Filistin Araştırmaları Dergisi
Bulletin of Palestine Studies
e-ISSN: 2587-1862

Yaz/Summer 17, 2025, 1-34
Geliş Tarihi/Received: 04.03.2025, Kabul Tarihi/Accepted: 29.05.2025, Yayın Tarihi/Published: 30.06.2025
DOI: http://doi.org/10.34230/fiad.1651510

Identity and Resistance: The Constructivist Transformation of Palestine

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Abstract

This study examines the change and transformation of Palestinian identity from a constructivist theoretical perspective, starting from the pre-1948 period and covering the entire process up to the present day. The main argument of the study is that Palestinian identity is not a fixed, static, or inherent phenomenon; rather, it is continuously constructed and shaped over time under the influence of historical, social, and political dynamics. In this regard, a comprehensive literature review is conducted to explore the transformation of Palestinian identity in depth and to provide historical coherence with constructivist theory. The unique and valuable contribution of the study is its analysis of the evolution of Palestinian identity, examining it within the contexts of Gaza, the West Bank, Israel, and refugees, highlighting how this identity has developed from pre-1948 to the present and the role of socio-political dynamics in this evolution. Furthermore, the study is significant for its in-depth analysis of how Palestinians living in different geographical areas have engaged with this process and how they have shaped the concept of "Palestinianness." By approaching the construction of Palestinian identity not just as a historical phenomenon but also as a dynamic process shaped by social, cultural, and political factors, the study emphasizes not only the ethnic and religious characteristics of identity but also its aspects related to resistance and national belonging. Analyzing Palestinian identity across five distinct periods and within the defining characteristics of each era, the study offers an in-depth examination of its constructivist nature. In doing so, it aims to provide a substantial contribution to the existing literature and serve as a valuable resource for researchers interested in the subject.

Keywords: Palestine, Identity in Palestine, Palestinianness, Collective Identity Construction, Constructivism.

Kimlik ve Direniş: Filistin'in Konstrüktivist Dönüşümü

Özet

Bu çalışma, Filistin kimliğindeki değişim ve dönüşümü konstrüktivist teori perspektifinden 1948 öncesinden başlatarak günümüze kadar kapsamlı bir şekilde ele almaktadır. Çalışmanın temel argümanı Filistin kimliğinin sabit, statik ve doğuştan gelen bir olgu olmadığı; aksine, tarihsel, toplumsal ve siyasal dinamiklerin etkisiyle sürekli olarak inşa edilen ve zaman içinde dönüşen bir yapıya sahip olduğudur. Bu doğrultuda, geniş bir literatür taraması yapılarak Filistin kimliğindeki dönüşüm derinlemesine incelenmekte ve konstrüktivist teori ile tarihsel bir bütünlük

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sağlanmaktadır. Çalışmanın özgün ve değerli katkısı, Filistin kimliğinin evrimini Gazze, Batı Şeria, İsrail ve mülteciler bağlamında bir arada ele alarak bu kimliğin 1948 öncesinden günümüze kadar nasıl dönüştüğünü ve toplumsal-politik dinamiklerin bu süreçteki rolünü vurgulamasıdır. Ayrıca farklı coğrafyalarda yaşayan Filistinlilerin bu sürece nasıl farklı şekillerde dahil olduklarını ve "Filistinlilik" olgusunu nasıl şekillendirdiklerini derinlemesine incelemesi bakımından da önem arz etmektedir. Filistin kimliğinin inşasını sadece tarihsel bir olgu olarak değil aynı zamanda toplumsal, kültürel ve politik faktörlerin etkisiyle şekillenen dinamik bir süreç olarak ele alan ve bu bağlamda kimliğin etnik ve dini özelliklerinin yanı sıra direniş ve ulusal aidiyet yönlerini de vurgulayan çalışma, Filistin kimliğini beş ayrı dönemde ve her dönemin belirleyici özellikleri çerçevesinde incelemektedir. Filistin kimliğinin inşacı karakterine dair derinlemesine bir analiz sunarak bu alandaki literatüre önemli bir katkı sağlamayı amaçlayan çalışma, konuyla ilgilenen araştırmacılar için kıymetli bir kaynak olmayı hedeflemektedir.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Filistin, Filistin'de Kimlik, Filistinlilik, Kolektif Kimlik İnşası, Konstrüktivizm

Introduction

I am lost and confused,
Searching for my identity…
No, I don't like the color blue…
Nor am I happy to be white,
It reminds me of oppressive minds…

Menel Badarene, Katru'n-Nedâ[1*]

Identity, in its broadest sense, refers to the way individuals and societies define themselves, shaped by historical, cultural, and social dynamics. In this context, identity is not merely a domain of personal belonging but also a collective way of life. Individuals who feel a sense of belonging to a community construct and reproduce their identities within the framework of historical experiences, cultural values, religious beliefs, and political conditions. Rather than being fixed and static, identities undergo continuous transformation in response to changing circumstances. The dynamic and constructed nature of identities finds its most suitable theoretical foundation in constructivism. Constructivism does not perceive identity as an objective reality but rather as a phenomenon shaped and reproduced within a historical context. In this regard, states, groups, and individuals continuously reconstruct their identities through discourses, norms, and historical experiences.

When examined from a constructivist perspective, Palestinian identity is not a static structure tied to a specific historical period but rather a phenomenon shaped and transformed by the interaction of political and cultural dynamics. In this context, Palestinian identity is too comprehensive to be confined solely to ethnic affiliation or geographic boundaries; instead, it is shaped as part of historical, political, and ideological processes. Since the Nakba, Palestinian identity has undergone constant transformation in the context of exile, resistance, and the struggle for national liberation, reflecting the

1 Haifa Majadly and İbrahim Yılmaz, "Filistin Edebiyatında Kimlik Sorunu," *Ilahiyat Tetkikleri Dergisi= Journal of Ilahiyat Researches*, no. 46 (2016): 152.

* The poem has been translated into English by the author.

reciprocal interaction between national identity and resistance practices. The historical evolution of the concept of "Palestinianness" is, in fact, one of the most defining characteristics of the constructivist nature of Palestinian identity. In this regard, the construction of Palestinian identity is primarily shaped by national movements, cultural heritage, resistance practices, and collective memory.

This article aims to examine Palestinian identity not as a fixed and externally given structure but as a process that is constructed and transformed over time, providing a comprehensive examination of the phenomenon of "Palestinianness." The construction of Palestinian identity is not limited to historical events alone; rather, it reflects a dynamic understanding of identity shaped by social, cultural, and political interactions. In this context, the article approaches Palestinian identity and the perception of being Palestinian as a dynamic and interactive construct, aiming to reveal how this identity has been constructed and reconstructed across different historical periods through a case study based on a qualitative research method. The research questions of the article are as follows:

- What are the key factors influencing the formation of Palestinian identity? Has there been any change or transformation in this identity over time?
- When did a significant portion of Arabs living in Palestine begin to identify themselves as Palestinian?
- Did the identity formation process develop in the same way for Palestinians living in different regions (Israel, Gaza, the West Bank, and refugee camps)?
- How have religious, ethnic, or other types of identity influenced the sense of identification with Palestine?
- What are the factors that strengthen or weaken Palestinian identity? What is the role of collective identity in this process, and what are the dynamics that increase or decrease the perception of Palestinianness?

A literature review reveals that many studies have been conducted on Palestinian identity.[2] In addition to general analyses of Palestinian identity, there are also research studies focusing on the identities of specific groups. For instance, studies on the identity of Palestinians in Israel;[3] the identity of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank;[4] identity

[2] Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); F Robert Hunter, *The Palestinian Uprising: A War by Other Means* (University of California Press, 1993); Mustafa Kabha, *The Palestinian People: Seeking Sovereignty and State* (USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Incorporated, 2014); Nadim N Rouhana and Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, "The Indigenous Palestinian Bedouin of the Naqab: Forced Urbanization and Denied Recognition," *The Palestinians in Israel* (2011).

[3] John E Hofman and Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, "The Palestinian Identity and Israel's Arabs," *Peace Research* 9, no. 1 (1977); Elia Zureik, "Being Palestinian in Israel," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 30, no. 3 (2001); Nadim N Rouhana and Sahar S Huneidi, *Israel and its Palestinian Citizens: Ethnic Privileges in the Jewish State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Haim Koren, "The Arab Citizens of the State of Israel: The Arab Media Perspective," *Israel Affairs* 9, no. 1-2 (2002); Ahmad H Sa'Di, "Trends in Israeli Social Science Research on the National Identity of the Palestinian Citizens of Israel," *Asian Journal of Social Science* (2004); As' ad Ghanem and Sarah Ozacky-Lazar, "The Status of the Palestinians in Israel in an Era of Peace: Part of the Problem but Not Part of the Solution," *Israel Affairs* 9, no. 1-2 (2002); Muhammad Amara, "The Collective Identity of the Arabs in Israel in an Era of Peace," *Israel Affairs* 9, no. 1-2 (2002); Mahmoud Mi'ari, "Collective identity of Palestinians in Israel after Oslo," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*

perception among Palestinians in refugee camps;[5] identity among Palestinian children and youth[6] and identity among Palestinian women[7] are other important topics addressed in the literature. The unique and important contribution of this study is that it analyses the perception and change of identity among Palestinians in the context of Gaza, the West Bank, Israel and refugees in a holistic manner, from pre-1948 to the present day, and examines in depth how identity is continuously shaped and how social and political contexts affect this process by approaching the study within the framework of social construction theory. The article, excluding the introduction and conclusion sections, addresses the construction of identity from a constructivist perspective in the theoretical framework and then examines Palestinian identity under five main headings: 1) Palestinian Identity Before 1948, 2) Palestinian Identity from 1948 to 1967, 3) Palestinian Identity from 1967 to 1993, 4) Palestinian Identity from 1993 to 2006, and 5) Palestinian Identity from 2006 to the Present. These sections focus on historical turning points in Palestinian identity, revealing the dynamic and evolving nature of the process.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework: Identity and Constructivism

The term "identity," which has its origins and usage dating back to Ancient Greek and Western philosophy[8] but began to be used as a popular social science term in the 1950s, derives from the Latin root "idem," meaning "same."[9] Identity is one of the most important concepts in various social and human sciences. The phenomenon of identity, which is too specific and simultaneously broad to be confined to a single definition or expression, is generally measured by the questions "Who are you?" or "Where are you from?" and the answers given to these questions.

