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Palestinian Nationalism: From Secularism to Islam

DAN STOENESCU

For most of the last half of the 20th century to nowadays, Palestinian nationalism puzzled Middle Eastern scholars. Although it was not as old as Arab nationalism, Palestinian nationalism fought for independence against Israel and for emancipation of Palestinians in the countries they sought refuge in. As opposed to other kinds of nationalisms, Palestinian nationalism is intrinsically related to the question of the Palestinian refugees. Palestinian nationalism is in great part the product of the refugee camps, intellectuals in the Diaspora and freedom fighters, many of whom were refugees or internally displaced people. The timeline for the development of Palestinian nationalism starts in 1948 when Israel declared its independence and continues to develop in the regional context of the Middle East. In the 1950s and 1960s it is influenced by Nasser's Pan-Arabism. The Arab defeat of 1967 gives impetus to this movement, bringing it closer to Islam, later on, in the 1980s all the way to this day.

The objective of this essay is to critically analyze the modern developments of Palestinian nationalism. This concept was always an integral part of the political discourse in the Middle East from 1948 onwards and even more after 1967. Through the years and influenced by the political changes in the region, Palestinian nationalism went through a metamorphosis. Palestinian intellectuals of the 1950s and 1960s were linking it with Arab nationalism, later on after the great defeat of 1967 Palestinian nationalism started to re-emerge as a force of its own fighting for the liberation of Palestine. From the late 1980s to this day Palestinian nationalism is not anymore the traditional nationalism propagated by intellectuals in the 1960s but started to incorporate a new Islamic identity that transcends the borders of Palestine and in the same time fights for its independence.

The essay is divided in three parts and tries to answer to three essential questions. The first part will analyze the concept of nationalism and its implications for Palestinian nationalism. What are the theoretical approaches when analyzing nationalism and how it is this relevant when analyzing Palestinian nationalism? The second part will search for the reasons of the emergence of Palestinian nationalism in the Occupied Territories and in the countries that host large numbers of Palestinian refugees. What are the factors that determined the development of modern Palestinian nationalism? The third part will look into the relationship between Palestinian nationalism and Islam. Is it possible nowadays to incorporate the ideas of Palestinian nationalism into a broader Islamic view for the future of Palestine? Furthermore, the third part will look into the relationship between land, nationalism and Islam and will analyze the rise of Hamas and its role in the development of Palestinian nationalism.

Theoretical Perspectives

Scholars in the field of nationalism studies argue that the present concept of nationalism is a modern combination of Enlightenment and liberal ideas of self

ruling, French revolutionary ideas of the community and egalitarianism among citizens and German conceptions of a nation formed by history, traditions and common culture¹. Even the UN Charter considers national self-determination as a universally accepted principle and as a base for the modern world order².

There are many reasons that encourage nationalism. These reasons include dislike of alien cultures, hostility to global media, attractions of secession, the loss of local control to foreign investors, hostility to immigration, fears of unemployment, resentment of supranational institutions such as IMF or World Bank, and fears of terrorism and subversion. Furthermore, reasons opposing nationalism are shared prosperity, economic integration, migration, travel and tourism, employment abroad, global threats, world-wide communications, end of belief in economic sovereignty³.

In the Palestinian context the factors that promote Palestinian nationalism are the occupation of Palestine by the state of Israel, the mistreatment of Palestinians by Israel and some Arab states⁴, the lack of economic opportunities for Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza and the countries where they sought refuge, the lack of citizenship rights for many Palestinian refugees, dislike of Western and Israeli military presence in the Middle East.

Halliday argues that there are positive and negative features of nationalism. A positive feature is the fact that nationalism offers a principle of legitimacy and realization of democratic principles and at the same time encourages human creativity and diversity. Furthermore, another important feature is the sense of belonging that nationalism provides. This is based on common things such as language, culture, socio-political experiences, economic interests, a collective memory and role in history. On the negative side, nationalism could create conflicts and violence (militarism, xenophobia, chauvinism, imperialism) and could obstruct cooperation⁵.

Furthermore, according to Halliday there are a few national symbols that could unite nations. Those symbols are: heroes, flags, colors, language, food and drink, clothing, commemorative holidays, anthems and general dislike for some non-nationals⁶. In the case of Palestinian nationalism there are definitely features that would confirm this unity: the common sense of dispossession and historical identity, the Palestinian patriotic songs, dancing the Dabki, folk rhetoric and the hate of Israel.

Anthony Smith argues that there are seven main themes that shape the nationalist doctrine. According to him humanity is naturally divided into nations and each nation has a peculiar character. In his nationalist view the nation, encompassing the entire collectivity, is the foundation for power, freedom and self-realization, every

¹ Fred HALLIDAY, "Nationalism", in John BAYLIS, Steve SMITH (ed.), *The Globalisation of World Politics*, 2nd edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, p. 445.

² *Ibidem*, p. 447.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 442.

⁴ Palestinian refugees in many Arabic countries do not have the full rights to work. In Lebanon, for years, Palestinians were not allowed to work in dozens of professions. In Egypt Palestinians experienced worsening treatment after the signing of the peace treaty with Israel in 1978. More recent examples of punitive treatment of Palestinians include Kuwait's expulsion of tens of thousands of long-term residents in the wake of the 1991 Gulf war and the Libyan government's move in 1995 to show its displeasure with Arafat's peace negotiations with Israel by not renewing the one-year residency visas of some 30 000 Palestinians and beginning deportations.

⁵ Fred HALLIDAY, "Nationalism", cit., pp. 450-451.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 451.

person needs to belong to a nation. In terms of territoriality, Smith says that nations can only be fulfilled in their own states. The rise of the nation-state brings global freedom and harmony and loyalty to the nation state is supreme¹. Smith's vision is a representative perennialist perspective of the concept of nationalism.

The concept of nationalism could be seen from two perspectives: perennialism and modernism. On one hand perennialism, places the nation in a fixed time and implies that the task is to discover that fixed point. On the other hand, modernism recognizes that definitions change over time and uses parts of the past, selecting according to the present needs, and combining them with elements of other cultures². In analysing modern Palestinian nationalism a modernist approach is more suitable since it avoids the inflexibility of history's normative claims and allows a more flexible and historically precise portrayal of nationalism.

