**Introduction and Argument**

In his autobiography, Salah Khalaf describes the development of Palestinian national consciousness and its transformation into a state building project. Towards the end, he sums up his thoughts thus: ‘We still are without a country, without an identity’[[1]](#footnote-1). These are powerful words from one of the creators of modern Palestinian national identity. But they are in my mind critical to the understanding of what became of Palestinian nationalism and how the events of June 1967 brought about and contributed to this transformation. My argument in this essay will be that central to understanding how Palestinian national identity transformed after the events of 1967 is the goal of creating a state, a centre of power, in the Palestinian homeland, Palestine. If we want to understand how coherent Palestinian nationalism became after 1967, we need to probe this nexus of national identity and state. The lack of state for the Palestinian nation is, we will see, a challenge to the coherence of the national idea.

To this end, I will attempt three things. Firstly, I will lay out a historical context of Palestinian national identity and how a particularist, separate identity needed to compete with other existing identities such as Ottomanism, Arabism and pan Arabism. We will see three periods of identity, consisting of the late Ottoman era, Mandate period and the nearly twenty years following the dismantling of Palestinian society that was the Naqba. Secondly, I will look at how things changed for Palestinian identity after the Six Day War in June 1967. Already before 1967 a new Palestinian elite was creating institutions that would react to the Naqba, such as Fateh. But after 1967 we will see that these new leaders were given political space to recreate or reconstitute Palestinian national identity. We will probe this new identity and then thirdly look to compare it with theoretical ideas on national identity.

**Conceptual Framework**

My theoretical construct will begin with the thought of Benedict Anderson. He understood that a nation was ‘an imagined community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign’[[2]](#footnote-2). This definition of a nation is also a challenge. For Anderson, ‘all communities larger than primordial villages of face to face contact... are imagined.’[[3]](#footnote-3) We will see that for the Palestinian nation, this characteristic of ‘imagining’, where members of the nation do not know and see most other members, would require a carefully crafted and developed national consciousness to evolve and be created by the national elites. There existed other competing identities such as Ottomanism, Arabism and pan-Arabism. To understand the development of a particularist Palestinian national identity, I will turn to the ideas of Anthony Smith to understand the making of such a nation and its definition. He defines a nation as ‘a named population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historic memories, a mass public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members’[[4]](#footnote-4). I will also look at Smith’s definition of how nations are formed, specifically what he calls the formation of a nation from a ‘vertical ethnie’[[5]](#footnote-5). Here a nation forms around an ethnic core, and the intelligentsia of the ethnic group are able to mobilise masses around a specific vernacular culture. The task of an ethnic intelligentsia would then be ‘to mobilise a formerly passive community into forming a nation around the new vernacular historical culture that it has discovered’[[6]](#footnote-6) . Here Smith provides us with five methods through which the ethnic intelligentsia can mobilise its masses towards nation building:

1. ‘A movement from passive subordination of the community to its active political assertion
2. A movement to place the community in its homeland, a secure and recognised compact territory
3. A movement to endow the territorial community with economic unity
4. A movement to place the people at the centre of concern and to celebrate the masses by re-educating them in national values, memories and myths.
5. A movement to turn ethnic members into legal ‘citizens’ by conferring civil, social and political rights on them’ [[7]](#footnote-7)

I will apply the definition of nation and of these characteristics of ethnic national mobilisation to the Palestinians, and compare the national development before 1948 to that after 1967.

The recent work of Montserrat Guibernau, has probed the nation theory of Smith and investigated the modern issue of nations that do not have states. Her criticism of Smith is that he ‘associates national identity with membership of the state ignoring that although all nations have a national identity, not all of them have a state of their own’[[8]](#footnote-8). So rather than myths and symbols created by the ethnic elite being a source for a national identity alone, to Guibernau, they are also a source of ‘powerful arguments to those who seek to reinforce the political legitimacy of their nations and the power of the states claiming to represent them’[[9]](#footnote-9). This model will be important in its application to the transformation and in effect rediscovery of Palestinian national identity after 1967 in a more political and state seeking form than had existed before. I would argue that the period before 1948 saw the cultural genesis of the Palestinian nation; after 1967 witnessed the political and state building genesis.