Since any definition made or to be made when explaining the concept of identity will be incomplete, identities are fundamentally divided into two categories: individual and social.[10] While individual identity emphasizes who a person is, their characteristics, and societal perception, social identity pertains to the social categories to which an individual

1, no. 8 (2011); Tuğçe Ersoy-Ceylan, "Social Identities in Conflict: Israeli Palestinians and Israeli Jews," *Digest of Middle East Studies* 32, no. 3 (2023).

4 Mahmoud Mi'ari, "Transformation of Collective Identity in Palestine," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 44, no. 6 (2009); Mahmoud Mi'ari, "Self-identity and Readiness for Interethnic Contact among Young Palestinians in the West Bank," *Canadian Journal of Sociology/Cahiers Canadiens de Sociologie* (1998).

5 Pamela Murgia, "The Discourse on Identity in Palestinian Refugee Camps. The Role of Textual Genres and Representations," *América Crítica* 5, no. 2 (2021); Rosemary Sayigh, "The Palestinian Identity Among Camp Residents," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 6, no. 3 (1977).

6 Ahmad Baker, "Psychological-Political Perception of Identity among Palestinian Youth," in *The Future of Palestinian Identity*, ed. Sharif Kanaana (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2018); Janette Habashi, "Palestinian Children: A Transformation of National Identity in the Abbas Era," *Fennia-International Journal of Geography* 197, no. 1 (2019).

7 Maria C Holt, "A Crisis of Identity: Palestinian Women, Memory and Dissent," in *the Future of Palestinian Identity*, ed. Sharif Kanaana (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018).

8 Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond "Identity"," *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000): 2.

9 Philip Gleason, "Identifying Identity: A Semantic History," *The Journal of American History* 69, no. 4 (1983): 911.

10 Sefa Şimşek, "Günümüzün Kimlik Sorunu ve Bu Sorunun Yaşandığı Temel Çatışma Eksenleri," *Uludağ Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 3, no. 3 (2002): 35.

feels belonging and emerges[11] as a result of interpersonal interactions, shaping their social status. An individual who identifies with a group may adopt their social identity, sometimes at the expense of their personal desires and freedoms. Collective identity, on the other hand, is considered an expression of social identity at the community level. In this context, the legitimate bearers of personal identity turn to collective identity, which serves as a more inclusive center of action and responsibility, to respond to the griefs and aspirations they experience.[12]

Collective identity functions as an umbrella, encompassing traditionally prominent ethnic, religious, and national identities, as well as newer identity types such as environmentalism, cosmopolitanism, and feminism. However, among these identity types, national identity stands out as the most influential and capable of generating more radical effects.[13] Anthony Smith, in explaining the concept of national identity, emphasizes the notions of "similarity or commonality." According to Smith, national identity refers to "a named human population that shares a historic territory, common memories and origin myths, a mass, standardized public culture, a common economy and territorial mobility, and common legal rights and duties for all members of the community."[14]

When examining the usage of the concept of identity in the Oxford English Dictionary, it is defined as "who or what somebody/something is."[15] However, James D. Fearon challenges this definition, arguing that it is not comprehensive when it comes to national and ethnic identity. He questions whether a nation must always and everywhere be "the same" or behave in the same way for a national identity to exist, suggesting that such a notion may lead to overgeneralization. In this context, while Fearon acknowledges the idea of temporal and spatial continuity in national identity, he differs from Smith by focusing more on "differences" rather than "sameness."[16]

The process of identity construction is shaped through the mechanism of opposition and mutual dependence between the "self" and the "other." This is because defining the "self" becomes possible only through the "other" that is positioned in contrast to it. In this context, identity construction is not only shaped by how the subject defines itself but also by how it is perceived and defined by "others."[17] Stuart Hall explains this situation with the metaphor, "It has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself."[18]

[11] Henri Tajfel and John C Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior," in *Political Psychology*, ed. J. T. Jost and J. Sidanius (Psychology Press, 2003), 283.

[12] William E Connolly, *Kimlik ve Farklılık Siyasetin Açmazlarına Dair Çözüm Önerileri*, trans. Ferma Lekesizalın (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 1995), 259.

[13] Bilal Karabulut, "15 Temmuz ve Türk Ulusal Kimliğinin Uyanışı: Konstrüktivist Teori Perspektifinde Bir Analiz," *Bilig*, no. 79: 5-6.

[14] Anthony D Smith, "National Identity and the Idea of European Unity," *International Affairs* 68, no. 1 (1992): 60.

[15] Oxford Dictionary. https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/identity.

[16] James D Fearon, "What is identity (As We Now Use the Word)," *Stanford University, California* (1999): 8.

[17] Gökhan Çapar, "Dış Politika Açısından Toplumsal, Siyasal ve Uluslararası Boyutlarıyla Kimlik ve Kültür: Biz ve Ötekiler Ayrımına Kavramsal ve Kuramsal Bir Bakış," in *Uluslararası İlişkilerde Kimlik Perspektifinden Dış Politika Biz ve Ötekiler*, ed. Gökhan Çapar (Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi, Ankara), 15.

[18] Stuart Hall, "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity," in *Culture Globalization and the World System*, ed. Anthony D. King (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 21.

In international relations, identity is often addressed in a collective context. According to Brubaker and Cooper, it refers to the fundamental and consequential similarity between members of a group or category, whether on an objective or subjective level. This similarity manifests primarily in collective action, tendencies, and consciousness[19] and is constructed through discourses. In this regard, constructivism, by proposing that identity is a concept based on the construction process, is one of the most important theories that enable in-depth analyses in this field. Constructivism is the reflection of the structuration theory, which was conceptualized by Anthony Giddens, in the field of international relations.[20] Nicholas Onuf, who introduced the concept of constructivism to international relations and laid its philosophical foundation, critiques most international relations scholars in his work *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations*, arguing that they do not go far enough back in developing their theories. He outlines the fundamental principles of constructivism in this context.[21] According to Onuf, in constructivism, which begins with actions, individuals and societies construct each other.[22] The person who popularized the concept and theorized it using its philosophical foundation is Alexander Wendt. Wendt explains his ideas, known as "social constructivism," in his work *Social Theory of International Politics*[23] and positions his theory as a "middle path" (bridge) between rationalists and reflectivists. In his work *Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics*, Wendt critiques the concept of "anarchy" as presented by neo-realist Kenneth Waltz. He also shares his thoughts on identity, which is a crucial foundation of the theory. According to Wendt, just as each individual can have multiple institutional identities, such as teacher, sibling, or citizen, states can similarly have multiple identities, such as "sovereign" or "imperial power."[24]

Alexander Wendt argues that the identities of actors are not given, but are developed, maintained, and transformed through interaction.[25] According to Wendt, identities are a characteristic that produces behavioral tendencies for international actors and form the basis of interests. This is because an actor is not aware of what they want until they know who they are.[26] On the other hand, Wendt's statement that "identities may be hard to change, but they are not carved in stone" reflects the constructivist theory's view that identities can be changed through interaction, yet they are also "relatively stable" structures.[27]

19 Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond "Identity", 7.

20 Davut Ateş, "Uluslararası İlişkilerde Konstrüktivizm: Ortayol Yaklaşımının Epistemolojik Çerçevesi," *Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 10, no. 1 (2008): 216.

21 Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989).

22 Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations*, 35-36.

23 Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, vol. 67 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

24 Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 398.

25 Wendt, "Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics," 397; Ted Hopf, "Constructivism All the Way Down," *International Politics* 37 (2000): 372.

26 Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 231.

27 Maja Zehfuss, "Constructivism and Identity: A Dangerous Liaison," in *Constructivism and International Relations: Alexander Wendt and His Critics*, ed. S. Guzzini and A Leander (London: Routledge, 2005), 7-8.

According to constructivist theory, identities are classified into four types: personal/legal, role, type, and collective.[28] Personal identities refer to the identity that distinguishes actors from others; type identities examine the attitudes, behaviors, and appearances of actors; role identities refer to the identity associated with an actor's position within the social structure. In collective identity, the concept of a shared fate is crucial, and it is expected that actors may, if necessary, limit their own desires and demands for the sake of the collective identity.[29] Vamık Volkan explains this situation as "large group identity." When the identity of a large group is humiliated or threatened, individuals belonging to that identity psychologically perceive it as legitimate to humiliate, sacrifice, and even kill members of the enemy group in the name of that identity.[30] In this context, Palestinian identity has become not only an individual form of belonging but also a symbol of collective resistance, due to the historical threats and traumas it has endured. The preservation and continuity of this identity are made possible through individual sacrifices, and as a result, Palestinians perceive attacks on their identity as an existential struggle.

The Transformation of Palestinian Identity in the Historical Process

The Palestinian identity is not a fixed and unchanging phenomenon but rather a dynamic construct that is continuously reshaped by historical experiences and political developments. Key turning points such as Ottoman rule, the British Mandate, the establishment of Israel, the Arab-Israeli wars, and the Oslo Process have played a crucial role in shaping how Palestinians define themselves and their collective identity. Palestinian identity has been shaped not only through ethnic or religious affiliation but also through the threats faced and practices of resistance, making resistance itself an inseparable part of identity. Each generation has inherited the experiences of the past, reproducing its understanding of identity and updating its elements through collective memory, thereby attributing new meanings to it. As a result, Palestinians have not only been the bearers of historical heritage but also active agents who continuously reconstruct this identity in response to political and social conditions.

Palestinian Identity Before 1948: The Transition from Ottomanism to Arab Nationalism

Palestine, referred to as *Filastin* in Arabic and *Eretz-Yisrael* in Hebrew, is a land of deep historical and religious significance. For the Christian world, it is the land where Jesus was born, crucified, and resurrected; for the Jews, it is their ancestral homeland mentioned in their sacred texts (*Eretz HaKodesh* – the Holy Land); and for the Islamic world (*Al-Ard Al-Muqaddas* – the Holy Land), it holds significance as the site of Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, where Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven. During the classical period, the term *Jund Filastin* was used to refer to a military district. In later

[28] Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 198.

[29] Alexander Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation and the International State," *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 2 (1994): 386.

[30] Vamik D Volkan, "Large-Group Identity, International Relations and Psychoanalysis" (paper presented at the International Forum of Psychoanalysis, 2009), 207.

periods, the region, including the districts of Jerusalem, Nablus, and Acre, was generally referred to as Southern Syria or simply Palestine.[31]

The naming of the country was a political act that took place in Ottoman Palestine in the late 19th century. Before this period, there was no debate over the country's name, and the names used by the ruling class, local population, or visitors were merely among many alternatives chosen for religious or administrative purposes. The name by which the country was referred had no significant impact on the daily lives of the people living there at the time. With the arrival of European colonialism and Zionism, the process of naming Palestine began, evolving into a political phenomenon that represented competing claims over the land rather than merely defining its geographical boundaries. In this context, since the late 19th century, actors with different claims to the region have sought to establish new realities whenever they had the necessary determination and power, using the act of naming as a means to advance their objectives.

