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FOOTNOTE

"Palestine" is currently being used as a propaganda term for Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip only, forgetting that Palestine in its proper and historical sense comprises not only this area, but also Jordan. When talking about Palestine, most writers conveniently ignore the fact that there is already an Arab state in Palestine. That state is Jordan, which is an historic part of Palestine and was included within the British Mandate of Palestine.

Britain, in 1922, detached 78% of the original area of Palestine to become an Arab entity and in order to satisfy Arab aspirations for independence. This area east of the Jordan was thereafter called Trans-Jordan, and remained legally part of the Mandate until 1946, when it was declared an independent Arab state. It was renamed Jordan in 1953. Jordan thus comprises 78% of Palestine, and the vast majority of Jordanians are Palestinians.

It is, therefore incorrect to state that the Jews took possession of 78% of Palestine in 1948 when, in fact, it is only 15%. The remaining 7% of Palestine comprises the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

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FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL

The very right of the Jewish people to their homeland and nation in the land of Israel is being fundamentally assailed today.

The Christian Aid publication "The Palestinians" states: "The Palestinians are the inhabitants of Palestine, an Arab people who have lived in and around the Holy Land since before the time of Christ", and goes on to complain that the Jewish hopes for a national homeland were centred not in Europe, but in a land which "was already inhabited by the Palestinians".

An album by the Christian singer Garth Hewitt includes a song "Where is the land of Palestine" which has as the chorus: "Where is the land of Palestine? Its disappeared somewhere in time. Is it in the camps of the Lebanon? Will they be forever without a home? They took their land - they took their homes, they took away all they owned. Turned a nation into refugees: hundreds forced to flee."

So, in both the World Council of Churches, and in the evangelical Christian world, not to mention regularly in the secular press, the idea is purveyed remorselessly that the Jews entered into and occupied a land which properly and legally already belonged to another people. It is necessary to examine this closely.

One of the planks of this Arab argument that "Palestine", belongs to the Arabs, and not to the Jews, is the assertion that the Arabs have occupied and owned the land "from time immemorial". The Arab argument goes on to assert that the "Zionist Jews" colonised a land belonging by right to the Arabs, and that the Jews are therefore illegally occupying it at the expense of its legitimate Arab owners and inhabitants. Not only Arab propagandists, but most Western writers and commentators have fallen completely for this fallacious argument.

Palestinian Arabs claim to be descendants of the original occupants of the land, going back some 3,000 years, and the true descendants of the original "Semites" whose roots lie in Palestine. In fact the Palestinians are a diverse mixture of people, such as Persians, Greeks, Romans, Mongols, Europeans, Arabs, Turks and Jews, who have all entered the country in wave after wave of immigration and invasion, making a connection between the modern Palestinian and the ancient "Semite" highly implausible.¹

The fatal weakness, however, in the Arab argument is the neglect of the large scale immigration of Arabs into Palestine from the surrounding countries that has occurred in modern times. This contradicts the theory that the roots of the Palestinians are only to be found in Palestine.

Beginning with the invasion of Palestine by Napoleon and the subsequent invasion and rule of Muhammad Ali between 1831-1840, there was a large influx of peasants from Egypt.² Many of the veteran inhabitants fled to escape the heavy taxes and conscriptions placed on them by the Egyptian

regime. This regime encouraged peasants to enter Palestine to help them consolidate their hold on the country, although even before the Egyptian invasion, it is known that Egyptian peasants had been making their way into Palestine. Thus in 1831, 6,000 peasants left Egypt and settled in Acre.³

Muhammad Ali carried out a policy of scattering Egyptians throughout the country in both urban and rural areas, and the Hula and Bet Shean Valleys, for example, became home to Egyptian immigrants, as did the Jordan Valley.⁴ The largest area of Egyptian settlement extended from Tulkarm to Gaza.⁵

The Egyptians were not the only immigrants. In 1860 large numbers of Algerian tribes from Damascus settled in large numbers in the Safed region,⁶ while the Algerians founded a number of villages in the Lower Galilee about the same time.⁷ The Ottoman authorities encouraged the immigration of Circassians, and the Druze drifted in from Lebanon uninvited. Travellers and European diplomats during the 19th Century speak of the land also being populated with Turks, Kurds and Bosnians.