If we want to properly understand Palestinian nationalism we have to take a closer look towards Arab nationalism. According to most scholars, Arab nationalism has three main dimensions. The first two dimensions are the ways traditionally Arabs saw themselves, as a whole (*qaumi*) and locally (*qutri*), depending on the circumstances³. For example, when Nasser wanted to influence the Arab countries to agree with Egypt, he stressed the *qaumi* while Sadat stressed the *qutri* when he signed the peace with Israel, in order to downplay his responsibility for the Palestinians⁴. The third obvious dimension is Islam⁵ because it was revealed to the Arabs and the *Quran* is written in Arabic, the language of God. In the past decade the *qutri* dimension and Islam played an important role in shaping Palestinian nationalism.

The Emergence and Development of Palestinian Nationalism

In order to understand Palestinian nationalism it is important to understand its historical link with Arab nationalism. The creation of the state of Israel and the 1948 war represented a true renaissance for Arab nationalism. This time the Arabs were not against the traditional imperialist forces of the West but also against the Zionists⁶. Furthermore, the new nationalistic wave was led by Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser and his nationalist-socialist brand of Arab nationalism driven by anti-Imperialism, socialism, neutralism, republicanism, and Arab unity⁷. Although many Palestinians supported pan-Arabism hoping that it will bring them back their homeland, Gamal Abdel Nasser was a great disappointment for many because he accepted the Rogers Plan⁸. This was an important moment in which Palestinians realized they have to look after themselves and not wait for salvation from their Arab brothers.

¹ Anthony SMITH, *Theories on Nationalism*, 2nd edition, Duckworth, London, 1983, p. 21.

² Fred HALLIDAY, *Nation and Religion in the Middle East*, Saqi Books, London, 2000, p. 54.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

⁶ William L. CLEVELAND, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, Westview Press, Oxford, 2000, pp. 260-263.

⁷ Don PERETZ, *The Middle East Today*, Prager Publishers, Westport, Connecticut and London, 1994, pp. 148-149.

⁸ Rosemary SAYIGH, "Palestinian Identity Among Camp Residents", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. VI, no. 4, Spring 1977, p. 9.

The reasons that determined the emergence of a new Palestinian identity different from the Arab identity among Palestinian refugees are many and they are influenced by socio-political and economical factors. Certainly the history of displacement that differed from that of other Arab people, poverty, oppression, uncertainty of Arab support, discrimination of Palestinians in other Arab countries, and the development of new sub-regional identities among Arabs, all these were determining factors in the emergence of a new Palestinian identity¹. The tension between Palestinians and the Arab world was one of sublimation and it forced Palestinians to look for a transnational, transpolitical, transhistorical world in order to find normality².

Ever since the 1970s Palestinians stopped to consider themselves Arabs only, as it used to happen during the Nasserite period, due to three decades of suffering and a sense of disappointment with the Arab governments³. In spite of that, historically many factions within the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) held more of an Arab nationalist view and they never renounced the pan-Arab ideals although Fatah itself was more inclined to adopt a more Palestinian nationalist ideology. Even nowadays the most fervently pan-Arab members of the PLO are justifying their views by stating that the Palestinian struggle must be an important element in a pan-Arab movement. This was the case for the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which not only considered the "Palestinian revolution" as the first stage towards Arab unity, but also as inseparable from a world anti-Imperialist struggle.

According to Sayigh, beginning with mid-1970s, there is strong evidence that shows that the new generation of Palestinian refugees – *jeel al-nakba*⁴ (the generation of the disaster) has a different sense of identity in comparison to their parents. Compared to their parents that felt a sense of helplessness (from 1948 to 1968), this sense of new identity is due to the fact that the new generation of children born in exile are more politically motivated and they feel different from Syrians, Jordanians, Lebanese and Egyptians although hate for Israel unites them⁵.

Musa Budeiri⁶ claims that Palestinian nationalism appeared much later than other national movements and developed only after the Ottoman era and the British Mandate. Palestinian nationalism was a result of oppression and displacement of Palestinians by the Israeli state and started to develop after 1967 in the refugee camps. Therefore Palestinian nationalism is not native to Palestine itself but it is rather a product of disillusion and hope of refugees in the camps, amongst intellectuals of the Diaspora and PLO fighters.

Palestinian nationalism amongst refugees and amongst other Palestinians is a clear statement of existential malaise expressed by the culture of fighting oppression.

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

² Fawaz TURKI, "Palestinians Estranged", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol.5, no. 1/2, Autumn 1975-Winter 1976, p. 85.

³ Rosemary SAYIGH, "Palestinian Identity...cit.", p. 3.

⁴ Al-Nakba comes from the Arabic term meaning the catastrophe. This term defines the sum of events prior to Israel's declaration of independence and the 1948 Arab-Israeli War that erupted following the invasion by neighbouring Arab states and resulted in flight or expulsion of over 700 000 Palestinian refugees and the destruction and abandonment of hundreds of Palestinian villages.

⁵ Rosemary SAYIGH, "Palestinian Identity...cit.", pp. 8-9.

⁶ Salim TAMARI, "Fading Flags: The Crises of Palestinian Legitimacy", *Middle East Report*, no.194/195, "Odds against Peace", May-August 1995, p. 11.

For example "folk rhetoric, the erotic delight of the glittering arabesques of swear words in Palestinian phraseology"¹ stopped being means of communications and started to express this kind of national malaise. Furthermore, "dancing the Dabki, ululating at weddings, hysterics at public happenings"² are not anymore expressions of joy and abandon but they convey now rage and constriction.

In mid-1970s the concept of Palestinian nationalism was not very developed and camp refugees had highly conflicting views about what does it mean to be a Palestinian. Research conducted in Palestinian refugee camps observed the fact in order to stress unity, there is no social differentiation among Palestinian refugees in terms of the way they perceive themselves³. Furthermore in relation with other Arabs, Palestinian refugees perceive themselves as Arabs but they emphasize that they have certain extra traits such as "courage; readiness to sacrifice; faithfulness and education". Although these traits are also common to the perceived identities of other Arab people, Palestinians see them more from a perspective of intensity of these traits since they had to endure occupation and to fight for their freedom for many decades⁴.