By the mid-19th century, the region that would later be called Palestine was home to approximately half a million people. More than 80% of this population was Muslim, around 10% was Christian, and between 5% and 7% was Jewish. However, between 1880 and 1914, the population increased to approximately 690,000.[32] The population increase occurred as a result of the gradual migration of Jews persecuted in Eastern and Western Europe to Palestine. Starting in the 1870s, particularly Jews from Romania, who faced persecution, organized an international Jewish conference in 1872 to bring forward the idea of a mass migration to the United States. Although the 1878 Berlin Congress granted Romania independence under the condition that it would not practice religious-based discrimination, Romania fulfilled this obligation by excluding Jews and continued persecuting them.[33] The increasing pogroms and antisemitism in Russia in 1881, along with events such as the Dreyfus Affair in France, led Jews to adopt Zionism, believing it would allow them to preserve their identity and put an end to their frustrations.[34]

The Jewish migrations to Palestine from the 1880s onwards are defined as a series of *aliyah*s, and these migrations not only laid the foundations for the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 but also played a significant role in shaping the concept of "Palestinianness." The outbreak of pogroms in Russia in 1882 triggered the mass migration to Palestine, marking the beginning of the Zionist chapter in the country's history. The first settlers referred to themselves as *Hovevei Tzion* (Lovers of Zion) and aimed to establish a Jewish national homeland, opting to use Hebrew instead of Yiddish.[35] In this context, it can be seen that the "New Yishuv" established by the Zionists was sharply distinct from the state-dependent and traditional "Old Yishuv."[36] Indeed,

31 Ian Black, *Komşular ve Düşmanlar: Filistin ve İsrail'deki Araplar ve Yahudiler 1917-2017* (İstanbul: Pegasus Yayınları, 2018), 12-13.

32 Muhammad Y. Muslih, *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 13-14.

33 Jehuda Reinharz, "Old and New Yishuv: the Jewish Community in Palestine at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1993): 65.

34 Muslih, *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism*, 71-72.

35 Black, *Komşular ve Düşmanlar: Filistin ve İsrail'deki Araplar ve Yahudiler 1917-2017*, 20.

36 Reinharz, "Old and New Yishuv: the Jewish Community in Palestine at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," 54.

the identities within the Old Yishuv were known to be more religious than national in character, and according to Ian Black, they were referred to in Arabic as *Abna' el-Balad* (sons of the country) [37] by the Arabs. The political manifestation of Zionism was realized by Theodor Herzl, who wrote *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State) in 1896 and organized the first Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897. At the congress, Palestine was referred to as the "historic homeland" for the Jewish people, and the Zionist Organization was established with the goal of creating an official homeland for Jews. The famous motto of early Zionist literature and intellectual history, "A people without a land for a land without a people,"[38] was used to justify the transfer of the land inhabited by "stateless and identity-less" Palestinians to its "true owners."

Historically, the positioning of the Arabic language as a distinguishing feature, along with the belief system that all Arabs share a common origin, has supported the consciousness of Arabs as a distinct ethnic and cultural group. During the period of Ottoman rule over the Arabs, this sense of difference persisted, but since it found common ground within the framework of Islam, it did not progress to the extent of severing ties with the state. Particularly as a result of the Tanzimat reforms, the bureaucratic Palestinian class that emerged, benefiting from the Ottoman modernization reforms, fully identified with the ideology of Ottomanism and facilitated the sultan's centralizing policies.[39] Until the final decades of the Ottoman Empire, Arabs maintained their loyalty to the Ottoman *ummah* system, viewing the state as a force against Western designs and as the protector of Islam. However, this loyalty began to be questioned in the 19th century due to the state's struggles in uniting the Muslim world against Western threats and the differences in the understanding of the caliphate. Despite these emerging differences between Arabs and Turks, as Muslih puts it, this did not lead to a political divorce (*talaq siyasi*) between the two ethnic groups. Arabs' pursuit of cultural and political independence was influenced by the rising nationalism in Europe and the adoption of Turkism by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). By 1913, Arabs realized that they would not gain privileges in terms of language and cultural rights and began to chart a new course for their independence struggle. However, this struggle initially remained limited and did not receive support from the Arab elites serving in the Ottoman bureaucracy. For Arabs, who had remained loyal to both Islam religiously and to the Ottoman Empire politically, creating a nationalist class proved to be a difficult process.[40] Nevertheless, it is known that young, intellectual, and non-bureaucratic Arabs continued to pursue this independence struggle.

The shift from Ottomanism to Turkism, combined with the increasing Jewish immigration, led to a situation which, on one hand, led Arabs to begin to question their loyalty to the state, and, on the other hand, contributed to the emergence of both the Arab and Palestinian modern identities. The Arab dimension of this identity arose as an inseparable part of the changes occurring worldwide, especially in the Middle East, while

[37] Black, *Komşular ve Düşmanlar: Filistin ve İsrail'deki Araplar ve Yahudiler 1917-2017*, 19.

[38] Adam M Garfinkle, "On the Origin, Meaning, Use and Abuse of a Phrase," *Middle Eastern Studies* 27, no. 4 (1991): 539.

[39] Muslih, *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism*, 58.

[40] Muslih, *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism*, 60-67.

the "Palestinianness" aspect developed as a result of issues related to Palestine and conflicts with the Zionist movement. In this context, one of the most significant developments that facilitated the prominence and widespread recognition of Palestinian identity was the increase in journalistic activities. The *Filastin* newspaper, which emerged in Jaffa in 1911 played an important role in the development of Palestinian identity and was influential in gradually raising the consciousness of Palestine/Palestinianness, particularly by emphasizing the threat of Zionism.[41] Similar to the *Filastin* newspaper, the *al-Karmil* newspaper also played a significant role in the formation of identity awareness by publishing numerous articles warning Arabs not to sell land to the newly arriving Jews.[42] Additionally, a call titled "The Dangers of Zionism" was published in *Fatat al-Arab*, *al-Iqdam*, and *al-Karmil*, and this call was translated into Hebrew and featured in the newspapers *HaHerut* and *Moriah* as well.[43] However, it is important to emphasize that this emerging modern national identity consciousness was adopted by a very limited number of intellectuals before the world war.

In the late Ottoman period, the sense of identity among Palestinians was characterized by notions of "collective belonging" and "attachment" to the land they inhabited, reflecting a consciousness of ownership and a claim to rights over these territories. However, it is widely acknowledged that these shared sentiments did not evolve into the idea of establishing an independent nation-state. According to Fishman, a sense of local Palestinian identity began to emerge during the Second Constitutional Period in the Ottoman Empire; however, this identity coexisted with religious (Islam and Christianity), ethnic (Arab), and national (Ottoman) identities. Moreover, this newly developing sense of identity was not only a reaction to Zionism, but also evolved in response to British imperialism, the influence of Western culture, and the corruption of local administrators. It is important to emphasize that the emerging tendency of "being Palestinian," which took shape around educated elites, traditional urban notables, and village leaders, was present among both Muslims and Christians during this period. Within this framework, expressions such as *Filastiniyyun* (Palestinians), *al-Sha'b al-Filastini* (the Palestinian people), *Ahali Filastin* (people of Palestine), *Abna' Filastin* (sons of Palestine), and *Rijal Filastin* (men of Palestine) were adopted and used by both Muslim and Christian communities.[44] Moreover, during this period, the fact that Christians were responsible for the management of the aforementioned newspapers also played a role in spreading the Palestinian cause into the public sphere. Their anti-Zionist headlines emphasized the common dangers faced by Muslims and Christians in Palestine and suggested that the two communities unite to establish organizations for purchasing land. For example, Neguib Nassar, the editor of *The Carmel* newspaper, used the following words against the Zionist threat: "Our cities which used to be blooming are ruins, our plains which used to be fruitful are deserts… The Zionists who came to your land and live at your expense did

41 Kabha, *The Palestinian People: Seeking Sovereignty and State*, 2-3.

42 Emanuel Beška, "Political Opposition to Zionism in Palestine and Greater Syria: 1910-1911 as a Turning Point," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 59 (2014): 60.

43 Louis A. Fishman, *Jews and Palestinians in the Late Ottoman Era, 1908-1914: Claiming the Homeland*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 84.

44 Fishman, "*Jews and Palestinians in the Late Ottoman Era"*, 16, 68.

manage to revive their nationalism."[45] In this context, it is well established that Palestinian Christians played a particularly influential role in the emergence of a secular-oriented Palestinian nationalism in the late Ottoman era.[46]

The many events that took place from the beginning of World War I to the early years of British Mandate brought about radical and disturbing changes for the Arabs, particularly the Palestinians. This led to a series of transformations in the national and political identity feelings of the conscious urban Palestinians. During the war years, prominent Palestinian families such as Nimr, Husayni and Nashashibi remained loyal to the Ottomanism ideology and supported the state, while even Sharif Hussein's rebellion against the Ottomans, after striking an agreement with the British, had little impact on the Palestinian Arab elites. However, the Ottoman Empire's defeat in the war effectively ended the Ottomanism ideology, ushering in a search for a new cohesive ideology. Within this search, Arab nationalism rose, especially during Faisal's 22-month rule in Syria, and was presented as the only true political and hegemonic ideology. The rise of this nationalism and the support for Faisal were also influenced by the anger created among the Arabs by the Balfour Declaration, through which the British pledged to the Jews the right to establish a homeland in Palestine.[47] However, for the older Palestinian political elites, although Zionism posed a threat to the Arabs, it was seen as a direct threat and danger specifically to the Palestinians. Therefore, a group led by these elites shifted their focus towards the struggle for Palestine, rather than Arab nationalism.[48] In this context, while Arabism, religion, and local affiliations remained important factors, Palestinian nationalism, which had begun to sprout before the war and appealed only to a limited audience, matured in the post-war period and entered a process of identity transformation, just as constructivism emphasizes.

With the official beginning of the British Mandate in 1922, a new political and social process emerged in Palestine, during which two distinct societal structures became increasingly prominent. During this period, Muslim and Christian Arab politicians sought to construct a shared Arab identity, while Zionist Jews pursued an entirely different path, striving to create a distinct "Hebrew self."[49] Since the key factor distinguishing Palestinians from other Arab communities was their strong attachment to the land, the Muslim and Christian inhabitants of Palestine united around the principle of self-determination and displayed a common stance against Jewish Zionism. In this context, Christians and Muslims converged around a common political agenda under the framework of the Palestinian Arab National Movement, developing a sense of shared destiny based on a mutual perception of threat. However, this unity gradually weakened as Palestinian identity increasingly became associated with religion and Islam and Arab

[45] Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine*. (Stanford University Press, 2010) 226-227.

