionist immigration and the British mandate, and the call for total independence.

In April 1920, the first Palestinian uprising started in Jerusalem and eventually spread all over Palestine. Its message was Arab unity and independence as well as a clear "no" to Jewish immigration: it was a salute to Faisal, who became the first Arab king in Damascus.

With the enforcement of the British mandate in Palestine and the appointment of Sir Herbert Samuel as the first British High Commissioner to Palestine, the Palestinian National Movement entered a new chapter. During the period of the British mandate, 1923 -1947, Palestinians held over seven major national conferences, elected an Arab executive committee, formed various political parties, revolted in 1921, 1929, 1933, 1936, and sent many delegations to London and the Arab capitals, as well as to India, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey. However, in February / March 1939, they were back to square number one: the Palestinian revolt of 1936 was ended by Arab decision.

The Palestinians attended the St. James Conference with the other Arab representatives and received the famous British 'White Paper' restricting Jewish immigration and land-buying. Meanwhile, the Zionist movement, with the assistance of the British government, rushed to create facts on the ground by building settlements, establishing a military army, forming the Jewish Agency to represent the Jewish community and to confront the Palestinian National Movement, and, at the same time,

by searching for a political formula through contacts and negotiations with Arab capitals as well as through dialogue with Palestinian leaders.

The period of the British mandate witnessed the emergence of Palestinian political elites as well as a class of professionals and technocrats, all of whom were loyal to the Arab Movement and worked towards achieving its goals. Their leadership was embodied in the Arab Higher Committee chaired by Hajj Amin Al-Husseini. Historic documents show exactly to what extent the Palestinian National Movement 'copied' the early days of the Arab awakening under the Ottomans. For example, Al-Muntada Al-Adabi was re-established in Jerusalem in January 1918, and An-Nadi Al-Arabi in 1919, with the very same goals of reviving the Arab heritage, history, language and achieving freedom.

Palestinian history, from the early 1920s up to 1948, is dominated by two major dimensions: Arabizing the Palestinian cause versus Palestinizing it. The first trend had the upper hand, but unfortunately led to the first Palestinian catastrophe, *an-nakba*, in 1948, with the *de facto* partition of Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state in more than 56% of the Palestinian territory.

It should be emphasized here that some historians introduce the evolution of Palestine in connection with the evolution of Zionism, and they record in detail all the Zionist conferences, statements, leaders, contacts and achievements. I believe the evolution of Palestine should be recorded as an integral part of the Arab National Movement. Both, eventually, confronted the challenges of Zionism.

The Palestinian National Movement struggled against the British mandate, the Zionist movement and various Arab regimes to maintain its identity. But the Palestinian National Program was about to be forgotten geographically, demographically, and politically as a result of the potential disappearance of the Palestinians through the process of assimilation into the Jordanian state. The Arab countries, excluding Jordan, refused to absorb Palestinian refugees. They were assisted in this by the Arab League resolutions that banned its states from granting citizenship to Palestinians.

The Partition Plan of 29 November 1947 was an international recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent Palestinian national state in Palestine. The document also granted the Zionist movement a Jewish state in part of Palestine. The context of the international plan represented a major injustice for Palestinians.

On 10 July 1948 the political committee of the Arab League called for the establishment of a Palestinian temporary civil administration to govern the Palestinian territories controlled by the Arab armies following the 1948 war, but the plan never materialized because of the strong objection of Jordan. On 1 October 1948 the Arab Higher Committee called a national conference in Gaza. The council elected a government, established a national charter, and declared Palestinian independence in Gaza. All Arab League members recognized the Palestinian government in Gaza with the exception of Jordan.

Palestinian leaders in the West Bank held a series of conferences during which they called for unity with Jordan. At a later stage Jordan granted Jordanian citizenship to Palestinians in the West Bank and endorsed the conference resolutions regarding the unity of the two banks of the River Jordan.

The Arab League did not accept Jordan's unification plans and up until the early fifties it could not change the *de facto* unity. It stated, however, that the annexation of the West Bank to Jordan was pending the final settlement of the Palestine Question and the realization of the Palestinians' right to self-determination.

