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OLGA BIBIKOVA. THE SITUATION OF PALESTINIAN REFUGEES LIVING IN ARAB COUNTRIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST (Part 1)

Keywords: Palestinians; refugee camps; UNRWA; HAMAS; problems of adaptation and identity.

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Abstract. There are currently more than five million Palestinian refugees in the world. Most of them live in the Arab countries of the Middle East: Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. The UN has secured in numerous documents the right of Palestinians to create their own state. However, the United States offers Arab countries to accept Palestinians as their citizens. Palestinian political organizations have rejected the plan because they believe it would call into question their rights to return to their land.

*General Moshe Dayan (1915-1981), speaking on March 19, 1969 at the Technion University (Haifa) said:
"Jewish villages were built on the site of Arab villages. You don't even know the names of these Arab villages, and I don't blame you, because these Geography books no longer exist. Not only no more books exist, but the Arab villages no longer exist either. (...). In this country there is not a single place built where there was no Arabic population before..."*

After Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (August 1990), the issue of attitude towards the Palestinian problem was reconsidered in a number of countries. The Palestinians ostentatiously supported Iraq, despite the fact that Kuwait had provided financial assistance to the PLO for many years.

Saddam Hussein argued his actions against Kuwait, allegedly by the fact that Kuwait was conducting illegal oil production in the border Rumaila field¹. Baghdad demanded to provide it with gratuitous assistance, writing off accumulated debts², and also to cede part of the territory of Kuwait, claiming that the territory of Kuwait was once part of Iraq. At the same time, probably to ensure support from the "Arab street," Saddam Hussein said that fulfilling his conditions would contribute to

* Genèse du conflit Israélo-Palestinien: entre mensonges et oublis. Géopolitique Profonde / - URL: <https://geopolitique-profonde.com/articles/conflit-israelo-palestinien> 10/27/2023 (date of access: 01/04/2024).

“achieving justice in the region.” Let me remind you that a few months before the Iraqi invasion (May 1990), on the initiative of the PLO, a meeting of heads of state and government of Arab countries was held in Baghdad. Syria and Lebanon refused to take part in it, and Morocco, Oman and Algeria sent only government members. At this meeting, Saddam Hussein stated that “some Persian Gulf countries began to produce oil in excess of the quotas established by OPEC, as a result of which the price of a barrel of oil fell to \$7, while the agreed price of one barrel of oil was \$18... Saddam Hussein noted that a drop in the price of each barrel by just one dollar means Iraq’s loss of \$1 billion annually. This, in his opinion, in the current economic conditions for Iraq was tantamount to an “act of war”” [Invasion..., 2010].

Later, participants in an emergency meeting of Arab foreign ministers in Cairo, when discussing the current situation, demonstrated their agreement with UN Security Council resolutions (Nos. 660, 661, 662), which recorded the requirement to immediately withdraw Iraqi troops to positions held before the invasion (as of August 1 1990). However, there was no unity among the summit participants in assessing the conflict. In particular, the Maghreb countries and Oman avoided participating in the meeting.

This can be explained by the fact that in the 80s of 20th century new trends emerged in the foreign policy of Arab countries. A bloc of moderate Arab states was formed, integration processes intensified, which resulted in the emergence of new regional associations (Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Persian Gulf – 1981, Council of Arab Cooperation and the Arab Maghreb Union – 1989). Palestinian delegation was on the Iraqi side, which is explained by the fact that Baghdad motivated its actions against Kuwait as the first step towards the creation of a Palestinian state. The Palestinians were supported by Islamist organizations, which viewed Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait as jihad against the United States.

But for countries where the Palestinian presence was significant, a difficult situation arose. First of all, for Jordan, where a large number of Palestinians gradually resettled, as a result of which by the early 2000s the majority of the population of this country are of Palestinian origin. King Hussein of Jordan refrained from condemning Iraq's actions. The neighboring kingdom of Saudi Arabia imposed a ban on Palestinians entering its territory. In addition, Saudi Arabia punished Yemen for its openly pro-Iraqi position by abandoning the Yemeni workforce, whose earnings constituted a significant part of the budget of the Yemeni state [Abilov..., 2007].