**The Ottoman and Mandate Periods**

The existence of a separate Palestinian national identity has often been affected by competition with other overarching identities. In the latter part of the 18th century, the Arab population of Palestine was a local group of the Ottoman Empire. Identity was more formed by being part of a village or family. Gerber quotes a testimony from the sociologist Afif Tannous who noted that: “The Fellah is always conscious of the fact that he is a member of a certain community and he knows that wherever he goes people expect him to identify himself as such...A stranger is always ‘placed’ with respect to his village, family and church’”[[10]](#footnote-10)

But three factors would bridge between this early local identity and a wider and deeper social boundary. Firstly, the local notables, or ‘ayan’ gained greater power. One reason according to Kimmerling(1993) is that the ‘ayan’ were able to register larger tracts of land including on the coastal plain areas of Palestine. The Ottoman government instituted a series of legal reforms known as Tanzimat, among which was legislation that land should now be registered. This benefited the notables who could create large land holdings. The Arab society was now developing two branches, a fact that would be most important as Palestinian identity developed. Secondly, the Young Turk uprising of 1908 and growing Turk patriotism spurred on a growing Arab nationalism which was also felt by those living in Palestine. According to Muslih (1988), a new universal Arabism would replace a universal Ottoman identity[[11]](#footnote-11). This Arabism was encouraged more by the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The initial desire for Palestinian rule after the First World War was not as a separate identity, but as part of a Greater Syrian federation. It would be hoped that support for Faysal, ruler of Syria would bring autonomy to Palestine[[12]](#footnote-12). This was the position of Hajj Amin al Husseini, the self proclaimed spokesperson of the Arabs of Palestinian. Hajj Amin was appointed Mufti in 1929 with British support.

A developing societal structure began also to flower in Palestine, developed by a new intelligentsia. City life was growing and communal and political organisations were also being founded. This marked the onset of the second period of Palestinian national development under the British Mandate. The Muslim Christian Association, which met regularly, began to express opinions that Palestine was a ‘common homeland’. A social identity was being developed around the Palestinian population[[13]](#footnote-13) and Kimmerling testifies to ‘the assertion of Palestine as a common homeland at a time when political boundaries were new and still quite uncertain’[[14]](#footnote-14). Palestinian poetry began to evoke a passionate and romantic connection with the land, echoing a romantic village connection. Identification with village was now transforming into identification with the homeland. Print media helped as well, although peasant illiteracy was up to 90% in the 1930’s[[15]](#footnote-15). At the third Palestinian Arab Congress in 1920 there would be a demand for a ‘national government responsible to a representative assembly’[[16]](#footnote-16).

But the Mandate period were far from easy years for Palestinian national identity and it did not enter the Naqba of 1948 with any sort of clear coherence. Paradoxically, the ‘losing battles with the Zionists and the British, only deepened this shared sense of identity as a common set of “others” and a common sense of threat made increasing numbers of Palestinians perceive that they had a shared fate’[[17]](#footnote-17). Khalaf, one of the later leaders of Fateh, is critical of the early national movement. He cites the internecine strife (particularly between the Husseini and Nashashibi families), the lack of rootedness in the masses, being too dependent on a leader and not founding proper structures[[18]](#footnote-18). So when the tragedy of the Naqba occurred in 1948, Palestinian national identity had been a top down entity and had not created politically coherent institutions that could represent a Palestinian national idea.