[46] Bård Kårtveit, "Dilemmas of Attachment: Identity and Belonging among Palestinian Christians", Brill, vol. 112 (2014), 13-14.

[47] Yehoshua Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement, 1918-1929 (RLE Israel and Palestine)* (London: Routledge, 2020), 70-71.

[48] Muslih, *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism*, 103-04.

[49] Assaf Likhovski, *Law and Identity in Mandate Palestine*. (USA: Univ of North Carolina Press, 2006), 2.

nationalism became more intertwined—ultimately leading to a growing divide between Christian and Muslim Palestinians.[50]

Between 1922 and 1944, the population of the country rose from approximately 750,000 to 1,700,000, while the Jewish population increased from around 83,000 (about 10% of the total population) to 530,000 (about 30%).[51] In this context, one of the most defining characteristics of the British Mandate period was the intense period of conflict and tension between the rapidly growing Jewish population—driven by large-scale immigration—and the Arab inhabitants, who were the region's indigenous population. This era, in which two completely distinct societal paradigms came to the forefront, was a period that contributed to the shaping of the Palestinian collective identity, while simultaneously preventing the unification of the people.[52] The British Mandate, effectively a colonial state, not only gave a name to the country and part of the geography where its inhabitants lived (Palestine), but also played a significant role in shaping their political and social identities.[53] During this period, when Palestine began to acquire a distinct political definition at the international level, Palestinian Arabs gradually abandoned their consciousness of a pan-Eastern identity and increasingly focused on an Arab-Palestinian identity that emphasized the national dimension. In this context, an examination of the books written during the era reveals that most authors used the terms "Palestine" and "Palestinians." For example, in 1923, Husayn Rawhi published a book titled *Concise Geography of Palestine*, while Khalil al-Sakakini authored *History of Palestine Following the Great War* in 1925.[54] In addition to the published books, the articles published especially in the *Filastīn* and *al-Karmil* newspapers are noteworthy. In this context, while the articles entitled "What is the Right of Jews on Palestine?" and "The Holy Land That is Becoming a National Homeland," published in *Filastīn*, questioned the rights of Jews in Palestine, an article published around the same time in *al-Karmil* criticized the Arabs for selling land to the Jews and resigning themselves to their own misery.[55] Meanwhile, Jewish settlements were seen as a movement of influence against the "pure" traditional Islamic society, leading to fatwas being issued that anyone selling land to Jews would be excluded from the Muslim community. Although Islam and pan-Islamism were no longer dominant ideologies in the post-war context, Islam was instrumentalized for political purposes and utilized as a means of political mobilization during this period. The Muslim Brotherhood movement, founded in Egypt by Hasan al-Banna in 1928, found its way into Palestine in the 1930s, influenced by Sheikh Izz ad-Din al-Qassam and his followers. However, they did not become a political power. In 1935 al-

50 William A. Stalder, Palestinian Christians and the Old Testament: Hermeneutics, History, and Ideology, (Diss. University of Aberdeen, 2012), 13-14.

51 Likhovski, "*Law and Identity in Mandate Palestine*", 21.

52 Zachary Lockman, "Railway Workers and Relational History: Arabs and Jews in British-ruled Palestine," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35, no. 3 (1993): 602-03.

53 Baruch Kimmerling, "The Formation of Palestinian Collective Identities: the Ottoman and Mandatory Periods," *Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 2 (2000): 63-64.

54 Kabha, *The Palestinian People: Seeking Sovereignty and State*, 4.

55 Selim Tezcan, "Historiography of Palestine in the Arab Press of the Early Mandate and the Question of the Formation of Palestinian Identity". Filistin Araştırmaları Dergisi, no. Kudüs'te Kimlik ve Mekan (April 2025): 191-193

Qassam, on being martyred, was regarded as the first martyr and hero of the Palestinian national movement. Despite this, it is accepted that the influence of Islam and Islamic elements on the shaping of Palestinian collective identity during the Mandate period was limited.[56]

The internal dynamics of the post-World War II period and the subsequent decolonization process were generally shaped by the transfer of colonial authority to representatives of the majority population group. However, in the case of Palestine, this process unfolded in a markedly different manner. In November 1947, the United Nations General Assembly approved a partition plan that proposed dividing the Palestine Mandate into a Jewish state, an Arab state, and an international zone that included Jerusalem.[57] According to this plan, the Jewish state would control approximately 55% of the territory, while the Arab state would receive around 40%. The Palestinians rejected this plan and attempted to defend their homeland. However, on May 14, 1948, following Israel's unilateral declaration of independence, Arab states sent troops to Palestine, leading to a full-scale war. However, since the Arab armies were unable to counter effectively the better-trained and better-equipped Israeli forces, the ceasefire agreements signed in 1949 resulted in approximately 700,000 Palestinians becoming refugees.[58] During this period, Egypt took control of the Gaza Strip, while Jordan gained control over the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. In the captured territories, efforts to reshape social identity and strict political control mechanisms were implemented with the aim of "de-Palestinizing" Palestinian identity. The Hashemite regime imposed a "Jordanian" identity, while the Israeli administration sought to create an "Israeli-Arab" identity. Other Arab states, while preserving Palestinian identity, largely framed it within the context of pan-Arabism (*qawmiyya*), aiming to resolve the Palestinian issue through a victorious Arab nationalism. Despite all the imposed identity policies and radical shifts in the political landscape, Arab nationalism continued to exist as an overarching identity in the post-1948 period. However, it is acknowledged that Palestinian identity was not entirely erased and, albeit weak, continued to persist and develop.[59]

The Period Between 1948-1967: A Search for Identity Between Dispersal, Integration and Resistance

These lines, expressed by Fawaz Turki "Yes, even our name got lost in the shuffle in 1948. Those of us in exile became known as 'the Arab refugees'. Those in the West Bank became 'Jordanians'. Those few who stayed behind became 'Israeli Arabs'. And those in Gaza, well, heck, no one even knew what to call them" clearly summarize the state of the "stranded" Palestinian identity in the aftermath of 1948.[60] The Arab-Israeli wars that began in 1948, referred to by Palestinians as the *Nakba* (Catastrophe), led to the division of Palestinian territories, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, and

[56] Kimmerling, "The Formation of Palestinian Collective Identities: the Ottoman and Mandatory Periods," 69.
[57] UN General Assembly, *Resolution Adopted on the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestinian Question* (29 November 1947).
[58] Lex Takkenberg, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees after Sixty Years: Some Reflections," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, no. 2-3 (2009): 254.
[59] Kimmerling, "The Formation of Palestinian Collective Identities: the Ottoman and Mandatory Periods," 69.
[60] Fawaz Turki, "Reflections on Al-Nakba," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28, no. 1 (1998): 12.

the creation of diaspora communities as approximately 750,000 Palestinian Arabs became refugees in neighboring countries[61] such as Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon. However, since the shared *Nakba* experience did not affect all Palestinians in the same way, it also shaped their responses to these events, influencing the evolution of Palestinian national identity and contributing to differences in their strategic choices.[62] The defeat in 1948 intensified the process of "Pan-Arabization" of the Palestinian struggle, and throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Palestinian liberation movement was conducted through the Arab Nationalist Movement led by Egyptian leader Nasser. During this period, many Palestinians, believing that the only way to continue the struggle for Palestine and fight Zionism was through Arab unity, shaped their identity through the discourse of Arab nationalism/Arab national identity. In this context, the 1964 Palestinian National Charter did not mention Palestinian or Muslim identity but instead emphasized Arab identity.[63]

The emergence of Palestinian national consciousness did not culminate in the formation of a nation-state, as it did not follow a continuous trajectory unlike the processes in neighboring Arab countries.[64] Although Palestinian identity weakened after 1948, the sense of identity manifested itself in various forms among Palestinians who were forced to disperse across different regions. During this period, identity developed among the Palestinian diaspora as a result of being uprooted, experiencing life as refugees, and facing exclusion from emerging national identities around them. In Lebanon, in particular, the oppression and discriminatory policies they encountered, as well as their perception as the "new other," prevented the loss of national identity among Palestinians living there. Deprived of legal status by the Lebanese state through the denial of citizenship, Palestinian refugees have been positioned not as a collective political subject but as foreigners with individual and limited rights under Lebanon's sovereignty regime. In contrast, the political and cultural integration processes of Palestinian refugees in Syria were approached with a relatively more inclusive attitude; this facilitated the de facto integration of many refugees into Syrian society over time, enabling them to move beyond life in the camps. However, the restriction of property rights—such as granting only one housing right per refugee family and prohibiting the purchase of agricultural land—reveals that Syria, too, adopted a sovereignty-based and restrictive approach in its integration policy toward Palestinian refugees.[65] Thus, while Jews were perceived as the "other" among Arabs prior to the Nakba, after 1948, it was the Palestinians who came to be seen as the unwanted outsiders in neighboring countries. The transformation of Palestinians into refugees, the end of urban life for many, and their forced confinement in ghettos in host countries led to social disintegration in many areas, eroding local senses of belonging. However, Homi Bhabha interprets this situation—the experience of living within different cultures and the existence of distances between kin—not as barriers to

61 Tuğçe Ersoy-Ceylan, "1948: Mekân-Kırım Yoluyla Unutma Rejiminin Kuruluşu," *Filistin Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 9 (2021): 87.

62 Mamdouh Nofal et al., "Reflections on al-Nakba," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28, no. 1 (1998): 20.

63 Mi'ari, "Transformation of Collective Identity in Palestine," 583-84.

64 Issam Nassar, "Reflections on Writing the History of Palestinian Identity," *Palestine-Israel Journal* 8, no. 4 (2001): 8.

65 Kabha, *The Palestinian People: Seeking Sovereignty and State*, 156-158.

the formation of a community or identity, but rather as elements that make such formations possible.[66] The loss of local belonging among the Palestinian diaspora has been replaced by a sense of Palestinian national consciousness.