The particularity of the historical experience of Palestinians created a very unique kind of nationalism in which the experiences of oppression of the Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories and those living elsewhere as refugees blend and become essential. Because of these experiences many Palestinians have an impulse to deny their identity:

"A Palestinian from Jaffa, born in Lebanon, who grew up in Kuwait, held a Jordanian passport, studied in Cairo and *came* from Palestine is a person with an acute crisis of self. He wants to flee-outward. He has hitherto internalized, individualized and stylized his discontent by letting it invade his consciousness and catch flame only there. The outside world was not his"⁵.

Palestinian nationalism is rooted in the miseries and suffering of Palestinian people thus forming a specific sub-culture and counter-politics of the refugee camp. For many Palestinian refugees Palestine and being a Palestinian is not always something to be proud of. Sometimes being a Palestinian means "work permits, police permits, laissez-passer, neglect, isolation and exclusion"⁶.

The Palestinian refugee communities around the Arab world were considered a threat to the stability of the political regimes of their host countries and the refugees felt abandoned in the same time by Arab leaders. For example, in Lebanon the PLO was a key player in the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) taking advantage of the high numbers of Palestinian refugee camps in the country and thus loosing the compassion of the Lebanese. By 1970, Palestinians, both Jordanian citizens and refugees, were almost as numerous in Jordan as King Hussein's own Bedouins. Arafat used over 20 000 PLO fighters to exercise control over much of the Palestinian population. Because of the terrorist activities of militant factions of the PLO, King Hussein was forced to expel the organization since it became a threat to the country's stability. Also in Egypt Palestinian refugees are watched by the State Security since they are the main suspects in illegal arms trade over the border to Gaza.

¹ Fawaz TURKI, "Palestinians Estranged", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 5, no.1/2, Autumn 1975-Winter 1976, p. 88.

² *Ibidem*.

³ Rosemary SAYIGH, "Palestinian Identity...cit.", p. 13.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 18-19.

⁵ Fawaz TURKI, "Palestinians Estranged", cit., p. 83.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 84.

In this context, in the end of the 1970s, Palestinian nationalism developed mainly among refugees and created a sort of radical nationalist identity like nothing that existed before¹. Historically it was shown that continued struggle can lead to a sense of national solidarity. The best example of this solidarity is the emergence of Palestinian nationalism, a sense of identity that transcends confessional lines and even Arab identity, a solidarity that is intrinsically linked to the land of Palestine and to the fight against oppression.

Palestinian nationalism was not only a product of Israeli repression but also one of suppression on the side of host Arab governments. This was the case in Jordan where following the September 1970 fighting, the anti-Palestinian general feeling amongst native Jordanians created a back-clash amongst Palestinians thus re-enforcing their sense of identity. Collective killing of Palestinians on the East Bank aroused a sense of solitude and dispossession not only amongst them but also amongst Palestinians in the West Bank that experienced the same alienation under Israeli occupation.

By the summer of 1971, the Jordanian army crashed the Palestinian groups in the country and once again many Palestinians had to find refuge elsewhere. Many notable Palestinians went to the West Bank with Israeli approval². The tragedies of 1970 and 1971 helped building a sense of unity among Palestinians from refugee communities and the ones in West Bank and Gaza. Palestinian nationalism seemed to be the ideological answer for fighting oppression either from the Israelis or from some Arab states such as Jordan or Lebanon.

Another repression of Palestinian nationalist movement done by Arab governments was in Gaza, in the beginning of the 1960s. Although Nasser allowed Palestinians to organize themselves very well in Egypt and actually strongly supported them, the same kind of freedom was not allowed to them in the Gaza strip. The main reason was a security fear amongst the authorities that the same kind of freedom of organization in Gaza would boost Palestinian nationalism and thus challenge the Egyptian occupation. Moreover, the Egyptian military developed strong commercial ties with the Gazan elite thus having now economic reasons for keeping Palestinian nationalism in check³.

Like many other forms of nationalism, Palestinian nationalism perpetuated itself not only through political ways but also through education and culture. For example, a recent study on Palestinian textbooks reveals a new development of Palestinian nationalism. The oppression and propaganda of Israel created a counter-reaction thus giving an impetus to Palestinian nationalist forces. In Palestinian textbooks the geographic extent of the Palestinian nation, includes all the territory west of the Jordan River, while in many illustrations the slogan "Jerusalem Is Ours"⁴ appears. Furthermore the maps indicate only a Palestinian state ignoring the existence of Israel and thus, according to many Israeli scholars, promoting a destructive kind of nationalism among Palestinian youth.

¹ E.G.H. JOFFE, "Arab Nationalism and Palestine", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, June 1983, p. 167.

² Issa AL-SHUAIBI, "The Development of Palestinian Entity-Consciousness: Part II", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, Winter 1980, pp. 69-70.

³ Laurie BRAND, "Nasir's Egypt and the Reemergence of the Palestinian National Movement", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2, Winter 1988, p. 43.

⁴ *National Education*, Textbook for the Sixth Grade, Palestinian Ministry of Education, Ramallah, 2000-2001, p. 24.

Furthermore, Palestinian literature is a powerful venue for nationalism to be propagated to the masses. In Palestinian poetry, Palestine is portrayed as a lover or as a mother. For poets Palestine is far and wide, known and yet to be known, is always her, the breast to suckle, the lap to sit on, the power to appeal to in a moment of crisis, a virgin garden¹. Palestinian nationalism will always have sorrow attached to it because even if someday Palestinians will have an independent homeland it will be only a fragment of what Palestine used to be. "Living in the *ghourba*, having no homeland became for the Palestinians *the* homeland."²

From Secular Nationalism to Islamic Nationalism

Since the society in many Arab countries is culturally very traditional compared to the West, the dimension of Islam was always significant for the people but not that much for the secular governments. The 1967 defeat and the disappointment of Nasserist policies created a new momentum for Islam, thus converting this ignored third part of Arabism³ in the dominant one. The influence of this movement can be also observed in the metamorphosis of Palestinian nationalism in the past two decades.

