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# Critical Analysis Of The Palestinian Identity: The Construction Of Modern National Consciousness By Rashid Khalidi

History as a subject is heavily reliant on the analysis and understandings of the past, in order to comprehend the circumstances that have shaped the World as we know it to be presently. Through major time periods such as the Arab-Israeli conflict which spanned from the late 19th century to the early 21st century, historians were able to dissect the causes of the rise of nationalist movements, interactions between Jews and Arabs in Palestine, and thus the layers of the continuing feud during this period. Differences stemming from religion and culture appear to be the foundation of the conflict between these two parties, and the justification for nationalism which inevitably caused the Jewish and Arab identities to intersect. However, authors such as Rashid Khalidi in "The Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness," seek to examine the development of Palestinian nationalism as early as the 19th century in order to separate their histories through the exploration of the cultural beginnings of the Palestinian identity which preceded the encounter with Zionism. In this essay I will discuss the text written by Rashid Khalidi and the relation of this source to our course findings, as well as critically analyze the messages the text is attempting to portray.

Khalidi attempts to assess the construction of the Palestinian national identity, its historical phases, and the obstacles it faced outside of the confines that "Palestinian nationalism developed in response to Zionism". The author analyzes the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the early Mandate period and its effects on the culture and identity of its Arab citizens, however he is not very successful in dissociating the Palestinian identity from that of conflict or from other identities which he explains is among the reasons why "the Palestinian identity is so poorly understood". In that sense, the Palestinian identity is one that is created based on competing "alter egos", as it is dependent on the existence of other cultures, and without this it would cease to exist. The emergence of nationalism in Palestine began in 1834 during the Arab revolt, which was a reaction to conscription into the Egyptian army as the ruler of Egypt sought to occupy Syria through Palestine, who was then governed by the Ottoman Empire. Traditionally, soldiers were recruited from mercenaries, slaves or members of a military caste; however the conscription called for ordinary subjects in addition to the lower classes. This sparked popular resistance as the peasantry equated recruitment to death, which in turn forged a unity among groups against a common enemy. The allied classes during this conflict served to establish the Palestinians as a people.

The formation of Palestinian nationalism continues into the 19th and 20th centuries through the

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focus on Jerusalem as a sacred entity to multiple different parties, primarily Christians, Jews and Muslims. The life and death of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem provided a religious attachment to Christians and Jews, while the journey of Mohammed from Mecca to Jerusalem formed a connection to the land for Arabs. Khalidi argues “the assertion that Palestinian nationalism developed in response to the challenge of Zionism embodies a kernel of a much older truth, [in that] modern nationalism was rooted in long-standing attitudes of concern for Jerusalem and for Palestine as sacred”. This was a response to perceived threats from European powers and the Zionist movement. Opposition between the Roman church and Palestine can be seen as early as the 11th century through the Crusades. This series of religious wars served as expeditions by Christians to attempt to capture the Holy Lands from the Muslims. It was hoped the land offered rewards in many forms, from forgiveness from God for sins to political and economic gain. Jerusalem in 1099 was captured through the massacring of Muslims as well as Jews, and was established as a Christian state. However, in the 12th to 14th century, the majority of the population shifted from Christians to Muslims which serves to highlight a sense of Palestinian identity far before what is generally thought. Despite this, the struggle for land continued with the Jewish people. After the crisis of 1881, many Jews turned to socialism with the hope that a socialist revolution would eradicate classism in society as Jews living in Poland (who was under the jurisdiction of Russia in the 19th century) suffered restrictions in education, were offered no political rights, and lived in poverty. In this Zionism as a movement was birthed. They believed that anti-semitism was a social disease that was passed down from generation to generation and could only be cured if Jews relocated to an area where they were isolated and could live autonomously.

The pre-First World War period provided them with an opportunity to seize land in Palestine as absentee landlords in Beirut sold large tracts of land to the Jewish Colonization Association. In the focus of the role of Zionism in shaping Palestinian nationalism, Khalidi explains that it was the “fellahin” or peasants who suffered in the early encounters with Zionist settlers due to “increased land purchases and the replacement of Arab wage-laborers on Jewish estates by Jewish workers”. This Zionist policy proclaimed land to be a necessity for establishing roots in Palestine “since there were hardly any more unsettled lands, thus binding each purchase of land and its settlement to remove the peasants who cultivated the land so far, both owners of the land and tenants.”

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