**Naqba and the Disappearance of Palestinian Identity**

It is then no wonder that writers describe the period between 1948 and 1967 as the ‘Disappearance of Palestinian identity’[[19]](#footnote-19). These ‘lost years’[[20]](#footnote-20) are explained by Rashid Khalidi as ‘a hiatus in manifestations of Palestinian identity’ and that ‘indeed, during these lost years, there no longer appeared to be a centre of gravity for the Palestinians’[[21]](#footnote-21). And not only did the Palestinian population have to deal with the reality of dispersal, but they now had to negotiate their reality within a number of neighbouring Arab countries, who were at times hostile to a Palestinian national identity. The relationship, for instance between Palestinian refugees on Jordanian soil and the Jordanian regime was incredibly complicated. Jordan looked to integrate the new refugee influx into a new Jordanian identity[[22]](#footnote-22).

Rashid Khalidi (2010) eloquently explains the effects of the Naqba on the Palestinians. What is fascinating is that as much as the Naqba was a clear and deep failure for Palestinian national aspirations, ‘these failures ultimately resulted in the universalisation of a uniform Palestinian national identity’[[23]](#footnote-23). Before 1948, Khalidi also explains that a separate Palestinian identity had to compete with other identities such as Ottomanism and Arabism. It had begun to develop a more Palestinian orientated identity, what Kimmerling calls ‘Palestinism’[[24]](#footnote-24). However ‘there remained differences in consciousness, education and outlook in Palestinian society’[[25]](#footnote-25). The Naqba however was a great ‘leveller’ and it ‘obliterated many of these differences, erased many of these gaps and decreased the importance of many pre 1948 conflicts’[[26]](#footnote-26).

Yezid Sayigh differs slightly with this analysis and explains that the Naqba ‘disarticulated’[[27]](#footnote-27) Palestinian society in that it scattered its classes across different locations in the Arab world. Sayigh’s analysis is important for an argument I am making in this essay in that he looks at the Naqba as an event that removed the ability for separate Palestinian political organisation. Identity had been developed through the experience of Naqba and there was a growing set of ‘common myths and memories’ and a clear and tight connection to a ‘homeland’, two clear indicators of national identity according to Anthony Smith[[28]](#footnote-28). But no space existed yet for particular Palestinian political activism. In the words of Sayigh, ‘The experience of al-Naqba made for a distinct Palestinian*ness*, but not necessarily for Palestinian*ism*’[[29]](#footnote-29). So after 1948,’ a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members’[[30]](#footnote-30), again indicators of a nation according to Smith, were not present as part of the Palestinian experience. They had no state of their own, and they as yet were not in a position to demand or acquire this state. Sayigh brings two other conditions that were preventing the re-emergence of an active Palestinian politics. Firstly, this new politics would be dependent on the rebuilding of Palestinian society in the refugee camps. This would take time, ‘and it was not until the early 1960’s that Palestinian society approached the critical mass required to generate its own, overt politics and to sustain an autonomous national movement’[[31]](#footnote-31). Critical to this new politics was a new cadre of leaders, university educated, who were building new specifically Palestinian movements. Individuals such as Yasir Arafat, Salah Khalaf and Khalil al-Wazir who were among the founders of Fateh in the late 1950’s were able to instrumentalise the reforming Palestinian social identity and mould it together with a political activism which would be based on military action. Kimmerling also puts great importance on the re-emerging Palestinian identity in the refugee camps based on shared traumatic experiences and yearning for the homeland. He quotes the Palestinian writer Fawz Turki as saying that ‘In his home, a Palestinian child, whether born in Beirut, Amman or Damascus, would be instructed to identify himself as a Palestinian from Haifa or Lydda or any other town that had been his parents birthplace...’[[32]](#footnote-32). Social institutions were created in the camp society, refocusing refugees ‘away from confrontation with larger Arab society, into a world of memory...into their Lost Garden of Palestine’[[33]](#footnote-33). Furthermore the ‘overpowering paternal force’ of UNRWA had drastically improved education in the refugee camps and had through its many relief, aid and educational projects in the refugee camps helped ‘Palestinians reconstitute their lives’[[34]](#footnote-34)