It is worth noting the words of the London Jews Society Missionary E. G. W. Masterman who, writing in 1914, reminds the Zionists that, although there is a considerable exodus of Arabs underway to America, some of the best parts of Palestine have become occupied by immigrants in recent years: "There are Moslem, Algerian, Bulgarian, Circassian and Turkoman settlements west of the Jordan, not to mention the progressive German colonists. . ."⁸

There are no real figures to determine exactly how many immigrants entered Palestine during the nineteenth Century. However, it is on record that in 1882 there were 141,000 Muslims living in all of Palestine, of whom at least 25 per cent were newcomers or descendants of those who arrived after 1831.⁹

The real influx of Arab immigration began to take place after the First World War. The stability provided by the Mandatory government and the large-scale investment that came from Zionist coffers, made the country immensely attractive to impoverished Arabs living in Egypt, Syria, the Trans-Jordan and Lebanon. From the period covering 1922-1931, illegal Arab immigrants comprised almost 12% of the Arab population.¹⁰ The Hope-Simpson Report acknowledged in 1930 that there was "uncontrolled influx of illegal immigrants from Egypt, Trans-Jordan and Syria". The rate of immigration increased during the early 1930's, which was a period of prosperity in Palestine. The Syrian Governor of Hauran admitted in 1934 that 30,000-36,000 people from his district entered Palestine that year and settled there.¹¹

Ironically, while the British authorities curbed Jewish immigration, they did little to stop Arabs slipping illegally into the country.¹² Restrictions were imposed against the Jews under the erroneous premise that unchecked Jewish immigration would displace the country's Arabs. Yet at the time, in the late 1930's, when the Jews of Germany and Austria were in great danger, although Palestine was closed to them, it was not closed to thousands of illegal Arab immigrants.

No wonder Churchill could point out in 1939: "Far from being persecuted, the Arabs have crowded into the country and multiplied until their population has increased more than even all world Jewry could lift up (increase) the Jewish population".¹³

Further study on Arab immigration into pre-State Palestine needs to be undertaken, but it is false to claim that the Zionists displaced the Arabs. One final point on this subject deserves notice. Most of the illegal Arab immigrants that flooded into Palestine before 1948 settled in areas heavily populated by Jews - Jaffa, Tel Aviv, Haifa, Safed and the like. In these areas, wages were higher, work more plentiful and health care better.¹⁴

In the end it was the Palestinian Arabs who were responsible for their own displacement. Led by extremists they tried to "push the Jews into the sea" in 1948. Their attempt to destroy the Jewish community failed miserably, and as a result of the war started by the Arab nations they became refugees.

It is also helpful to examine the Arab claim to Palestine over a broader perspective. During previous history there never has been a "Palestinian Arab" nation. To the Arab people as a whole, no such entity as Palestine existed. They were not conscious of any relationship with the land. In twelve hundred years of association they built only a single town, Ramle, in the eighth century. The researches of nineteenth century scholars revealed that hundreds of place-names of villages and sites, seemingly Arab, were Arabic renderings or translations of ancient Hebrew names.

The validity of the Arab claim may also be judged by the condition of the land before the Jewish return. One visitor after another in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries described its desolate appearance, (Thomas Shaw in 1738; Constantine Francois Volney in 1785; Alexander Keith in 1844; Alphonse de Lamartine in 1835), which was summed up most graphically by Mark Twain in 1867, when he wrote: "Desolate country whose soil is rich enough but is given over wholly to weeds . . . we never saw a human being on the whole route." "There was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere . . .". "Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes. Palestine is desolate and unlovely . . .".¹⁵

It awaited the return of the Jews to restore the land and rescue it from its neglect and misuse. It was this restoration which attracted so many Arab immigrants.

The assertion that the Jewish people have no right to a sovereign state in the land of Palestine because it is, or has become, the property of another people is new to the twentieth century - indeed it was never even suggested in the nineteenth century when the restoration of the Jewish people to Palestine was the subject of intense discussion and writing. The claim of historic association, of historic right, of historical ownership by the Arab people or by a "Palestinian entity" is a fiction fabricated in our own day.

No right thinking person has any desire to set aside the need and indeed human right of those Palestinian Arabs now living in the "West Bank" and the Gaza Strip to manage their own affairs, maintain their own culture and enjoy similar privileges to others occupying the same area. It is clear however that a Palestinian state, as currently promised by the PLO leadership, is no answer to these aspirations. Moreover and most important, the Arab claims to the whole of Palestine" on the grounds that the Palestinian Arabs have occupied the land "from time immemorial" is historically untenable.

By contrast, the Jewish people have maintained a continuous presence in the land over the past 3,500 years, where a national language and distinct civilisation has been maintained. The full historic right of Israel to occupy this land as a nation is unassailable.