Joffe argues that in the case of Palestinians there are three conflicting identities: Muslim, Arabic and secular⁴. Moreover, after 1967 when Palestinian nationalism developed more, the question of identity began to be divisive. Neither Arabism nor secular ethnic nationalism, that led to Camp David as it was the case of Egypt, proved to be solutions for the identity crises and problems of Palestinian refugees. Therefore, from the perspective of many Palestinian leaders, the return to "pure Islamic social organization"⁵ might solve the question of identity for Palestinians in the occupied territories and in the refugee camps, thus integrating them into the bigger Muslim World and giving them more hope.

From a historical perspective, Arabs, including Palestinians, always tried to have Islam as a fundamental part of their Arab identity for several reasons. On one hand, Peretz argues that Islam is seen as a way to resist the "Christian" West from the Crusades to the present day⁶, thus legitimizing religion as a factor that brings freedom in the Arab world. Furthermore, for Muslims, Islam is more important than any other concepts including nationalism. In order to understand why many Muslims can not accept the idea of a nation, it is necessary to look into the concept of the all-inclusive *umma* (community of believers), a concept that does not have national borders and operates under the concept of *dar-ul-islam* (the house of Islam) which differentiates between the believers and the infidels⁷.

¹ Fawaz TURKI, "Palestinians Estranged", cit., p. 94.

² *Ibidem*, p. 95.

³ Pan-Arabism became even more popular in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war since Saddam Hussein managed to gather most of the Arab countries against the historical Persian enemy. Although Iraq did not manage to take over the Arabic province of Khuzestan, the Arab public sympathized with the Iraqis and their Pan-Arabic ideals.

⁴ E.G.H. JOFFE, "Arab Nationalism...cit.", p. 157.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 157.

⁶ Don PERETZ, *The Middle East Today*, cit., p. 155.

⁷ Sami ZUBAIDA, *Islam, The People And The State*, I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd, London and New York, 1993, p. 130.

Islamic thinking developed in mid-nineteenth century as a fight against European colonialism. Many Islamic thinkers blamed the corruption of Islam on the Westernization of Middle Eastern societies and on colonialism¹. Islamic scholars of that time believed that:

"In the political domain, the invention of modernity lies in the emergence of an autonomous political space, separate from both the religious and private spheres and embodied in the modern, law-based state"².

The abovementioned "law-based state", nonetheless was a secular political system in which religious law did not play any role. This system was the embodiment of the West and its influence in the Muslim world. Many Islamic scholars of the 19th and early 20th century considered this style of secular government as immoral and corrupt, since it separated religion and religious law from the government.

This kind of ideas influenced Hassan Al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Banna was born in 1906 in Al Mahmudiyya, Egypt, and was raised in a traditionally religious environment. Nevertheless through his schooling he became familiar with modern western ideas³. The Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic politics have a long historical relation to Palestine. Since the 1936 Great Palestinian Revolt, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt started paying attention to the problem of the "Zionist invasion" in Palestine⁴.

At a conference in 1936, the Muslim Brotherhood founded the General Central Committee to Aid Palestine. Headed by Al-Banna, this committee was also meant as protest against the British lenience towards the Zionists⁵ and to educate the masses about Palestine⁶. Moreover, members of the Muslim Brotherhood formed militias in Palestine, in order to attack Jewish settlements and supplying arms to local Palestinian fighters⁷. This was the beginning of the Egyptian aid towards Palestine in the years following the Great Palestinian Revolt, even though the Muslim Brotherhood would not officially be founded in Palestine until 1946⁸. The Muslim Brother's

"efforts and their commitment to the Palestinian cause were driven by their doctrinaire perspective and faith in the concept of one Islamic nation and the brotherhood of all Muslims and the imperative to engage in jihad for the cause of God"⁹.

¹ J.M.SBALJON, *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation (1880-1960)*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, Netherlands, 1961, p. 3.

² Olivier ROY, *The Failure of Political Islam*, trans. C. Volk, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1994, p. 8.

³ John L. ESPOSITO, *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1983, pp. 9-10.

⁴ Khaled HROUB, *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice*, The Institute for Palestine Studies, Washington D.C., 2000, p. 12.

⁵ Zionism also went through a similar process (secular and territorial) between the 1930s and the 1950s. Later on after the 1967 and 1973 Wars, the religious nature of Zionism became even more evident.

⁶ Ziad ABU-AMR, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza: Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 1994, p. 3.

⁷ Khaled HROUB, *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice*, The Institute for Palestine Studies, Washington D.C., 2000, p. 13.

⁸ Hisham AHMAD, *Hamas: From Religious Salvation to Political Transformation*, PASSIA, Jerusalem, 1994, p. 14.

⁹ Khaled HROUB, *Hamas: Political Thought...cit.*, p. 13.

The activities of the Muslim Brotherhood were viewed favourably in Palestine, and with the support of Hajj Amin Al-Huseini, the Brotherhood in Palestine was able to grow efficiently. Moreover, it is important to note that the Muslim Brotherhood's approach towards the Palestinian issue was the motivating force that allowed the growth of the organization in other Middle Eastern countries such as Jordan and Syria¹.

Even though the Muslim Brotherhood was one of the most combative groups in the 1948 war, the organization did not join the armed resistance movement. Hamas scholar Khaled Hroub states:

"The mainstream Brotherhood chose the alternative of consolidating the power of its existing organization in the expectation that, when it succeeded in its mission, it would liberate Palestine with the support of the Islamic world. The Brotherhood felt it could appeal to the fact that Muslims everywhere had a sacred duty to save Jerusalem, which was the first *qibla* in Islam, and to liberate the land of *al-isra' wal mi-raj*"².

Thirty years later, when Hamas broke from the Muslim Brotherhood, its language and the ideological weight placed on the actual land of Palestine would be particularly evocative of the Muslim Brotherhood in the years leading up to the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. By the first *Intifada* of 1987, the aggravating situation in Palestinian Territories reached its zenith, especially in Gaza after the Israeli army stormed the Islamic University and opened fire, wounding many of defenceless students³.

The turn of Palestinians to political Islam was influenced by pre-existing cultural orientations⁴ and it is closer to popular expectations, thus ensuring national cohesion in a faster and easier way. In the Middle East, resurgence of political Islam started with the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran⁵. Since the Iranian revolution, Islamic discourse has become a very powerful ideology of protest and Islamist movements constitute the main opposition forces of opposition to the state in most Middle Eastern countries. In the Palestinian case the blending of nationalism with Islamic ideology is a natural process and represents no surprise since previously all other venues of fight for liberation had been used.