After the liberation of Kuwait (February 1991), repressions against Palestinians began in the country and about 200 thousand Palestinians were forced to leave the country. An exodus of Palestinians was also observed from neighboring countries of the Arabian Peninsula. Most of them (150 thousand) moved to Jordan [Secret ethnic..., 2015].

Palestinian Refugees in the Kingdom of Jordan

Jordan remains a unique example in the Arab world in terms of demographics, geography and culture. After the *Nakba*³ of 1948, the percentage of Palestinians (with, partially or without Jordanian citizenship) in this country remains the highest in the world: today it is already about 70 per cent of the population. Some of them have refugee status, some have received Jordanian passports. However, Palestinians who arrived later, after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, do not have the full scope of rights.

After the 1967 war, Jordan received the largest number of Palestinian refugees. At that time, King Hussein, accepting Palestinian refugees, was guided, first of all, by the desire to include all Palestinian lands in his state. To resettle Palestinians in the country, thirteen official refugee camps were created in five different governorates, which still exist [Hzaïne L. ..., 2023]. According to UNRWA⁴ data for 2023, the number of Palestinians

registered as refugees in camps in Jordan is estimated at approximately 2.2 million people [Hzaineh L. ..., 2023].

UNRWA provides social, educational and health services in ten of the thirteen camps, but does not provide or supervise security, which is the responsibility of host country authorities. The most famous of these camps are: Zarqa (founded by the International Committee of the Red Cross - ICRC - in 1949), which is located in the city of Zarqa. The Jebel al-Hussein camp (founded in 1952) is located directly in the capital of Jordan in Amman. According to UNRWA, it is seriously overpopulated. Baqaa camp, the largest in area (1.4 sq km), like Jerah camp, was established in 1968. The camps are run by UNRWA, which controls schools where political activity is prohibited. In particular, information about the Palestinian issue is excluded from the school curriculum.

From 1956 to 1970, the headquarters of the Palestine Liberation Organization was in Jordan. It is known that the Palestinian leadership initially tried to settle in Egypt, but Egyptian President G.A. Nasser, realizing that this threatened the country to be drawn into another conflict with Israel, refused Arafat. The PLO settled in Jordan, and it soon became clear that its presence threatened the very existence of the kingdom.

Without going into the intricacies of the Palestinians living in Jordan (which they consider part of the territory of historical Palestine), it should be noted that their stay in this country was marked by a number of events that negatively affected the social climate in the country. In 1970 (from September 16 to 27), a conflict occurred between militants of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Jordanian armed forces, called "Black September,"⁵ about 150 thousand Palestinians were forced to leave Jordan. The PLO, along with its leadership, was expelled from the country on the grounds that it posed a threat to national security. After this, the process of "Jordanization" of the state began in the country. There are fewer and fewer Palestinians in the military and administrative structures and more and more

Jordanians (primarily people from Bedouin tribes) who occupy high positions in the army. The Palestinians retained control of the private sector.

However, some Palestinians (those who moved to Jordan in the late 1950s) received citizenship of this country, which suggests that Jordan was the only Arab country to fully integrate the Palestinian refugees of 1948. Today they form a significant part of the intelligentsia, as well as the commercial and entrepreneurial bourgeoisie of the country.

Jordan does not possess any significant mineral resources. The country's mineral resources are represented by large deposits of phosphates, potash, limestone and marble, as well as dolomite, kaolin and salt. Jordan is one of the world leaders in potash salt production. It is one of the top ten global manufacturers. Significant reserves of phosphates are used in the chemical industry, as well as in the production of fertilizers. It is known that there is even oil in the depths of Jordan, but it lies at a depth of 5–7 thousand meters. Oil production at such a depth is practically impossible due to the high cost of equipment [Laskaris..., 2018].

Until recently, it received financial assistance from the United States annually. The focus on the United States is explained by the fact that the kingdom sees it as a protector against Israel. For the United States, Jordan, due to its geographical location, is a convenient place for a military presence in the region: an agreement was signed between the United States and Jordan on the access of American armed forces to the country's military facilities. In addition, the US Air Force has the right to use local airports for its needs.