During this period, Palestinian identity also showed significant development in the Gaza Strip under Egyptian administration. Egypt did not annex the region but defined it as Palestinian territory. Although it did not actively support Palestinian national identity, it also did not pursue a policy of obstruction against it. Organizations operating in Gaza, such as the Palestinian Liberation Movement and the Muslim Brotherhood, despite facing occasional repression and restrictions, placed the Palestinian cause at the center of their ideologies, mobilizing public opinion and significantly contributing to the growth of political consciousness among Palestinians. In this context, it would be appropriate to trace the roots of Gaza's later role in paving the way for the emergence of the Palestinian Liberation Movement and the political reconstruction process of Palestinians living there back to the period after 1948.[67]

The year 1959 witnessed significant developments for the Palestinian national movement. Under Egypt's leadership, the idea of reviving the Palestinian presence was introduced at the Arab League Council. Subsequently, in 1963, the Arab League appointed Ahmad al-Shuqayri as the official Palestinian representative, and in June 1964, he founded the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).[68] With the establishment of the PLO, the Palestinian issue was no longer merely a refugee problem but was redefined as a political and national cause. Additionally, 1959 marked three key developments in the Palestinian national movement. In October, the institutional structure of the Fatah organization took shape, and the monthly publication *Filastinuna* began circulation in Beirut. In November, the General Union of Palestinian Students was established in Cairo. These developments strengthened the Palestinian cause both organizationally and intellectually. In the following years, on January 1, 1965, Fatah launched its armed struggle, and various fedayeen organizations joined the armed resistance against Israel. The early 1960s witnessed the rise of a new Palestinian national movement guided by a youthful and nationalist leadership. The formation of the PLO and Fatah's leadership became defining elements of Palestinian political dynamics in the 1960s and foundational pillars of the Palestinian struggle that continues to this day.[69]

Unlike in the diaspora and the Gaza Strip, where Palestinian identity developed despite a lack of active encouragement from Arab regimes, its evolution in the West Bank—annexed by Jordan—remained weak due to the deliberate policies implemented by the Jordanian government.[70] Due to Jordan's active and repressive policies aimed at the "Jordanization" of East Palestine and its people, the development and entrenchment of Palestinian self-awareness in the West Bank became a prolonged process, unlike in other

66 Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2012), 140.

67 Mi'ari, "Transformation of Collective Identity in Palestine," 584.

68 Yezid Sayigh, "The PLO and the Palestinian Armed Struggle," in *The Middle East Online: Series 1: Arab-Israeli Relations, 1917-1970* (Cengage Learning: Gale. Com. Retrieved July, 2005), 2.

69 Moshe Shemesh, "The Palestinian Society in the Wake of the 1948 War: From Social Fragmentation to Consolidation," *Israel Studies* 9, no. 1 (2004): 86-89.

70 Mi'ari, "Self-identity and Readiness for Interethnic Contact among Young Palestinians in the West Bank," 50.

regions.[71] In this context, East Jerusalem and the West Bank were no longer Palestine but Jordan, while Palestine, as Musa Budeiri put it, was "beyond the flimsy wall that started at Damascus Gate and stretched all the way to Shaykh Jarrah," somewhere beyond.[72] Mi'ari suggests that if a survey on collective identity had been conducted among Palestinians living in the West Bank during this period, the likely responses would have been "Jordanian" or "Arab." This is because the Jordanian government, through its integration policies and the Citizenship Law enacted in 1954, sought to eliminate the sense of belonging to Palestine by granting citizenship to all Palestinians. However, this integration policy was largely symbolic and intended for official purposes, as many positions within the state hierarchy were occupied by "original Jordanians." [73]

Palestinian identity also remained weak among Palestinians in Israel, who, after the 1948 war, were left "ownerless" due to the defeat and the flight of their leaders. Israel primarily pursued a policy of "controlling" Palestinians within its borders. To implement this policy, it employed strategies such as "segmentation" (fragmenting the Arab minority from within and separating them from the Jewish majority), "dependence" (making Arabs socially, economically, and politically dependent on Jews), and "cooptation" (bringing potential Arab leaders to its side through privileges and special exemptions).[74] Isolated, leaderless, and under pressure, Palestinians in Israel were forced to accept Israeli policies, and from that point on, they were referred to as "internal Arabs," "48 Arabs," or "Israeli Arabs." When Israel's policies were combined with the defeat of 1948 and the severing of ties with the rest of the Palestinian people, Palestinian elements in both individual and collective identities remained extremely weak during this period. In order to adapt to their new status and assert their position as a minority, they sought to emphasize an Israeli identity due to the contradictory elements within their Arab identity.

Israel, constitutionally characterized as a Jewish state, has distinctly illustrated its stance of unequal treatment towards Palestinian minorities since its establishment. The designation of Palestinians as "Arab" under the "nationality" category on Israeli identity cards and passports highlights the sharp distinction between citizenship and national identity.[75] This situation serves as a significant indicator that Israel has not fully integrated its Arab citizens into the national identity, instead positioning them as "others" in contrast to the state's "Jewish" identity. Although Arab citizens of Israel are recognized as official citizens, the classification of them as "Arab" on their identity cards has led to criticisms, as it places them in a second-class citizen status both nationally and legally. This situation is considered one of the key factors deepening the fragmented structure of Arab identity in Israel and the tension between citizenship and national belonging. Israel's discriminatory policies towards its Arab citizens were institutionalized through fundamental legal provisions enacted during the state's early years. The 1950

71 Nassar, "Reflections on Writing the History of Palestinian Identity," 9.
72 Musa Budeiri, "Reflections on Al-Nakba," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28, no. 1 (1998): 32.
73 Mi'ari, "Transformation of Collective Identity in Palestine," 584.
74 Ian Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State: Israel's Control of a National Minority* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980), 77.
75 Koren, "The Arab Citizens of the State of Israel: The Arab Media Perspective," 212.

Law of Return and the 1952 Citizenship Law prescribed unequal treatment for Palestinian citizens regarding citizenship rights. These laws granted Jews worldwide the right to immigrate to Israel freely and automatically acquire citizenship, while, during the same period (1947-1952), forcibly displaced Palestinians were excluded from these provisions. As a result, Palestinians were stripped of their previous legal status, and their internationally recognized right of return was effectively denied.[76]

The dispersion of the Palestinian population after 1948 it completely wiped out the social and political developments that had started among Palestinians prior to the war. By 1952, it was estimated that there was a total of 1.6 million Palestinians. Of these, 11% lived in Israel (179,500), 18% in Gaza (approximately 500,000), 47% in the West Bank (approximately 742,500), 9% in eastern Jordan (150,000), and the remaining approximately 580,000 in neighboring Arab countries. This distribution of Palestinians profoundly affected their social structure and identity, complicating the process of reconstructing their identities. The key difference between the 11% living in Israel and the other Palestinians was that they remained on their land and gained citizenship in this new Jewish state of Israel. However, in practice, this led to them being labeled as "traitors" or "cowards" by Palestinians living outside, while within Israel they were perceived as the "other" or "enemy," potentially endangering their security. Most of the poor, illiterate Palestinians at the time focused solely on providing for their families and ensuring that they did not become refugees like their brothers. Because Israeli authorities employed various methods to deter many Arabs from engaging in political participation or conversations considered unfavorable by the authorities, most Arabs did not have the opportunity for political activities due to the harsh living conditions in Israel until 1967.[77]

Palestinian Identity from 1967 to 1993: Resistance, Revolution, and National Identity Building

In the first twenty years following the establishment of Israel, it can be observed that traditional identities, such as religious, tribal, or local identities, which could be classified as forms of identity, maintained their presence among Palestinians. However, Palestinian identity remained weak. Particularly among Palestinians in Israel, the adoption of the new social and political reality led to the prominence of Israeli identity in order to integrate into society. However, with the 1967 War, a new period began, characterized by a significant change and transformation in Palestinians' collective identity perception. The first development that influenced this period was the abolition of martial law in 1966 in areas with a dense Arab population, especially in the Galilee and the Triangle, where a serious martial law policy was followed until 1966, and the creation of the infrastructure for a new Palestinian identity building process by increasing social interaction and integration.[78] The second development was the 1967 Six-Day War, in which Israel captured the Golan Heights, the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East

[76] Katie Hesketh, Suhad Bishara, Rina Rosenberg, and Sawsan Zaher, *The Inequality Report: The Palestinian Arab Minority in Israel. Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel* (Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, 2011), 15.

[77] Ghanem and Ozacky-Lazar, "The Status of the Palestinians in Israel in an Era of Peace: Part of the Problem but Not Part of the Solution," 263-64.

[78] Koren, "The Arab Citizens of the State of Israel: The Arab Media Perspective," 213-14.

Jerusalem,[79] which eliminated the fragmented relationship among Palestinians. As a result of these developments, Israeli identity weakened, while Arab identity strengthened, and an awakening of Palestinian identity began.[80]

The transformation of Palestinian identity from that of a poor refugee to a revolutionary spirit parallels the establishment of resistance organizations. For Palestinians, particularly those in refugee camps, revolution and resistance marked a process that reminded them first of their humanity and then of their Palestinian identity. Since identity was closely associated with Palestinian lands, its reclamation could only be achieved through resistance and struggle. In this context, the transformation of Palestinians from refugees to fighters (fedayeen) shaped the process that turned the Palestinian cause into a revolution.[81] The establishment of the PLO in the mid-1960s marked a turning point that reinforced Palestinians' sense of self-sufficiency, while the defeat in 1967 further supported this perception, rendering Palestinians aware of the fact that they needed to depend on themselves in the fight to free Palestine.[82] The Fatah Movement, which defined military struggle as its main strategy for the liberation of Palestine, rejected the 1967 defeat and initiated guerrilla warfare. However, the event that brought Fatah to the forefront of Palestinian resistance was the Battle of Karameh on March 21, 1968. This battle, representing the beginning of an entirely new phase of resistance for Palestinians, saw the guerrillas emerge as a significant factor in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The main commando group in Karameh, Fatah and its leader Yasser Arafat,[83] gained support from the Arab world and encouraged thousands of Palestinians to join the resistance.[84] Perhaps the most important feature of this battle, referred to as the "Second Leningrad,"[85] was its role in rebuilding Arab self-respect and showing Palestinians that the only way to confront Israel militarily and ultimately to defeat Zionism was through armed struggle.[86] After this battle, the Fatah movement, which took over the PLO established in 1964, adopted the idea that the liberation of Palestine would be achieved through the direct actions of the Palestinians. It emphasized a Palestinian national identity that separated from Pan-Arab identity, advocating for Palestinian refugees to take control of their own destiny.[87] The phrase "Armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine" in Article 9

[79] Murat Ağdemir, "Religion, Settlements and Israel's Relations with Palestinian Arabs," *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, no. 45 (2014): 52.

[80] Mi'ari Mahmoud, "Traditionalism and Political Identity of Arabs in Israel," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 22, no. 1-2 (1987): 225.