Although about 90% of Palestinians are Sunni Muslims, Islamic political doctrines, never fully entered the Palestinian movement until the 1980s. From an Islamic perspective, the struggle for Palestine was viewed exclusively from a religious standpoint, as a struggle to retrieve Muslim lands and the holy places of Al Quds (Jerusalem). Nevertheless, in the late 1990s, Muslim sympathy with the Palestinian struggle, led to many Islamic movements accepting nationalism as a justifiable ideology. In the case of Hamas – the Palestinian offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood – Palestinian nationalism has almost completely blended with the pan-Islamic ideology thus planting the seeds for a future Hamas control in the Palestinian territories in 2006.

¹ *Ibidem*.

² *Ibidem*, p. 27.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

⁴ E.G.H. JOFFE, "Arab Nationalism...cit.", p. 169.

⁵ Moreover Iran became a country exporting the Islamic Revolution believing that only this way Muslims and non-Muslims can liberate themselves from the oppression of tyrants who serve the interests of international imperialism. This has been especially true with respect to Iran's policy toward Lebanon, the strategic alliance with Syria and, to a lesser degree, its policy in the Persian Gulf.

According to Joffe "the Arab failure over Palestine has forced Arab populations back to indigenous sources of inspiration"¹. Although Palestinian nationalism and nationalism in general were antithetical to Islam, the persistence of Israeli presence in the Palestinian Territories and the Western involvement in the Middle East triggered an approach between Islam and Palestinian nationalism. The idea of complementarity between Islam and Arab nationalism was stated by politicians such as colonel Qaddafi of Libya since 1982 and it was re-enforced by the rise of radical Islamic movements around the Middle East in countries such as Lebanon, Saudi Arabia or Egypt.

In order to increase its legitimacy and mobilize the Palestinians the PLO leadership also started to use Islamic symbols and rhetoric in the 1990s. Yasser Arafat was not only the first president of the Palestinian Authority or the leader of the PLO; he was also the father of Palestinian nationalism. Although he was a secular leader having a leftist background and ideology, Arafat did not hesitate to link his nationalist ideology to Islam in order to advance his political agenda.

Although Arafat established the Fatah movement for Palestinian Liberation in 1959, the Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967 was the starting point for incorporating Muslim thought into his nationalist ideology². This way Arafat was trying to link the holy Muslim places of Jerusalem to the Muslim psyche and thus trying to get involved in the Palestinian struggle all Arab and Muslim countries who initially saw the Palestinian question as an Arab-Israeli affair. After Arafat's death, the fact that Palestinians wanted to bury him in Jerusalem, near the Noble Sanctuary further shows the strong link national Palestinian symbols have with Islam³. Another example of blending nationalism with Islamic ideology is the fact that in the May 1992 elections for the Chamber of Commerce in Nablus, the national list ran under the title "The National-Islamic Current". Furthermore, Fatah activists participated in rising of open Korans in their student council electoral campaign at Al-Najah University in Nablus⁴.

As expressed by Fatah, Palestinian nationalism is Islamic in content and lacks a proper social agenda. Therefore it was easy for many Palestinians to switch their allegiance in the late 1980s from Palestinian secular factions to organizations such as Hamas or Islamic Jihad, maintaining in the same time their nationalist ideology and even considering it as complementary to Islam⁵. Moreover, the PLO and Fatah lost massive popular support among the Palestinian people after they left into exile in Tunis and after they became involved in the peace negotiations. For this reason the increasing popularity of Hamas was no surprise.

Although Arafat tried to incorporate Islam into the Palestinian national movement he did not entirely succeed simply because Islam was not the base for his political ideology. Khan argues that "in order to create a good-cop bad-cop scenario to deal with Israel" Arafat allowed Hamas to grow and thus endangering the unity of Palestinian and creating a rift which may endanger the emergence of an independent Palestinian state⁶.

¹ E.G.H. JOFFE, "Arab Nationalism...cit.", p. 167.

² Muqtedar KHAN, "Religious, Secular Divide Arafat's Religious Legacy", *Science and Theology*, January 25, 2005, <http://www.ijtiihad.org/Arafat-Religion.htm> (accessed on 02/05/2006).

³ *Ibidem*

⁴ Ronni SHAKED, Aviva SHABI, *Hamas: Palestinian Islamic Fundamentalist Movement*, Keter, Jerusalem, 1994, p. 243.

⁵ Salim TAMARI, "Fading Flags...cit.", pp. 11-12.

⁶ Muqtedar KHAN, "Religious, Secular...cit.".

In 1987, on December 6th, an Israeli settler was stabbed to death by a member of Islamic Jihad; in the frenzy that followed, on 8 December an Israeli truck ran over 13 Palestinian workers returning home from work, killing four and wounding nine. In the same day, in Jabaliya, the hometown of three of the workers people started to protest. The protests spread across the Palestinian Territories and therefore 8 December is considered the start of the first Palestinian uprising, or *Intifada*¹. On 9 December, in Gaza, the members of the Political Bureau of the Muslim Brotherhood met to discuss earlier events.

Those present at this meeting – Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, ‘Abdul ‘Aziz al-Rantisi, Salah Shehadeh, Muhammad Sham’ah, ‘Isa al-Nashshar, ‘Abdel Fattah Dukhan, and Ibrahim al-Yazuri – decided that this was the best time to begin a confrontation with Israel. Furthermore, the first communiqué from what would become known as Hamas was issued². Although Hamas was first considered the armed wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, the growth of the organization, transformed Hamas in an entirely separate body, even though its ideology clearly comes from the Muslim Brotherhood’s beliefs.

Islamic Resistance Movement (known better by its Arabic acronym – Hamas), played a vital role in the first *Intifada* (which erupted in December 1987), as well as in the second *Intifada* (which erupted in September 2000). Through effectively combining nationalist slogans with religious symbols, Hamas managed to mobilize huge masses of people and gained their trust. The founding of Hamas in 1987 reflected the increasing power and influence of Islamism in Gaza and the West Bank. In spite of the fact that Hamas draws its support mainly from marginalized groups, its support base also includes representation from almost all social classes – intellectuals and illiterate people; businessmen and fellaheen (farmers); laborers and white-collar employees; the young and the old; women and men alike³.