From the early 1950s, the Palestinians gradually became scattered as refugees and displaced persons in the neighboring host Arab countries. Other Palestinians became second-class residents/citizens under Israeli military occupation in the new Jewish state. The Palestinians in Israel were cut off totally from their brothers in the West Bank and Gaza as well as from the Arab World, yet they struggled to maintain their identity, and continued to wait for a solution. Those who stayed in the West Bank including Jerusalem became Jordanian citizens and enjoyed full rights in a sovereign independent Arab state. Their political elite shared in the governing of Jordan, i.e., ministers, members of parliament, ambassadors. Meanwhile, those in Gaza maintained their Palestinian identity under Egyptian civil administration.

The famous story by Ghassan Kanafani, *People Under the Sun*, is a true story of how Palestinians struggled for survival, not only in their own homeland but also in neighboring host Arab countries. The story describes the plight of four people, hidden in an empty water tank, as they were driven across the desert between Jordan and Kuwait. They had no formal travel documents, and were attempting to smuggle themselves into Kuwait to find work. While they were dying under the heat of the sun, the four knocked continuously on the wall of the tank, crying, "We are here, we are dying, let us out, let us free." This story reflects the dilemma of the majority of Palestinians during that era. Palestine, for the Palestinian Diaspora, became a story of a house, a shore, a mountain or other treasured memories.

In the early 1960's Palestinians started again to re-organize and to mobilize enthusiastic popular support for the return to Palestine. This reawakening was on two tracks; the national and the Pan-Arab. With the first we witnessed a formation of Fateh organizations in Kuwait, and these later became the cornerstone of the national military resistance movement, whose leaders were received and supported by President Abdul Nasser of Egypt. The second track was an Arab summit decision to establish the PLO in 1964.

Internal Arab politics were unable to deliver a solution on either track, but the second Palestinian catastrophe in l967 brought the answer. The defeat of Arab armies and the fall of the West Bank and Gaza brought Palestinians, geographically and demographically, under Israeli military control. From 1967 until the early 70's the Palestinian military resistance against Israeli occupation was the major tool that united Palestinians throughout the world in their confrontation with Israel, with the backing and support of the Arab countries. Those under occupation called for steadfastness (*sumud*) and waiting for a solution to come through the PLO military resistance or Arab regimes, or the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 242 of l967.

The PLO faced a struggle for power and authority on Jordanian soil and was defeated and forced out of Jordan in the early 1970's. It re-established itself in Lebanon and succeeded in establishing a mini state within the state of Lebanon. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in l982, led by Begin-Sharon, put an end to the PLO mini state, and, with no state or military infrastructure, the PLO departed to Tunis. Meanwhile, Palestinians in the Occupied Territories moved from a stage of steadfastness to a new chapter known as the *Intifada.* The philosophy of the *Intifada* was to change the *status quo* and build a new society: "We cannot undo Israel, we

have to co-exist with Israel, we cannot wait for a solution to come from outside, we cannot be anything but Palestinians and we have a future to build, based on what we have in the Occupied Palestinian Territories." The characteristics of the five stages of the *Intifada* were as follows:

Stage one: to Palestinize the society, no fear, national pride, and challenging occupation with various tools such as stones, the burning of tires, leaflets and general strikes.

Stage two: to transfer the fear that governed the lives of the Palestinians for over 20 years to Israeli society, and to transfer the message of the *Intifada* to the PLO, which endorsed it in the Palestinian National Council meeting in Algiers in 1988.

Stage three: to begin talks and dialogue with all Israelis to build Israeli public opinion to support the need for the separation of power and a two-state solution.

Stage four: with the outburst of the Gulf crisis the Arab World was clearly divided and the dialogue between the Palestinians and the Israelis was frozen. The Americans introduced a political formula "land for peace, negotiations, Madrid-Washington bilateral talks." The Palestinians accepted the challenge to go to Madrid, and presented their case before the world. ("The whole world saw the messenger, and they understood the message.") Hanan Ashrawi was the spokesperson of the Palestinian delegation appointed by the PLO to negotiate with the Israelis. The whole world finally realized that the Palestinians and their entity should be allowed to enjoy their political rights in the Palestinian Territories.

The rest of the story is well known. The secret negotiations in Oslo were a breakthrough that delivered Israeli and Zionist recognition of the Palestinian people, and acceptance of the Palestinians as negotiation partners, in order to reach a political settlement. Today, the Palestinian entity is crystallized in a recognized flag, leader, elected council, transitional phase peace process, and support by the donor countries and the Arab World. But the story is not yet complete. The 'entity' and its future are to face more challenges, not least of all the absence of an Israeli partner to bring a successful conclusion to the peace process.