This leads us to Sayigh’s second condition that prevented particular Palestinian political expression until after 1967. The ideology of pan Arabism, a new form of Arabism, had been cultivated by Nasir from the early 1950’s. It became not surprisingly very popular amongst Palestinians, who viewed it as a tool for the liberation of Palestine, the homeland that had been taken from them by Israel in 1948. As Khalidi explains, pan Arabism was strong enough at times to ‘transcend the iron realities of the nation state in the Arab world...notably during the union of 1958-1961 between Egypt and Syria’[[35]](#footnote-35). Many Palestinians associated themselves with Nasir and his ideology. But at the same time as pan Arabism was seen to be the saviour of Palestinian yearnings to defeat Israel and return home, Palestinian refugees in their new homes in neighbouring Arab countries found that any expressions of separate national identity would be repressed. Jordan had annexed the West Bank in 1950, and with a now significant Palestinian population on its territory, embarked on creating a new Jordanian identity including the large numbers of new Palestinian refugees. Laurie Brand explains that with this annexation, there now was a ‘remodelling the bases of identification with the state in a way that would blur the distinctions’[[36]](#footnote-36) between the populations on both banks of the Jordan. This remodelling process resulted in a ‘blocking the re-emergence of a separate Palestinian political leadership’[[37]](#footnote-37). In Egypt too, there was a repressive attitude to Palestinian political and military expression, with many being ‘hounded, jailed and interrogated by the Egyptian mukhabarat (intelligence service)’[[38]](#footnote-38). Rubin therefore expressed it well when he explained that ‘the main factors suppressing a separate Palestinian identity in the 1950’s and 1960’s were Arab regimes and the appeal of radical pan Arabism’[[39]](#footnote-39).

The existence of the ‘imagined community’ that was Palestinian Arab society had taken steps leading up to 1948 to compensate for this imagined-ness, and create something that would now compete with other local identities. But this proto type nation, this early ethnie lacked in a number of ways. There was no unity around a separate and particular Palestinian nationalism. The leadership were split, often violently. There was not yet any real organisational basis for state hood. There was the beginning of what Smith calls ‘vernacular mobilisation’[[40]](#footnote-40) using the media and print to educate the new generation about a Palestinian consciousness. But as Kimmerling explains, this developing Palestinian identity had ‘originated with members of the ayan, eventually moving down to other groups as well’. As I have explained, the Naqba on the one hand created a hiatus in Palestinian existence. But at the same time it was instrumental in forging a newly emerging Palestinian identity, as Brand writes, being based on ‘attachment to the village of town or origin, a sense of loss of homeland and of gross injustice at the hands of the international community, and the centrality of the notion of return’[[41]](#footnote-41). But if we are using the parameters of Anthony Smith to understand how a nation is defined, there would also be a necessity for ‘a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all’. Palestinian society in 1967 may be understood using Smith’s theory of nation building as an ‘ethnie’ which would have ‘ a collective name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more differentiating elements of common culture, an association with a specific homeland and a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population’[[42]](#footnote-42). A process would now be needed to turn the Palestinian ‘ethnie’ into a nation. Smith[[43]](#footnote-43) explains this as the process of ‘vertical ethnie’ where intellectual elite mobilises a demotic ethnic mass into a nation through a new vernacular culture. The process can be ‘often slow and traumatic’[[44]](#footnote-44) and as with the example Smith brings of the Arab nation, compete with other identities. This process will also allow the people to be ‘emancipated into a political community of equal citizens’[[45]](#footnote-45) – in other words, the creating of a state. Earlier in the essay, I listed five different processes that Smith believes are lead by the ethnic elite. We will now turn to the development of Palestinian identity after 1967 and probe its coherence given these nation building processes.