In the new political context of 1987 it was absolutely necessary for Hamas to validate the struggle with the Israelis as a Muslim obligation in direct connection with the teachings of Islam. Such a validation came from the notion that Palestine was and should be an Islamic state, and the occupation of Muslim Palestine was the main reason to fight Israel. Hamas’s argument is based on the idea that the land of Palestine is Muslim and should remain as such since it stated so according to Islamic law.

From its establishment Hamas had to deal with the opposing ideas of advocating for the establishment of a supra-national Islamic state based on the laws of the *sharia’ a*⁴ and in the same time fighting for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Aburaiya argues that Hamas managed to establish itself as the main political actor in the Palestinian Territories and draw support from Palestinian refugees due to three main factors:

“First, the failure of the PLO to achieve what in the eyes of the majority of the Palestinians consider as a minimum for political settlements with Israel. Second, Hamas’ effective co-optation and Islamization of secular Palestinian

¹ Khaled HROUB, *Hamas: Political Thought...cit.*, p. 39.

² *Ibidem*.

³ Shaul MISHAL, Avraham SELA, *The Hamas Wind – Violence and Coexistence*, Tel-Aviv University, Tel-Aviv, 1999, p. 9.

⁴ *Sharia’ a* is the body of Islamic law and means “way” or “path”. It is the legal framework within which the public and some private aspects of life are regulated for those living in a legal system based on Muslim principles of jurisprudence. This body of Islamic law deals with all aspects of daily life including politics, economics, banking, business law, sexuality and social issues.

nationalism. Third, Hamas' ability to interpret Islam in a way that enables it to maintain a balance between pure ideological discourse and vision and realistic and pragmatic political behavior"¹.

Moreover, Hamas was the first organization that introduced Islamic nationalism into its political discourse.

After the Oslo accords of September 1993, Palestinian nationalism could also be analyzed through its manifestations on the Palestinian street. Symbols always comprise a very important part of any nationalistic movement and in terms of Palestinian nationalism even the national symbols started to be influenced by Islam. Such an example is the Palestinian flag. Forbidden during the Israeli occupation the Palestinian flag proudly displayed in Oslo and immediately after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority it became a symbol of unity and mass mobilization. The flag also portrayed the ever-changing political situation of Palestinian nationalism. For example, in mid 1990s, Hamas² invented its own Palestinian flag inserting the *shahadeh* (Muslim profession of faith) in the wide center strip to differentiate it from the flag of Palestinian nationalism. The Hamas flags are very popular with the masses nowadays.

Another shift of nationalist symbols towards Islamic symbols is the preponderance of the Al Aqsa mosque in the Palestinian nationalist discourse. The dome of the Al Aqsa Mosque is the logo of the Palestinian television channel while small scale copies of the mosque are displayed at anti-Israeli demonstrations. After 2000, when the second *Intifada* actually started at the Al Aqsa mosque, the mosque became a nationalist symbol of resistance having in the same time powerful religious significance not only for the Palestinians but also for all Muslims since it is one of the holiest places of Islam. Moreover the mosque is also present as a symbol for the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, a Fatah affiliated group that draws its ideology from Arab nationalism³.

Furthermore a Hamas leaflet evokes the unforgivable loss of the "blessed al-Aqsa mosque" to Islam⁴. For Palestinian nationalism the Islamic symbols of Jerusalem became essential. On the centrality of Jerusalem to the Palestinians and the need of it being controlled by Muslims, Hamas writes:

"In the event of *al-Isra' wal-Mi'raj*, God placed the crown of the prophets' seal as the master of the men of the soil of Palestine. In no other capital and in no other city on earth but Jerusalem did an event like *al-Isra'* occur, so that it might become the sister of Mecca in history and so that the Muslims might know that the abandonment of Jerusalem is tantamount to the abandonment of Mecca and al Madina"⁵.

This kind of stance on Jerusalem unmistakably reflects Hamas' practical endeavour to appeal to Muslims around the world. This appeal is a practical endeavour

¹ Issam ABURAIYA, "Hamas and Palestinian Nationalism", p. 2, <http://www.humanities.uci.edu/history/levineconference/papers/aburaiya.pdf> (accessed on 02/05/2006).

² Salim TAMARI, "Fading Flags...cit.", p. 11.

³ "Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Palestinian Nationalists", Council on Foreign Relations, http://www.cfr.org/publication/9127/alaqsa_martyrs_brigades_palestinian_nationalists.html (accessed on 02/05/2006).

⁴ "Leaflet No. 2", in Shaul MISHAL, Reuben AHARONI, *Speaking Stones: Communiqués from the Intifada Underground*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, NY, 1994, pp. 204-205.

⁵ "Leaflet No. 8", in *ibidem*, p. 217.

simply because unlike Palestine, which is not referred to in the *Quran* or *hadith* literature, the holy city of Jerusalem is recognized as the location of the "furthest mosque", which Muhammad travelled to on his night journey¹ and it was the place of the first *qibla* (direction of prayer). Moreover, Hamas regards Palestine as the most sacred place after Mecca and al-Medina, and giving up even a piece of it is "to forgo the faith of the nation and of Islam", and betrays prophet Muhammad and all the martyrs of Islam².

In the 2006 elections Hamas appeared in front of the electorate of the Palestinian Territories with a political program based on a number of principles arising from Islam since according to Hamas this is as consensus point among all Palestinians as well as among the Arabs and Muslims in general. These principles recognize Islam as a base for political, economical, social and legal development. Moreover they recognize historical Palestine as a part of the Arab and Islamic land and the Palestinian people as one unit, part and parcel of the Arab and Islamic nation. Hamas' political program stresses the support for the resistance of Palestinians against occupation and the future establishment of a complete sovereign Palestinian state having Jerusalem as its capital³.

The text of Hamas' 2006 political program also known as the list for *Change and Reform* encompasses all areas of interests for the Palestinian people: guiding principles, domestic policy, foreign relations, administrative reform and combating corruption, legislative policy and judicial reform, public freedom and citizen rights, educational and pedagogical policy, preaching and guidance, social policy, cultural and media policy, woman, child and family issues, youth issues, housing policy, health and environment policy, agricultural policy, economic, financial and monetary policy, labour and workers issues, transportation and crossings⁴.