The US is Jordan's largest donor. So, in 2013–2015 Washington has allocated \$3.75 billion in loans to Amman [Laskaris..., 2018]. For 2023, the United States has planned assistance in the amount of \$1.45 billion [Biden announced..., 2022].

Unlike most Arab states, Jordan maintains relations with Israel. In 1994, the kingdom signed a peace treaty and diplomatic relations were established with Israel⁶, which was dictated by economic problems. This allowed Jordan, the second most water-stressed country in the world, to receive 35 million cubic meters of water from Israel annually. Before this, in the 1980s, Jordan wanted to build a dam on the Yarmouk River (a tributary of the Jordan River). But after threats from Israel, Jordan was forced to abandon the project [Amiot H. ..., 2018].

In 2017, as a result of drought, the Yarmouk River (a tributary of the Jordan River) became shallow, and at the same time, water reserves in Jordan's reservoirs dried up, reducing to one-fifth of the required volume [In Jordan..., 2017]. Since 2021, due to the worsening climate situation, the volume of water received from Israel has been doubled [What Israel..., 2021]. Against the backdrop of drought, which has been observed in the region for several years, Jordan's agreement with Israel was the only possible solution to replenish the water shortage.

In 2016, an agreement was signed on the import of gas from Israel⁷, the direct injection of which began only in 2020. Jordanian citizens responded to this with protests and demanded the cancellation of this agreement. Many demonstrations were organized under the slogan "The enemy's gas is occupation."

At the 2021 Dubai Expo, Israel and Jordan signed an agreement to exchange desalinated water for solar energy. It is expected that Jordan will export about 600 megawatts of electricity generated by solar energy, in turn, Israel will transfer up to 200 million cubic meters of desalinated water to Jordan [Israel, Jordan, UAE..., 2021].

Part of the Palestinian population still has a negative attitude towards the leadership of the country that sheltered them. At one time, there were attempts to assassinate King

Hussein (1970). Let me also remind you that it was the Palestinian Mustafa Ashu who, on July 20, 1951, shot and killed the first king of Jordan, Abdullah I ibn Hussein (1882-1951), on the threshold of the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.

Researchers note that there is no consensus in the country between three population groups – Bedouins, Circassians and Palestinians. Moreover, the first two groups are considered “indigenous”. People of Bedouin origin are considered “the purest Arab stock”, and they are also related to the Saudi tribes. Note that a feature of Arab society is the great importance of tribal ties. In Jordan, these connections extend to the Arabian Nej, which predetermines many steps of the Jordanian ruler. And since some tribes have family ties with the Arabian tribes (even the Anaza tribe, where the Saudi dynasty comes from), this puts them in a privileged position.

In recent years, tribal leaders have repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with the deteriorating economic situation in the country. In July 2022, the sheikhs of the largest tribes (Haweitat, Majali, Abadi and Bani Hasan) gathered for a closed meeting where they criticized the king for his economic policies, harassment of political activists and the luxurious life of his family [Jordan’s tribal..., 2022]⁸.

Not all the reforms undertaken by the king are liked by the Bedouins, and then the tribes begin to turn to Saudi Arabia. Relations between the tribes of Jordan and Saudi Arabia have never been interrupted, but since 1996 they have intensified. As Hannah Jaber, a researcher at the Lokman Slim Foundation, notes, the Saudis sometimes resort to political pressure [Entretien avec Hana’ Jaber..., 2021]. This is explained by the fact that at one time “an agreement was concluded with the Bedouin tribes: to accept the monarchy, in exchange for the fact that a new generation of people from the tribes would have wide access to work in the army and in the administration. At the same time, to structure the state at the senior leadership level, King Abdullah I

(the first king of Jordan) attracted prominent figures from Syria” [Entretien avec Hana’ Jaber..., 2021]⁹.

However, Jordan’s relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, despite the presence of related tribes, were not always cloudless.

At one time, Saudi Arabia was a major investor in the construction of road infrastructure in Jordan [What do Saudi Arabia..., 2022]. Khaled Shneikat, head of the Jordanian Society of Political Sciences, assessing the nature of Jordanian-Saudi relations, notes: “Saudi Arabia recognizes the importance of Jordan and the need for its stability in an unstable region. Jordan is a buffer for the Saudis from Syria and Israel, and that is why it is extremely important to ensure security inside Jordan” [What do Saudi Arabia..., 2022].