**1967 and Palestinian National Identity**

Already before the events of 1967, a new and more coherent Palestinian national identity was being formed. As Khalidi writes, this was ‘a continuation of the Palestinian national movement’ and contained ‘the same use of the theme of historic Palestinian rootedness in the land, the same symbols signifying Palestinian identity, and the same obsession with Zionism’[[46]](#footnote-46). What was now different was that a new leadership was developing, free of the older elite leaders of pre 1948 who were ‘considered in some way as being responsible for having lost Palestine’[[47]](#footnote-47). As I have already mentioned, the pre 1948 Arab leadership of Palestine had been plagued with difference and conflict, reducing the effectiveness of the Arab population to respond to the pressures of Zionist successes and British repression. But, as Khalidi succinctly puts it, ‘if the Arab population of Palestine had not been sure of their identity before 1948, the experience of defeat, dispossession and exile guaranteed that they knew what their identity was soon afterward’[[48]](#footnote-48). It would only take the right conditions for the new Palestinian leadership to be able to mobilise the Palestinian masses around a new Palestinian particularism.

The right conditions had now come to pass by 1967. According to many writers the defeat of the Six Day War was a colossal catastrophe for pan Arabism. It spread despair amongst the populations of the Arab nations that had lost the war to Israel. According to Said Aburish, Yasir Arafat reacted to the defeat of 1967 by developing a military strategy, in order to contain this despair. According to Aburish, ‘However deep and fundamental their sense of defeat, the Arabs desperately needed something to lift their spirits, keep their hopes alive...Only the Palestinian call to resist stood between them and utter despair and self disgust’[[49]](#footnote-49). He calls the reaction of Yasir Arafat ‘snatch(ing) victory from the jaws of defeat’[[50]](#footnote-50). Khalidi interestingly disagrees with the dating of the fall of pan Arabism at the June 67 war. For Khalidi, pan Arabism had already begun its decline since the breakup of the union of Egypt and Syria in 1962 and would continue its decline after. More importantly for this essay however, Khalidi believes that Fateh contributed to the outbreak of the 1967 war. For Khalidi, ‘the rise of Fateh in the years before 1967...its ability...to drive regional events towards confrontation with Israel against the wishes of the most powerful state Egypt...helped to precipitate the war...’[[51]](#footnote-51). Fateh already were viewing themselves as an important military factor before) the 1967 war. This perception only increased after the Arab loss of June 1967.

Two important factors were important in paving the way to a more coherent Palestinian national identity after the Six Day War. Firstly, the leadership of Fateh were able to move forward with embedding a doctrine of ‘Palestine First’. This doctrine had already existed with the founding of Fateh in 1959, however now its leadership had the ability to translate it into a military doctrine that would make the Palestinians a vanguard for the Arab desire to defeat Israel. Now it was clear that the Palestinians could not rely on Arab regimes to be victorious against Israel. They could only rely on themselves. According to Abu Iyad ‘Yasir Arafat and I... knew what was damaging to the Palestinian cause. We were convinced for example that the Palestinians could expect nothing from the Arab regimes...We believed that the Palestinians could rely only on themselves’[[52]](#footnote-52). This meant ensuring that the Palestinian cause would no longer be ‘under the tutelage of any Arab government, regardless of which one’[[53]](#footnote-53). To be sure, Arab unity was not to be sacrificed , rather the ‘goal was to become the catalysts of a unitary and revolutionary Arab force , the spearhead of a wide front which alone would be capable of restoring Palestinian rights’[[54]](#footnote-54). This was, as Sayigh explains, an ‘essential’ and ‘existential’ question around ‘how to reassert Palestinian existence’[[55]](#footnote-55).

If the doctrine of ‘Palestine First’ was the reassertion of identity, the method of this reassertion was through a military strategy. Fateh had already begun military operations against Israel from Jordanian territory in 1965, all be it under the title ‘Al Asifa’. Fatah fedayeen raids may well have contributed to the spiral of events that led to the outbreak of war in June 1967, as is the opinion of Khalidi, mentioned earlier[[56]](#footnote-56). However the founding myth of Fateh military self reliance was the events at Karameh in March 1968. Karameh would not objectively come to be considered a total defeat for the Israeli regime. But the fact that Fateh forces, and not Jordanian forces caused a significant number of Israeli troops to retreat from military engagement at Karameh became a myth that would motivate mass mobilisation of support around Fateh. The name itself became a symbol of military revolution – ‘Karameh is the Arabic word for honour’[[57]](#footnote-57). Helena Cobban quotes Khalaf’s recollection that after Karameh, ‘5,000 new recruits applied to join Fateh in the next 48 hours’[[58]](#footnote-58). In an amended Palestinian National Charter of July 1968, the new, 9th Article emphasised this: ‘Armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine...The Palestinian Arab people assert their absolute determination and firm resolution to continue their armed struggle..’[[59]](#footnote-59). To add to the founding myth of post 1967 Palestinian identity, Yasir Arafat himself became a symbol of Palestine. As Aburish writes, ‘He was Mr. Palestine, the man who symbolised the country and its people’[[60]](#footnote-60)