[81] Amal Jamal, "Palestinian Dynamics of Self-Representation: Identity and Difference in Palestinian Nationalism, in *Israelis in Conflict: Hegemonies, Identities and Challenges*," ed. Adriana Kemp, David Newman, Uri Ram, and Oren Yiftachel (United Kingdom: Liverpool University Press: 2014), 6-7.

[82] Mi'ari, "Self-identity and Readiness for Interethnic Contact among Young Palestinians in the West Bank," 50.

[83] During this period, Yasser Arafat's popularity significantly increased, and in December 1968 issue of *Time* magazine, he was featured on the cover with the headline "Fedayeen Leader Arafat". Time, "Fedayeen Leader Arafat," Dec 13, 1968, https://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19681213,00.html. https://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19681213,00.html

[84] Hisham Sharabi, *Palestine Guerrillas: Their Credibility and Effectiveness* (The Center for Strategic and International Studies, Georgetown University., 1970), 17.

[85] Black, *Komşular ve Düşmanlar: Filistin ve İsrail'deki Araplar ve Yahudiler 1917-2017*, 190.

[86] Sharabi, *Palestine Guerrillas: Their Credibility and Effectiveness*, 17.

[87] Helga Baumgarten, "The Three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism, 1948—2005," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34, no. 4 (2005): 32.

of the 1968 Palestinian National Charter[88] demonstrates that, from 1968 onwards, Palestinian resistance groups engaged in guerrilla warfare, exerting significant political and psychological pressure on Israel.[89] The image of the *fedai* during this period became a symbol of the new Palestinian figure emerging in national literature. For example, in the 1970 article titled "The Revolutionary Personality," the fedai figure is described as: "For the oppressed ... he presents to the world a tough, resourceful, fighting Palestinian figure who will not negotiate or surrender until he returns [to his people] the land of peace [Filastin] and the signs of justice, freedom, and equality."[90]

The various internal and external developments of the 1970s and 1980s contributed to the strengthening of Palestinian identity. First, the 1973 Yom Kippur War, unlike previous Arab-Israeli conflicts, did not result in Israel's absolute victory. Instead, it changed the regional power balance, shaking the myth of the "invincible Israeli army" and allowing for the restoration of confidence in the Arab world. Another important development was the acknowledgment of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the exclusive legitimate representative of the Palestinian people during the 1974 Arab League Summit in Algiers, and its gaining of observer status at the United Nations in the same year. These developments reinforced the sense of Palestinian national identity. Indeed, during this period, Israeli Arabs, through the establishment of structures such as the Arab Municipalities Committee and monitoring committees, gained an increasing influence in political discussions about Palestinian identity.[91] Another significant turning point was the protests that took place on March 30, 1976, known as "Land Day," as a response to Israel's large-scale land expropriations. This event reinforced the connections between Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line.[92] In addition, the Camp David Accords signed between Egypt and Israel in 1978, which led to Egypt's peace process with Israel, created the perception that Palestinians were being abandoned by the Arab world. This, in turn, acted as a driving force for Palestinians to embrace their national identity more strongly. During this period, both Israel's policies of oppression and violence against Palestinians, as well as various massacres committed by Arab regimes and parties, such as the Black September in Jordan in 1970, the Tel el-Za'atar massacre in Lebanon in 1976, and the Sabra and Shatila massacres in 1982, reinforced the need for Palestinians to cling to their own identity.[93] Additionally, the intifada, which began in December 1987 and lasted until the early 1990s, clearly demonstrated that the Palestinian people were engaged in a more radical struggle for their identity. This process was also reflected in the 19th Palestinian National Council meeting held in Algeria in November 1988, known

88 Yale Law School, The Palestinian National Charter: Resolutions of the Palestine National Council July 1-17, 1968, (2008).

89 Michael C. Hudson, "Developments and Setbacks in the Palestinian Resistance Movement 1967-1971," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 1, no. 3 (1972): 66.

90 Shemesh, "The Palestinian Society in the Wake of the 1948 War: From Social Fragmentation to Consolidation," 97.

91 Alexander Bligh, "Israeli Arab Members of the 15th Knesset: Between Israeli Citizenship and their Palestinian National Identity," *Israel Affairs* 9, no. 1-2 (2002): 6.

92 Koren, "The Arab Citizens of the State of Israel: The Arab Media Perspective," 219.

93 Mahmoud Miari, "Collective Identity of Palestinians in Israel after Oslo," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 1, no. 8 (2011): 226.

as the "Intifada Session." During this meeting, PLO leader Yasser Arafat declared the establishment of the Palestinian state and expressed his willingness to resolve the conflict through peaceful means in accordance with UN resolutions 181, 242, and 338. With the end of the Cold War and the weakening of global competition in the Middle East, along with Iraq's loss of power after the Gulf War, a groundwork was laid for direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine. With Yitzhak Rabin's positive stance and the geopolitical changes in the region,[94] the Madrid Conference was held in 1991 under the mediation of the United States. This conference laid the foundation for the creation of the Refugee Working Group (RWG), an important phase of the peace process.[95]

After 1967, Israel, fearing that the integration of populations in the occupied territories would weaken the Jewish character of the state, adopted policies to prevent the people living there from demanding national rights associated with their Palestinian identity. These policies aimed to suppress Palestinian national identity on one hand, and to promote alternative forms of identity on the other hand, which led to divisions within Palestinian society. In this context, Israel emphasized clan (*hamula*) and religious identities to prevent the formation of a collective Palestinian identity. However, it is also evident that Israel did not adopt the same approach towards Arab identity. In an attempt to weaken Palestinian nationalism, Israel tried to associate Palestinians with other Arabs, and for this reason, for example, it did not prevent Jordan from maintaining its political presence in Gaza and the West Bank after 1967.[96] The Zionist character and dominant ideology of the Israeli state have obstructed Palestinian efforts to form a collective identity by subjecting Palestinians to inequality in every aspect, from education to employment, healthcare, and political participation. For example, during this period, the Israeli High Court rejected nearly all cases related to discrimination against Arab citizens. Regarding the right to vote and run for office, the law's provision stating that "a list of candidates shall not participate in the elections for the Knesset if its aims or actions, expressly or implicitly, point to the denial of the existence of the State of Israel as the State of the Jewish people" highlights that an Arab citizen wishing to participate in elections must not oppose the Jewish character of the state.[97]

Before 1967, under the control of Jordan and Egypt in the West Bank and Gaza, the education system, despite being culturally appropriate, did not promote Palestinian identity, and Palestinian history was not included in the textbooks. After the 1967 occupation, although the region came under Israeli control, nothing changed in this regard. Israeli authorities took over the education system immediately after the war, establishing educational offices managed by military personnel in each area. Recognizing the potential impact and danger of education, Israel eliminated any curriculum that might evoke identification with Palestinian nationalism.[98] In the parts of the curriculum where Palestinians were referenced, an orientalist approach was adopted, portraying

94 Ağdemir, "Religion, Settlements and Israel's Relations with Palestinian Arabs," 58.
95 Jinan Bastakı, "Who Represents Palestinian Refugees? The Sidelining of the Core of the Palestine Question," *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs* 20, no. 1 (2015): 83.
96 Neve Gordon, *Israel's Occupation* (University of California Press, 2008), 94-96.
97 Osama Fouad Khalifa, "Arab Political Mobilization and Israeli Responses," *Arab Studies Quarterly* (2001): 19.
98 Gordon, *Israel's Occupation*, 56.

Palestinians and Arabs as "suspicious," "rebellious," and "backward."[99] Despite all the inequalities, starting from the late 1970s, Arab citizens began to integrate more into Israeli society. Palestinians, despite the unequal conditions and policies of discrimination following the occupation, started to take the place of Jewish workers by working in agriculture, construction, restaurants, and many other sectors. As a result, between 1968 and 1972, the national income in the West Bank increased by 16% per year, and in Gaza by 20%.[100] A young person from East Jerusalem explained this situation as follows: "Jordanians had put a lot of pressure on us, and wouldn't let anything happen. Then the Israelis came in and let us work in Israel. Suddenly there was more money. No one wanted to revolt. This didn't mean that we liked Israel."[101] The relative improvement in the economic situation of Arabs inside Israel and Palestinians living under Israeli occupation created a sense of self-confidence among the Palestinians, while also holding the potential to serve as a "bridgehead" for integration with Arabs outside. This situation provided significant momentum for national unity compared to the period before 1967.[102]

The Period Between 1993-2006: Palestinian Identity–from Oslo to Intifada, the Construction of an Islamic Identity?

The perception summarized by Golda Meir's words, "There was no such thing as Palestinians…They did not exist,"[103] reflects Israel's view of Palestinians up until the Oslo process. Until this period, recognition was seen by Israelis as legitimizing the "Other" and thus questioning their own existence. As a result, Israelis tended to generalize Palestinians as Arabs, while Palestinians viewed Israel as a "Zionist entity." This ideological stance defined the interaction between the two groups and the conflict surrounding their identities, contributing to the longstanding lack of mutual recognition and understanding.[104] The signing of the Declaration of Principles (DOP) between Israel and the PLO in September 1993, within the context of the Oslo Accords, opened the doors to a new peace and mutual recognition process between Israel and Palestine. This period significantly impacted the identity-building process among Palestinians. Although the agreement was not a final settlement and outlined a gradual peace process, it served as a framework agreement, leading to the establishment of an autonomous administration (Palestinian Authority) in Gaza and Jericho in the first stage. The agreement envisioned that final status negotiations would be based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, and it emphasized the need to treat the West Bank and Gaza as a unified entity. However, sensitive issues such as Jerusalem, refugees, Jewish settlers, borders, and security were left for final negotiations. These negotiations were expected to commence

99 Ismael Abu-Saad, "State-Controlled Education And Identity Formation Among The Palestinian Arab Minority In Israel," *American Behavioral Scientist* 49, no. 8 (2006): 1089.

100 Black, *Komşular ve Düşmanlar: Filistin ve İsrail'deki Araplar ve Yahudiler 1917-2017*, 191.

101 Hunter, *The Palestinian Uprising: A War by Other Means*, 37.

102 Koren, "The Arab Citizens of the State of Israel: The Arab Media Perspective," 224.

103 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, 147.