As for the Circassians [Kushkhabiev..., 2012]¹⁰, their resettlement from the Caucasus to the Ottoman Empire took place in the second half of the 19th century¹¹. This process lasted several decades; in Jordan the Circassians themselves cite 1903 as the date of their settlement on the lands of present-day Jordan. From the very beginning, they encountered local Bedouins, who saw them as supporters of Ottoman power. Istanbul, by resettling the Caucasians, hoped to thereby establish control over the Bedouin and Druze tribes of Southern Syria. In addition, Caucasians were used to guard the Hijaz railway, which was being built at that time. Its route followed the traditional routes of pilgrimage caravans, which undermined the economic base of the Bedouins in the area.

In March 1921, in the territory east of the river Jordan, under the British protectorate, the Emirate of Transjordan was created, led by Emir Abdallah from the Hashemite dynasty. Under these conditions, the Circassians relied on the support of the king, and repeatedly proved their loyalty to him. After the formation of the independent Hashemite Kingdom in 1946, the king granted significant privileges to the former highlanders.

The Circassian Guard was formed, which until recently was the guarantor of the security of the ruling dynasty.

* * *

For more than half a century, Jordan has faced the enormous challenge of forming a national identity that could satisfy all citizens. A French orientalist Delphine Froment notes that even King Abdullah I tried to create “a hybrid identity based on four fundamental ideas: recognition of the monarchy with the king being the symbol of Jordan; an identity that will represent and express Arabism, making Jordan a refuge for all Arabs and giving it a mediating role in the region; commitment to peace and justice for Palestine, a Palestinian cause to which Jordan has always been committed; unity of two communities” [Froment D. ..., 2013].

However, the very idea of “Jordanization” of identity causes rejection among Palestinians, as it leads to the disappearance of the very concept of “Palestine¹²”. In turn, “indigenous” Jordanians of Bedouin origin the Palestinians view as a threat. Firstly, because of their demographic and economic weight; and secondly, because they fear Palestinian nationalist claims against Israel that threaten the security of Jordan.

The difficult economic situation led to Jordan taking third place in the number of militants who joined the ranks of the Islamic State (more than 3 thousand people). The International Center for the Study of Extremism in its report for 2017 noted that the reason for the participation of people from Jordan in ISIS is unemployment, especially among young people [Unemployment level..., 2023]. But at the same time, this indicates that Islamist ideas are popular among the Palestinians. Let me remind you that the terrorist organization “Al Qaeda in Iraq” (banned in the Russian Federation) was headed by Jordanian al-Zarqawi (1966–2006).

After a number of terrorist attacks, both in Iraq and abroad (including in Jordan itself: three explosions in Amman hotels in

November 2005), as well as threats against the king, the government introduced criminal liability for participation in terrorist organizations. A training center for combating terrorism was even created. Jordanian intelligence services monitored the situation within Palestinian society, and as a result, the government resorted to measures to revoke the Jordanian citizenship of some Palestinians. These actions were condemned by the Jordanian public. Human Rights Watch prepared a report on Jordan's discriminatory measures against Palestinians. In recent years, the government has repeatedly organized deportations of Palestinians who fled Syria.

Thus, within Jordanian society the Palestinian problem remains an irritating factor. Confirmation of the continuing negativism is the attitude towards the wife of King Abdullah. Queen Rania is a Palestinian who migrated with her parents from Kuwait. The Queen is the mother of 4 children, including Crown Prince Hussein bin Abdullah, who recently joined the Saudi dynasty through his marriage to Rajwa al-Hussein, a woman from the Sudairi clan, an influential Arabian family that has occupied an important position in the kingdom's political system since its creation. The founder of the Saudi dynasty, King Abdul Aziz, several crown princes and the current King Salman were married to women of this family.

