

# When Arabs Became Palestinians

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**Author Walid Shoebat of Bethlehem wondered how “on June 4, 1967, I was a Jordanian and overnight I became a Palestinian.”**



Not until Israel defeated and humiliated Arab countries in the Six-Day War (June 1967), ending Jordanian control over West Bank Arabs, did a distinctive Palestinian identity begin to emerge. (Image: washingtoninstitute.org)

(JNS) With the recent eruption of Palestinian violence on the Temple Mount, followed by the murder of three Israelis from the town of Elad, it is worth reflecting on the history of a people, until recently non-existent, who seem determined to define themselves by killing Jews.

Modern conceptions of “Palestine” date from the mid-19th century when British artist David Roberts followed the trail of the ancient Israelites from Egypt to their “Holy Land.” His lithographs provided stunning vistas of Hebron, Jerusalem, Jericho, Nablus and other ancient Jewish sites. As yet, there were no “Palestinian” locations to include.

Not long afterward, Scottish writer Alexander Keith, identifying the Land of Israel as the “Holy Land,” described Jews as “a people without a country; even as their own land ... is a country without a people.” British Lord Shaftesbury cited “the ancient and rightful lords of the soil, the Jews!” Palestinians were not mentioned.

On the eve of World War I, Chaim Weizmann, who decades later would become the first president of Israel, said: “There is a country which is called Palestine, a country without a people, and, on the other hand, there exists the Jewish people, and it has no country.” What else was necessary, he wondered, “than to fit the gem into the ring, to unite this people with this country?”

Although Arabs in small numbers had lived in Palestine for centuries with prosperous elite families concentrated in Jerusalem, there were no signs of an Arab national identity before World War I. Ironically, budding signs of Jewish nationalism—identified as Zionism—were its primary stimulus. But it took time.

Shortly before the State of Israel was born, Arab historian Philip Hitti stated: “There is no such thing as Palestine in history, absolutely not.” Without Palestine, there could not be Palestinians.

Not until Israel defeated and humiliated Arab countries in the Six-Day War (June 1967), ending Jordanian control over West Bank Arabs, did a distinctive Palestinian identity begin to emerge. Why was it, wondered author Walid Shoebat of Bethlehem, “that on June 4, 1967, I was a Jordanian and overnight I became a Palestinian.”

Even PLO military commander Zuhair Muhsin acknowledged: “There are no differences between Jordanians, Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese. We are all part of one nation.”

The vision of a Palestinian state, he recognized, was merely “a new tool in the continuing battle against Israel.”

Without a history of their own, Palestinians plundered Jewish history to define themselves. The ancient Canaanites were identified as the original “Palestinians.” So, too, were Jebusites, the biblical inhabitants of Jerusalem. Based on these fanciful claims an imaginary “Palestinian” history of 5,000 years was implanted in the Land of Israel.

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Palestinians’ identity theft has taken strange turns. They have absurdly equated the nakba (“disaster” or “catastrophe”) of 1948 when Arabs launched—and lost—a war of Jewish extermination with the Holocaust. Indeed, Holocaust denial was the core of the doctoral

dissertation of Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas. He preposterously claimed that Zionist leaders were “fundamental partners” of the Nazis, jointly responsible for the slaughter of 6 million Jews.

Palestinians have relied upon the model of the Israeli Law of Return to claim that millions of “refugees”—fewer than 30,000 of whom are still alive—should be permitted to return to the land they abandoned in 1947-48 during the Arab war to annihilate Jews. Teenage Arab girls have been taught to equate their plight with that of Holocaust victim Anne Frank.

So it is that a people without a national history until well into the 20th century have attempted to persuade a gullible world audience that Palestinians are the rightful inheritors of Jewish history and land.

Ironically, even the holy Koran (which makes frequent mention of Jews but does not mention Palestinians) was interpreted by Muslims more than a millennium ago to affirm that the Land of Israel was given by God to “the children of Israel” as a perpetual covenant. Murdering Jews was not mentioned. But as scholar and novelist Dara Horn aptly titles her new book, *People Love Dead Jews*.



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