The combination of a new political assertiveness and a clear military strategy was central to a recreated Palestinian national identity. According to Sayigh, there were four consequences of this military strategy. Firstly using the concept of Anderson(1991), ‘the armed struggle gave new substance to the imagined community of the Palestinians’[[61]](#footnote-61). In essence, the armed struggle was the tool in the hands of the Palestinian leadership and people to reassert Palestinian identity, itself dormant since 1948. Quoting Wazir, ‘This is how we understand the armed struggle. This is also how we have proceeded to rebuild our people and reassert its national identity’[[62]](#footnote-62). A second consequence of the Fateh led strategy of armed struggle was the creation of a political Palestinian identity. In other words institutions were now being created which would represent Palestinian national aspirations. As Salah Khalaf stated in an interview in 1988, the armed struggle had ‘restored the Palestinian cause to the people ....[and] gained political legitimacy’[[63]](#footnote-63). Not only were Palestinian institutions forming, but a third consequence of the strategy, according to Sayigh, ‘of the armed struggle for Palestinian nation building was that it produced a common political ‘arena’’[[64]](#footnote-64). The developing of the political sphere provided a central body that could make decisions and also include within it representation from public and societal organisations such as Trade Unions. This was achieved through the creation of the Palestine National Council.

But most important of all to Sayigh, a fourth consequence of the armed struggle, was the process of state building. This would involve the relocation of a Palestinian nation in its land through military struggle, and with that the creation of a State. I would argue that the coherence of Palestinian national identity became dependent on the success or not of the state building project and as Sayigh explains it ‘demonstrated the degree to which the restoration of national identity, reaffirmation of the imagined community, and institutionalisation of the representative identity had progressed’[[65]](#footnote-65).

**The Palestinian nation – A nation without a State**

As I have explained, the Arab defeat of 1967 allowed the new Palestinian elite to reassert a national identity around an armed struggle. Smith described the process of creating a nation from an ethnic group, using a mobilisation from ‘passive to active political assertion’ as well as a ‘re-education in national values, memories and myths’[[66]](#footnote-66). This had been accomplished through the experiences of being in *ghurba* and through the mobilisation to a military cause. The Palestinian people were now after 1967 a nation with a name, a homeland, they could share common myths and a history and had a mass public culture. What was missing critically was a state, an autonomous, self determined existence on their homeland itself. It would seem that according to Anthony Smith’s definition of a nation, the Palestinians would in fact fall short of being considered a ‘successful nation’ and would rather be still waiting for the full realisation of nationhood.