The *Change and Reform* list of Hamas became very appealing to the Palestinians not only because of the need of a viable alternative to Fatah but also because during the electoral campaign, in the beginning of 2006, verses from the *Quran* were cited frequently in order to give a truly theological base to the political program. For example Hamas' 2006 political program refers to Islam and God so many times:

"Allah Says in the holy Quran and this (i.e. Allah's commandments mentioned in the above 2 verses 151 & 152) is My straight path, so follow it, and follow not (other) paths, for they will separate you away from this path. This He has ordaining for you that you may become Almuttaqin (pious) – Al Anaam Surah 153"⁵.

In the introduction to the political program Hamas categorically states:

"Due to our conviction that we are defending one of the greatest bays of Islam; due to our responsibility towards our struggling people and their holy and just cause; due to our duty to contribute in reforming the Palestinian reality, to alleviate the suffering of our brave people, consolidate their resistance and protect them against corruption; and due to our hope to consolidate our

¹ *Quran* 17:1.

² "Leaflet No. 74", in Shaul MISHAL, Reuben AHARONI, *Speaking Stones...cit.*, p. 283.

³ HAMAS, "The Text of Hamas Legislative Elections Program", The Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan) Official Website, www.ikhwanweb.net/images/Hamas_Program.doc, p. 2 (accessed on 16/11/2006).

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 1.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

national unity and to reinforce the domestic Palestinian front: we decided to participate in the Palestinian legislative elections 2006"¹.

The position of Hamas relating to the question of land in Palestine is one of the most important examples of how a national issue is transformed by an Islamic organization and becomes an issue with theological nuances going far beyond the nationalistic discourse. In its political program Hamas' claim to the land is made based on Islamic legal principles. The Hamas view concerning the land is most evidently articulated in its initial communiqués and charters².

When Hamas was founded in 1987, its vision for Palestine was a land "from the river (Jordan) to the (Mediterranean) sea". Moreover, the organization considered the entire Palestinian territory as a *waqf* land, meaning a property that has been endowed for charitable purposes for an indefinite period of time. The notion of *waqf*, and the group that uses the land is one of the key methods of engaging the Palestinians on the Hamas side.

On 14 December 1988, in the first communiqué of Hamas, the organization calls the "Muslim masses" to fight in order to regain their land and rights in the "homeland" and to restore the pride of the Palestinian nation³. Since Hamas was a new group on the Palestinian political scene it was absolutely necessary for it to gain legitimacy among the people that were already mobilized in the first *Intifada*. Hamas had to establish itself among the nationalistic, secular groups fighting the Israeli occupation. The novelty was that the new popular group held Islamic beliefs and became even more involved in the fighting, even more than older groups such as the Islamic Jihad.

Since the beginning of 1988, Hamas's political program began to visibly reveal its Islamic identity. In its first communiqué that year, the organization already considers Palestinians as being *murabitun*, Muslims whose duty is to defend the borders during the early period of Muslim conquests⁴. In this leaflet, released by Hamas it is written: "O *murabitun* on the soil of immaculate and beloved Palestine". Evoking the past and linking it to the present is a way of obliging the Muslims of Palestine, to join in the resistance and defend their ancestral Muslim land of Palestine⁵.

The historical approach is not new to Hamas. In most of the organization's rhetoric there are many links to the Crusades and the Western invaders, links that are brought all the way to the present Western and Israeli involvement in Palestine. Furthermore in this communiqué, Hamas denounces the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt and sees them as Egypt's "falling asleep" to the Palestinian cause⁶.

The historical approach continues also in the second leaflet in which Hamas evokes the loss of land in both 1948 and 1967. Again the *murabitun* are mentioned but this time in a much sturdy way than in the previous flyer:

"Our people the *murabit* on its soil in which they have mingled their blood with the blood of their ancestors, fighters of the holy war among the

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 1.

² Khaled HROUB, *Hamas: Political Thought...cit.*, p. 73.

³ "First Communiqué of Hamas", in Khaled HROUB, *Hamas: Political Thought...cit.*, p. 265.

⁴ "Leaflet No. 1", in Shaul MISHAL, Reuben AHARONI, *Speaking Stones...cit.*, p. 201.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 201-202.

immaculate Companions of the Prophet (*sahaba*), and their righteous and merciful descendents"¹.

Strengthening foreign relations with Arab and Muslim countries is of primordial and strategic importance for Hamas. This way the Palestinian nation is better integrated into the Muslim *Ummah*. Furthermore, Hamas promotes in its foreign policy an "activation of the role played by Arab and Islamic masses to support the resistance of people against occupation, and the refusal of normalization with the enemy"². Even in the third section of the 2006 political program, Hamas makes references to the *Ummah* stressing the importance of fighting sectarian, local and moral calls that seek to divide the Muslim *Ummah*. Only after making reference to the importance of the relations with other Arab and Muslim countries and the importance of the *Ummah*, Hamas' foreign policy focuses on the international community and the fight for the Palestinian cause, the sovereignty of a Palestinian state, the illegitimacy of the occupation and its consequences³.

In the light of secular nationalism, for many years, Palestinians considered themselves as being either Muslims or Christians, seeing no contradiction between their religious and ethnic identity. Historically, Palestinian nationalism is the main political ideology for Palestinian Christians who disregard issues of religious identity or faith in their political struggle. Most Palestinian Christians cultivate a secularist outlook in order to strengthen the bonds of unity with their fellow Palestinian Muslim compatriots. Most Palestinian intellectuals would agree that sectarian hatreds and interconfessional bloodletting is absent among Palestinians and the Palestinians are united against the Zionist occupier. In the 2006 elections some Christians even voted for Hamas in order to protest the rampant corruption of the Fatah-led government.

In spite of the fact that many might consider Hamas an Islamic organization that focuses solely on Muslims, Hamas' political program mentions also the Christians who are considered as "people of the book" (people mentioned in the *Quran*). The Christians of Palestine are considered part of the Palestinian nation. The fight against Israeli occupation is a common purpose for both Christian and Muslim Palestinians. In the context of preserving the Palestinian presence in Jerusalem, Hamas calls for "resisting enemy attempts towards Jerusalem Judaization and protecting Palestinian Islamic and Christian holy places from Zionist desecration"⁴. Furthermore, Hamas calls for "keeping both Muslim and Christian Palestinian entailments away from aggression and cheat as well as developing such entailments in a way that suits their moral and materialistic values"⁵.