104 Herbert C Kelman, "The Interdependence of Israeli and Palestinian National Identities: The Role of the Other in Existential Conflicts," *Journal of Social Issues* 55, no. 3 (1999): 590.

no later than May 1999, five years after the establishment of the autonomous administration.[105]

The Oslo process marked an important moment in the efforts to dismantle the ideological foundations upon which both parties had built their perceptions of the "other." Just days before the signing of the agreement, both sides sent letters to one another, outlining their intentions. In his letter, Yitzhak Rabin acknowledged the national identity of the Palestinian people, while Yasser Arafat confirmed his recognition of Israel's right to exist and expressed the Palestinians' commitment to renouncing violence. In this context, the Oslo process prioritized issues of identity and statehood, leading to the formal recognition of the Palestinian identity for the first time, and marking the moment when Palestinians became recognized as a "presence" on the international stage.[106] The implementation of the DOP faced significant challenges, primarily due to extremists on both sides and various events that disrupted the peace process. Notably, the 1994 Hebron massacre and subsequent suicide bombings carried out by Hamas negatively impacted the peace efforts.[107] Despite these setbacks, the Oslo II Agreement, signed in 1995, expanded Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank, dividing the area into Areas A, B, and C, each under varying levels of Israeli and Palestinian control. However, the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995 and the election of Benjamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister in May 1996 significantly hindered the peace process, marking the beginning of a new phase. Under Netanyahu's government, which set continuous conditions for progress, the decision to freeze the expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank was reversed. As a result, the number of settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip increased by 12.4% between January 1997 and July 1998. Despite this, the 1997 Hebron Agreement was a significant development, as it marked the first time a Likud leader officially proposed handing over Jewish-controlled territories to the Palestinians, transferring control of the Hebron area to the Palestinians while keeping 20% under Israeli control.[108] The deadline for starting final status negotiations was set to end on May 4, 1999, but the process was extended further. On September 4, 1999, the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum was signed between the newly elected Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and the Palestinian Authority, with an agreement to sign the final settlement by September 13, 2000. In July 2000, both parties, with the participation of U.S. President Bill Clinton, reconvened at the Camp David summit. However, due to the complex issues each side insisted on, no agreement was reached.[109]

Although the Oslo Accords established a foundation for Palestinian autonomy, the political changes, violence, and mutual distrust caused the process to remain fragmented, and a comprehensive two-state solution was not realized. Despite the collapse of the peace process, Palestinian collective identity continued to grow, particularly in Gaza and

[105] Helena Lindholm Schulz, "The Politics of Fear and the Collapse of the Mideast Peace Process," *International Journal of Peace Studies* (2004): 91.

[106] Helena Lindholm Schulz, "Identity Conflicts and their Resolution: The Oslo Agreement and Palestinian National Identities," in *Ethnicity and Intra-State Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2018).

[107] Schulz, "The Politics of Fear and the Collapse of the Mideast Peace Process," 91-92.

[108] Ağdemir, "Religion, Settlements and Israel's Relations with Palestinian Arabs," 59-60.

[109] Schulz, "The Politics of Fear and the Collapse of the Mideast Peace Process," 95-96.

the West Bank. The deteriorating socio-economic conditions, the breakdown of the peace process and corruption within the Palestinian Authority increased Hamas's popularity, emphasizing a Muslim identity. However, during this period, Palestinian identity remained the dominant one. Regarding Palestinian citizens of Israel, their identity appeared weaker compared to those in Gaza, the West Bank, and the refugees. This is due to the Palestinian Authority's policy of pushing Palestinian citizens of Israel toward integration with Israel as part of the peace process. For instance, in the 1990s, the Palestinian Authority encouraged Palestinians in Israel to vote for the Israeli Labor Party in Knesset elections. Additionally, the Oslo process created the impression that Palestinians in Israel were being ignored, especially when it came to the refugee issue. Notably, internal refugees in Israel, who made up a quarter of Palestinians in Israel, were never addressed, leaving Palestinian citizens of Israel feeling marginalized both within Israeli society and the broader Palestinian community.[110]

The Oslo process, initiated with the hope of completing the statehood process in Palestine, became a great source of hope for the "stateless Palestinians" and contributed to the increased perception of "Palestinianness." In 1991, Palestinians with identity documents were not recognized by any Arab Gulf country or Lebanon, and some Palestinians were forced to travel from border to border for weeks. In September 1991, Palestinians from the Gaza Strip holding Egyptian travel documents and had been expelled from Kuwait, found themselves without the proper documentation to enter either Egypt or the Gaza Strip under Israeli occupation. As a result, they were stranded at Cairo Airport for twelve days, unable to return to Kuwait or travel elsewhere. In August 1995, Palestinians with valid refugee travel documents issued by Lebanon, most of whom were born in Lebanon, faced sudden visa requirements when returning to their home country, causing them to shuttle between airports for ten days in an attempt to be allowed entry into Lebanon. The worst-off Palestinians were those living in the Gaza Strip who held travel documents issued by Egypt or Israel, which were technically not considered passports. These documents had the word "undefined" in the "nationality" section in the case of those issued by Israel, and similar negative situations occurred for Palestinian refugees holding Lebanese-issued documents, who were categorized as "stateless Palestinians." Although the Palestinian Authority began issuing Palestinian passports in 1995, many countries did not recognize Palestine as a state, rendering these passports largely ineffective. Additionally, Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip had to possess at least three different identity documents, as Israel controlled their entry and exit to and from Gaza. Palestinians living in Jordan and Syria, despite holding Jordanian and Syrian passports, were often subjected to negative treatment by international authorities, as their documents were marked as "Palestinian travel documents."[111] Therefore, "stateless Palestinians" continued to hold onto the peace process with great hope, and as a result, Palestinian identity awareness continued to rise during this period.

On September 28, 2000, following Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Second Intifada (Al-Aqsa Intifada) (2000-2005) erupted in Gaza and the

[110] Miari, "Collective Identity of Palestinians in Israel after Oslo," 228.

[111] Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, 2-3.

West Bank. During this period, Palestinian identity remained the strongest identity. At the onset of the Second Intifada, in early October 2000, Israeli Arab citizens initiated unprecedented violent protests and riots, and 13 Arabs, including 12 Israeli citizens, were killed by police during the events. The October events strengthened the bond between Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinians living under occupation and contributed to the strengthening of Palestinian collective identity. In a survey conducted in January 2001, when asked about the reasons behind the uprising, 44% of Jewish participants saw the identification of Israeli Arabs with the struggle in Palestinian territories as the main cause, while 53% of Arab participants pointed to the discrimination faced by Israeli Arabs as the main reason.[112] Although Israel claims not to discriminate against its Palestinian citizens, it is known that they faced discrimination in many areas during this period. For example, the Jewish school system contributed to the marginalization of the Palestinian minority by providing very few opportunities for Jewish students to learn about Arab language and culture. Although Arabic was one of the two official languages[113] in Israel at the time, Arabic education was not mandatory as a degree course in Jewish schools. In parallel with these policies, there was no autonomous Palestinian university in Israel during this period, and Palestinian academics held only 1% of the academic positions in universities. For Palestinian Arab citizens in Israel to secure teaching positions, qualifications and education alone were inadequate; they had to undergo a security screening beyond their personal details to obtain the secret approval from Shin Bet (General Security Services) before being employed. In this context, in the 2004-2005 academic year, the Director-General of the Ministry of Education, Ronit Tirosh, publicly stated the necessity of a General Security Services check in the recruitment process for staff at Palestinian Arab schools.[114] Being effectively excluded from the state's identity structure, higher institutions, and centers of power, Palestinian Arab citizens are not offered equal opportunities by Israel. On the other hand, by offering certain advantages in some spheres, Israel has left Palestinians in a general state of uncertainty. Said Zidani, Director of the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights, explained the situation in the following words:[115]

> I am an average [Palestinian] Arab Israeli citizen existing in a gray area between being a citizen and a temple slave. I am a half citizen in the state of Israel; from my point of view the state is half mine, and half democratic. The gates of the state and society are half-open to me, and the ear is half listening to what I have to suggest or to say. I have no other state, and the state I have is only half mine. I am still a present-absentee, half-separated and half integrated in various life spheres of the state and the society. Despite my participation in elections I am not a legitimate partner in important decisions which affect me, nor am I a partner in deciding on the standards and norms in the various spheres of public life.

[112] Michal Shamir and Tammy Sagiv-Schifter, "Conflict, Identity, and Tolerance: Israel in the Al-Aqsa Intifada," *Political Psychology* 27, no. 4 (2006): 571.

[113] In 2018, a law was passed that abolished Arabic's status as an official language. The Guardian, "One More Racist Law': Reactions as Israel Axes Arabic as Official Language," *The Guardian* 19 July, 2018.

[114] Abu-Saad, "State-Controlled Education and Identity Formation among the Palestinian Arab Minority in Israel," 1092-93.

[115] Abu-Saad, "State-Controlled Education and Identity Formation among the Palestinian Arab Minority in Israel," 1097.

As for Palestinian identity in Gaza and the West Bank, it remained dominant during the Al-Aqsa Intifada, but this dominance was weakened slightly in favor of Muslim identity. This was because the charters of Hamas and Islamic Jihad emphasized Muslim identity while disregarding Palestinian identity, often reducing it to slogans and flags. For example, when comparing the collective identity of Palestinians over the years in surveys conducted in Gaza and the West Bank, in 1994, 70% identified themselves as Palestinian, and 16% as Muslim or Christian. However, in a 2006 survey, when people in the West Bank and Gaza were asked to define their identity in one word, 50% identified as "Palestinian," while 42.9% answered "Muslim" or "Christian." The proportion of Palestinians who primarily identified as "Arab" was seen to decrease gradually: [116]

Table 1: Primary collective identity of the adult population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during specific years

Identity	**1994**	**1997**	**2001**	**2006**
Muslim/ Christian	16.5	47.0	38.1	42.9
Arab	13.4	6.7	4.5	6.6
Palestinian	70.1	46.3	57.4	50.5
Total	224	1328	1415	1442

The Construction of Palestinian Identity from Hamas Rule to the Present: Identity Struggle Between Political Division and Collective Memory

In 2004, after the death of Yasser Arafat, Mahmoud Abbas assumed leadership of the Palestinian Authority. In 2006, Hamas's unexpected victory in the Palestinian legislative elections led to a deep political division within the country. After Hamas won the elections, the Abbas administration emphasized that the new government, led by Ismail Haniyeh, must recognize agreements made with Israel. However, Hamas maintained its stance, viewing the Oslo Accords as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause. Following the elections, the Quartet (Russia, the U.S., the European Union, and the United Nations) began negotiations with Hamas, demanding that the new government recognize Israel, engage in the peace process, and renounce violence to gain international legitimacy.[117] Hamas, in return, stated that it would consider these conditions if Israel allowed the creation of an independent Palestinian state centered in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. To prevent Hamas from holding power alone, the U.S. and EU provided military and economic support to the Fatah movement led by Mahmoud Abbas in late 2006 and early 2007, which resulted in a deep division within Palestinian politics and the emergence of the threat of civil war. Although a national coalition government was formed under Saudi Arabian mediation in early 2007, the ongoing economic crisis and power struggles led to renewed conflict. After Hamas militants expelled Fatah forces from Gaza, Mahmoud Abbas announced on June 15, 2007, that he was dissolving the

[116] Mi'ari, "Transformation of Collective Identity in Palestine," 590.