The work of Professor Monteserrat Guibernau is important here. Guibernau critiques Smith’s ethnosymbolic approach on a fundamental confusion between nation and state. To Guibernau ‘Smith associates national identity with membership of the state ignoring that, although nations have a national identity, not all of them have state of their own’[[67]](#footnote-67). Guibernau’s definition of a nation allows for the reality of a nation not itself retaining the self determination of statehood. A nation is ‘a human group conscious of forming a community, sharing a common culture, attached to a clearly demarcated territory, having a common past, and a common project for the future and claiming the right to rule itself’[[68]](#footnote-68). What Guibernau does, is split between the concept of ‘nation state’ and a growing reality in her opinion of ‘nations without states’. As Guibernau explains, ‘the political consequences of being a nation, with or without a state and the role of the state in the construction of national identity cannot be ignored’[[69]](#footnote-69). At this point, we must ask whether Palestinian national identity can fall under the rubric laid down by Guibernau. Oft mentioned as case studies, are nations such as Scotland, Quebec and Catalonia[[70]](#footnote-70). These are national identities that are in different ways demanding greater autonomy, however they reside on their historic lands. Of course a significant number of Palestinians live in historic Palestine under Israeli occupation; but most of the Palestinian national population live outside. In fact in Guibernau (1999) we find the definition ‘nations, which in spite of having their territories included within the boundaries of one or more states, by and large do not identify with them’[[71]](#footnote-71). In Guibernau (1996) we do find a reference to Palestine as a ‘nation without a state’ where it is ‘completely lacking recognition from the state which contains’ it[[72]](#footnote-72). Palestine therefore is a clearly demarcated national identity, however within the family of ‘nations without states’ it finds its national expression repressed by the state residing on the historic homeland and it has no real expression of self determination in its ‘clearly demarcated territory’. In the words of Khalidi ‘ ‘Like the Kurds, like the Armenians, like the Jews in Palestine before 1948, the Palestinians have asserted their identity without the trappings of an independent state and against powerful countervailing currents’[[73]](#footnote-73).

**Conclusion**

Nations without states are able to exist that way with a certain degree of autonomy that assuages the nationalist elements of the populous. For the Palestinian nation however, the reassertion of national identity that developed after the events of 1967 was clearly tied up with the achieving of a state for the Palestinian nation. The lack of success in this endeavour impinged therefore on the success of the national identity. Khalidi puts Palestinian national identity together with other ‘unsuccessful national identities’[[74]](#footnote-74). According to Khalidi, this ‘unsuccessful’ nature is part bound up with the lack of a Palestinian state and was influenced by a long series of Palestinian failures that were reframed by the Palestinian leadership as triumphs. According to Sayigh, ‘the inescapable reality...was that Palestinian state building remained constrained by the lack of a single territorial, social and economic base’[[75]](#footnote-75). As a result of this lack of state building, ‘Palestinian nationalism was weakened, and contested...’[[76]](#footnote-76). Furthermore, ‘statist autonomy was further affected by the physical dispersal of the Palestinians’[[77]](#footnote-77). This dispersal Sayigh explains meant that there was no ‘shared economic base’ to work with. As I explained earlier, Guibernau explains the lack of Palestine state entity as a result of Israeli repression of Palestinian identity. According to Rubin (2002), the lack of statehood was a result of lost opportunities on the part of Yasir Arafat, Chairman of the PLO. As Rubin concludes, ‘As a way of bettering the condition of the Palestinian people or of obtaining an independent Palestinian state, Arafat’s strategy now and in the past has been disastrous. In terms of making the activists (and often the masses) feel proud and successful...Arafat’s strategy has been a great success’[[78]](#footnote-78). In 1978, Abu Iyad himself showed great pessimism regarding the advent of a state: ‘I don’t believe my generation will have the joy of seeing a Palestinian State’.

The reassertion of Palestinian national identity after 1967 has had a dramatically positive effect on the geo-political position of the Palestinians and on their legitimacy to build their coveted state. But they have remained a national grouping without a state, a fact that may have hampered and reduced this legitimacy. Relying on a military struggle to create identity built national solidarity. But it did not deliver a state. As the Palestine National Fund chairman Jawid al-Ghusayn stated in 1986, ‘What is the harvest of twenty years of struggle? We have managed to create a Palestinian identity and bring our cause to the world’s attention. Otherwise it has been a total failure’[[79]](#footnote-79).

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2. Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verson, 1991) 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Anthony D. Smith, National Identity (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991) 43 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid 52 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid 64 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
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8. Montserrat Guibernau ‘Anthony D Smith on nations and national identity: a critical assessment’ Nations and Nationalism 10(1/2) (2004) 125 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid 127 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
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