Taking into consideration the more recent blending of militant Islam and Palestinian nationalism in the mainstream political discourse, the status of Palestinian Christians is declining. In recent years, the resurgence of militant Islamism among the Palestinians revealed that Christians are actually increasingly sidelined and rendered largely irrelevant in the general struggle for the liberation of Palestine⁶. The fact is that if the Islamists ever fulfilled their dream of defeating the Israelis the

¹ "Leaflet No. 2", Shaul MISHAL, Reuben AHARONI, *Speaking Stones...cit.*, p. 204.

² HAMAS, "The Text of Hamas Legislative Elections Program", cit., p. 4.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

⁶ Charles M. SENNOTT, *The Body and the Blood: The Holy Land's Christians at the Turn of a New Millennium*, Public Affairs, New York, 2001, pp. 409-450.

ideology of Palestinian nationalism will not protect the Christians from the oppression of the radical Islamist groups that are becoming even more powerful day by day¹. Furthermore, in 2006, the new Hamas cabinet obviously does not have any important Christian members as Fatah used to have.

Islam forms the basis for the national development of Palestine in the view of Hamas. All areas of society have to abide to Islam according to the party's ideology and political program. In terms of civil law, for example, Hamas stresses the importance of the *Shar'ia courts* (Islamic courts). As the bases of law in the Palestinian Territories Hamas advocates the need to pass laws originating from Islamic law and jurisprudence in order to encourage the "development of Palestinian Muslim society".

Furthermore, Hamas calls for passing legislation related to Palestinian (*Shar'ia*) religious courts at different levels, in order for these laws to be applied in the same ways in the courts of Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza. For example entailment law, heritage law and laws regarding non Muslim factions are considered matters that need to be dealt with in religious courts. Moreover, Hamas even supports a greater representation of religious courts in the Palestinian constitutional court².

In their policies regarding women, Hamas recognizes that the Palestinian woman is not only a partner in building and development but also in Jihad and resistance. Furthermore, Islamic education is considered by Hamas as essential for women in order for them to have an "independent character based on virtuousness, modesty and moral obligation"³.

In terms of educational and pedagogical policy Hamas considers that it is the duty of the young generation to determine the future of the Palestinian nation, namely bringing freedom and independence. Therefore education is of outmost importance for the Islamic organization. Although Hamas claims that "education should also go along with up-to-date systems", Islam still remains the base of education. Hamas considers that:

"Applying Principles on which the philosophy of pedagogy and education is based, first of which, is that Islam is a comprehensive system that includes man's welfare and that it preserves man's rights in parallelism with community's"⁴.

In the sixteenth section of Hamas' political program dedicated to economic, financial and monetary policy, again God is invoked:

"Allah (SWT) Says: 'Those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between those (extremes)' and: 'Allah will deprive usury of all blessing, but will give increase for deeds of charity'"⁵.

In the epilogue of the political program, Hamas appeals directly to the voter in order to convince the electorate that the organization is simply carrying God's will:

"Dear voter,
When you are in front of the polls remember your responsibility between god hands [...] You are entrusted with your testimony to choose your

¹ *Ibidem*.

² HAMAS, "The Text of Hamas Legislative Elections Program", cit., pp. 7-8.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

⁵ *Ibidem*

representative in the legislative council. When this representative speaks and has the final word of the future, nation and religion; he expresses yourself, so choose the best to please your generous god and your great prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) [...] Yes, choose the best to be happy and to please your people God's will. 'Islam is the solution' is our way to change and reform. Our program is our way to support the society which has been destroyed by the occupation and protect its resistance. Our program is our way to support the Islamic and national unity towards thorough national liberty. Our program is the people's and whole nation's program"¹.

The Hamas' political program ends in a way that promises define rewards for the Hamas voters:

"And say: Work (righteousness): Soon will Allah observe your work, and His Messenger, and the Believers: Soon will ye be brought back to the knower of what is hidden and what is open: then will He show you the truth of all that ye did"².

The continuing fighting in the Palestinian Territories and the low standards of living brought the Palestinians closer to Hamas and gave them the power in 2006. For the first time in the history of the Palestinian Territories the fight for independence and national self-determination was led by an Islamic party. Although, God and nationalism came together under Hamas the prospects for liberating Palestine through Islam seem bleak.

Conclusion

In the last decade, Middle Eastern scholars and political analysts have noticed the emergence of a new kind of Palestinian nationalism – a spiritual and political link that is evolving independently of state institutions and is following an Islamic path. In 2006 this new Palestinian Islamic nationalism, permeated into the structures of the Palestinian Authority through the Hamas led government. Ironically this new Palestinian Islamic Nationalism supports nationalism and Islam, two features that historically seemed antithetical. The emergence of Palestinian Islamic nationalism is not surprising since many Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza but also the refugees, realize that PLO and its brand of secular nationalism did not bring economic prosperity and independence for Palestine.

In its political discourse Hamas manages to use Palestinians' claim to the land of historic Palestine and makes it one of the most important aspects of its ideology. The strength of Hamas does not come from their claim to the land of Palestine according to the *sharia'a*, but from their aim to regain all of the land lost in 1948. This empowers them and transforms its ideals truly into national ideals of the Palestinian people. Since the Palestinians place a higher value on their ancestral land than any other nation, allows for Hamas to use weak, fundamentalist arguments. Land, physically and emblematically, defines national Palestinian identity and this exact fact gives Hamas political strength. For this rationale, the link between the land and Palestinian national identity is crucial in understanding the shift towards Islam.

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

² *Ibidem*.

This essay concludes that secular Palestinian nationalism was just a stage in the development of Palestinian national identity and it can not succeed in the contemporary political situation of the region. The political circumstances transformed the Palestinian nationalism into a Palestinian Islamic nationalism that sees the answers in the *Quran* rather than in the traditional Nasserist ideology. Therefore, nowadays Palestinian nationalism transformed itself and its adepts returned to the traditional Islamic concepts in order to fight for the independence of Palestine.