[117] Gökhan Çınkara, "Filistin'de İslami Hareketin Siyasallaşması: Hamas (1946-2024)," *Ombudsman Akademik*, no. Özel Sayı 2 (Gazze) (2024): 180.

National Coalition Government and dismissing Ismail Haniyeh. As a result of the continued conflict, Hamas gained control over Gaza while Fatah maintained authority in the West Bank.[118] This political division severely weakened Palestine's national goals and caused a structural transformation that disrupted the process of collective identity building.

Abbas leadership and the relationship with Israel initiated a process that affected the national identity perception and collective consciousness of the Palestinians. The new Abbas administration, aiming to preserve its political and economic influence with the backing of the West and Israel, agreed to renounce all forms of resistance, whether armed or non-violent.[119] This acceptance essentially signaled the weakening of the resistance element in the identity struggle from a governance perspective. The division in the West Bank, which had been separated into three distinct areas by the Oslo Accords, continued to increase with Israel's occupation and settlement policies. This existing division was further reinforced by the differences in national identity cards and repressive policies. In this context, Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, which Israel officially annexed in 1980, hold the status of "permanent residents,"[120] possessing blue identity cards that grant them the right to reside in Israel and enter the West Bank. Meanwhile, Palestinians living in the West Bank carry orange identity cards, which severely restrict their freedom of movement and only allow limited travel opportunities. Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip, on the other hand, possess green identity cards, symbolizing their existence in what is often described as an "open-air prison" due to the restrictions imposed by Israel.[121] This policy is essentially an extension of Israel's strategy of creating systematic inequality by assigning different residency statuses to Palestinians in the territories it occupied after 1967.

Although the identity of Arabs living in Israel has undergone significant transformations over time, the fundamental dilemma they have faced since 1948 stems from the tension between their Israeli citizenship and their Arab-Palestinian identity. According to Amara, three key factors underpin this dilemma: the Israeli-Palestinian/Arab conflict, Israel's self-definition as a Jewish state, and the discriminatory policies toward Arabs living in Israel.[122] These dynamics drive Palestinian citizens of Israel into an identity struggle between "Israelization" and "Palestinization," depending on shifting political and social conditions.[123] Although Palestinian citizens of Israel have more legal and democratic rights compared to Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank who do not hold Israeli citizenship, these advantages do not fully integrate them into Israeli society. While their relative rights within the Jewish majority encourage the process of "Israelization," the institutional discrimination and social exclusion they face at times reinforce

118 Habashi, "Palestinian Children: A Transformation of National Identity in the Abbas Era," 84.

119 Emilio Dabed, "Decrypting the Palestinian Political Crisis: Old Strategies against New Enemies: Chile 1970-73, Palestine 2006-09," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2010): 81.

120 Özge Özkoç, "İsrail'in Batı Şeria'daki Yerleşimci Politikası ve ABD'nin Filistin Sorununa İlişkin Barış Girişimleri: İki Devletli Çözüm Hâlâ Mümkün Mü?," *Gazi Akademik Bakış* 15, no. 29 (2021): 320.

121 Habashi, "Palestinian Children: A Transformation of National Identity in the Abbas Era," 79-80.

122 Amara, "The Collective Identity of the Arabs in Israel in an Era of Peace," 259.

123 Muhammad Al-Atawneh and Meir Hatina, "The Study of Islam and Muslims in Israel," *Israel Studies* 24, no. 3 (2019): 105.

"Palestinization." In this context, it is observed that Palestinian citizens of Israel support the establishment of a potential Palestinian state and embrace Palestinian national identity. However, they may be inclined to remain Israeli citizens and accept this status if they are granted equal rights with Jewish citizens within Israel.

The two separate administrations in Gaza and the West Bank differ in terms of ideological frameworks, intended goals, and the means used to achieve these goals. This situation has also influenced the governed populations, thereby weakening the collective identity structure that was being developed for Palestine as a whole. Hamas derives its legitimacy among the public from armed resistance, whereas the legitimacy of the Abbas administration and Fatah stems from their promise to achieve change through peace negotiations.[124] However, due to the severe embargoes imposed by Israel, the people living in Gaza have begun to question Hamas's legitimacy, while in the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority struggles with an increasingly fragmented territorial structure due to the continued expansion of Israeli settlements. Furthermore, because of the continuous postponement of elections since 2006, the Palestinian Authority has been experiencing a severe legitimacy crisis.[125] The war between Hamas and Israel, which began in October 2023, has led to significant population displacement and the large-scale destruction of Gaza's infrastructure. However, this war has also reinforced the meaning of the concept of "Palestinian identity" and demonstrated that it will persist in the context of resistance. In the West Bank, resistance against Israel has emerged more weakly, while in Gaza, it has been stronger, with young people leading this new wave of resistance. The growth of digital platforms and social media has enabled Palestinians to express themselves visually and amplify their voices more effectively. In this context, as Dina Mater describes, the Palestinian struggle for resistance and identity continues to bear an anti-colonial character. The only difference from the past is that Israelis no longer conceal their colonial intentions and cannot completely silence the Palestinians.[126]

Looking at the sense of Palestinian identity in refugee camps in recent years, it is evident that many residents possess a strong awareness of what it means to be Palestinian. For instance, in the camps in Lebanon, which host a significant Palestinian refugee population, various symbols serve as reminders of their Palestinian identity and evoke an imagined Palestinian space that has endured for decades. Symbols such as the Palestinian flag remain present in the camps, while the hope of reclaiming the lost homeland continues to sustain the sense of collective identity.[127] However, it can be said that the sense of identity among Palestinians living outside the camps and integrated to some extent into their host countries is relatively weaker, similar to that of Palestinian citizens of Israel. In this context, the deprivation of certain fundamental rights and the sense of statelessness tend to reinforce a strong attachment to their core identity.

[124] Khaled Elgindy, "Palestine Goes to the UN: Understanding the New Statehood Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 5 (2011): 106-07.

[125] Elon Gilad, "Who are the Palestinians?," *Mıd. Esat Journal* (23 Dec, 2024), https://www.mideastjournal.org/post/who-are-the-palestinians.

[126] Dina Matar, "What It Means To Be Palestinian: Reflections on Anti-colonial Identities in Times of Excessive Production and Destruction," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 17, no. 3 (2024): 250-51.

[127] Shelbi Macken, "Identity in Protracted Displacement: Exploring Identity of Palestinian and Syrian Refugees Living in Lebanon," *Aigne Journal* 7 (2018): 47.

Table.2: The historical process of identity transformation among Palestinians

	Gaza	**West Bank**	**Israeli Arabs**	**Refugees**
Pre- 1948	Under Ottoman and British rule: Unclear identity, strong local and tribal structures.	Under Ottoman and British rule: Unclear identity, strong local and tribal structures.	Under Ottoman and British rule: Unclear identity, strong local and tribal structures	Under Ottoman and British rule: Unclear identity, strong local and tribal structures
1948-1967	Post-Nakba, under Egyptian rule: Palestinian identity, though less influential	Due to Jordan's "Jordanization" policy: Weakened Palestinian identity.	They remain Israeli citizens, but face identity exclusion and uncertainty	Post-Nakba, scattered to Lebanon, Jordan, Syria; identity struggle in diaspora.
1967-1993	Post-occupation: Palestinian resistance rise with PLO and Islamist movements.	Israeli occupation strengthens identity awareness; PLO influence grows.	An identity caught between Israeli and Palestinian identities develops.	PLO's establishment solidifies national identity; refugees are seen as integral to Palestine.
1993-2006	Oslo Accords and PA strengthen Palestinian identity.	Under PLO and PA control, identity strengthens nationally.	As Israeli citizens, political rights emerge, but Palestinian identity persists.	The Oslo process raises return hopes for some refugees.
2006-	With Hamas taking control of Gaza, a more Islamist Palestinian identity develops.	As PLO and PA weaken, Israel's influence grows, with weaker identity awareness than Gaza.	In Israel, civil rights struggle, with an identity between Israelization and Palestinization.	In camps, strong Palestinian identity; weaker among the integrated.

Conclusion

This study has examined the evolving and historically contingent nature of Palestinian identity and the concept of "Palestinianness" from a constructivist perspective. Before 1948, Palestinian lands under Ottoman rule lacked a distinct political identity, with Ottomanism being the dominant ideology. Between 1948 and 1967, the catastrophe known as the *Nakba* and the accompanying experience of displacement led to the prominence of Arab identity. From 1967 to 1993, the decisive impact of the Six-Day War, along with the diminished significance of Arab-led resistance and the rising influence of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), contributed to the emergence of a distinct Palestinian identity. Between 1993 and 2006, the peace process strengthened collective identity, but its failure paved the way for Hamas's rise and the growing influence of Islamic identity. After 2006, political divisions within Palestinian society disrupted the formation of a collective identity even though the sense of Palestinianness remained strong, particularly among those in Gaza and refugee camps. Technological advancements further amplified Palestinians' ability to make their voices heard on a global scale.

The article concludes by addressing the research questions posed in the introduction, demonstrating—in consistence with constructivist theory—that Palestinian identity is not a fixed or given phenomenon, but is continuously shaped by historical contexts and political developments. Palestinian citizens of Israel experience a dilemma between "Israelization" and "Palestinization," as they navigate the democratic rights granted them alongside systemic inequalities. Among refugees, the sense of identity varies depending on their social integration into host societies; those in refugee camps maintain a strong attachment to Palestinian identity due to their longing for a homeland, while integrated refugees exhibit a weaker sense of national identity. Meanwhile, the political division and internal conflicts since 2006 have led to a fragmented identity among Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. Hamas, facing internal and external pressures, has sought to sustain Palestinian identity through Islamic narratives. As for the population in the West Bank, particularly under the Palestinian Authority, it has developed a more secular identity while simultaneously facing Israeli-imposed social, political, and economic constraints that weaken collective identity. Ultimately, the study's central finding is that Palestinian identity is a relational and constructed entity that evolves in response to contextual shifts and lived experiences.

Declarations:

1. **Ethics committee approval:** Not needed for this study.

2. Author contribution: The author declares that no one else has contributed to the article.

3. Competing interests: The author declares no competing interests.

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