Queen Rania is very influential, surrounded by an elite of businessmen of Palestinian origin. She is accused of excessive patronage of Palestinians living in Jordan. The hostility towards her culminated in an ugly scene that occurred during a football match when fans, called "*faisali*" (who represent the indigenous Bedouin tribes of Jordan), addressed the king, who was present in the box of honor, chanting: Talaq laha! Talaq laha! (divorce her!).

The number of Palestinians in Jordan exceeds 2 million people (exact statistics are unknown), and the majority hold

Jordanian passports and enjoy citizenship rights, but they are prohibited from holding positions in the security service, army or other senior positions in the Jordanian government [Entretien avec Hana'..., 2021]¹³. The most difficult case remains that of Palestinians holding temporary Jordanian passports who have neither a national identification number nor Jordanian citizenship. Some of them also do not have Palestinian documents and are stateless [Hzaine L. ..., 2023].

Layla Hzaineh, a Palestinian researcher, notes that "The difference between Palestinians and Jordanians becomes apparent when you come into contact with government agencies or apply for a job. Sometimes they can guess by last name, and the behavior of officials changes" [Hzaineh L. ..., 2023]. In particular, Palestinians are required to renew their driver's licenses annually, while people with a Jordanian passport do so once every ten years. "Native Jordanians" (Bedouins and Circassians) believe that Palestinians have "no loyalty" to the country.

Following the events in Gaza, starting on September 7, 2023, unprecedented weekly demonstrations began in Jordan, taking place every Friday. Demonstrations take place in the city center every Friday after the main prayer in the capital Amman, in addition to demonstrations in front of the Israeli embassy in the Al Rabiye neighborhood (about 20 minutes' drive from the center). Enterprises of foreign (primarily American) companies operating in Jordan were also subject to a boycott. In addition, since the beginning of the events in Gaza, the premises of Starbucks, McDonald's and other American cafes (which are directly targeted by the boycott) have been empty, and street advertising has featured alternative domestic products instead of targeted products. Lists of all companies and products that need to be boycotted due to the brands' support for Israel or their presence in the occupied territories are published on social media. The media are also calling for a boycott of American and European goods in order to replace them with domestic ones.

Videos have become popular in which children in stores ask about the origin of chocolate or juice before purchasing.

Israel and the United States planned to send peacekeepers to the Gaza Strip, but Jordan rejected its participation, explaining this by “reluctance to become enemies of the Palestinians” [Jordan refused..., 2023].

To be continued.

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Notes

1. S. Hussein stated that during the period from 1980 to 1990. Kuwait, through horizontal drilling, pumped \$2.4 billion worth of oil from the Iraqi oil-bearing region of Rumaila.
2. The \$15 billion that Kuwait gave Iraq as a loan was mentioned. It was assumed that the money would go towards strengthening Iraq's defense capabilities.

3. Nakba – (Arabic: النكبة – “catastrophe”) – a concept used in relation to the exodus of about 725 thousand Palestinians after Arab-Israeli War of 1948 – the First Nakba and the Six Day War of 1967 – the Second Nakba.
4. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was created in 1949.
5. “Black September” was an armed conflict between PLO militants and the Jordanian armed forces (September 16–27, 1970), the goal of which was to seize power in the country to continue the confrontation between the PLO and Israel.
6. The agreement made it possible to establish cooperation between Jordan and Israel in matters of economics, health care security, etc. The kingdom also received the right to use the port of Haifa in Israel. In addition, the United States canceled Jordan's debt (\$700 million).
7. We are talking about gas (presumably) obtained from the coastal Leviathan field.
8. The Jordanian media published materials about the elite real estate of the royal family, including 14 residences in the US and Great Britain.
9. The first Prime Minister of the Transjordan Emirate was Rashid Talia (1877–1926), a Lebanese of Druze origin, former Minister of the Interior of Syria.
10. In 2021, the number of Circassians (Adygs) in Jordan was 170 thousand people.
11. Immigrants from the Caucasus (Circassians, Shapsugs, Bzhedugs, Natukhais and Chechens) moved to the Ottoman Empire in the period 1817–1864. Istanbul intended to use them to contain the Bedouins and Arabs. The Circassians themselves cite 1903 as the date of their settlement on the territory of the Jordanian Emirate.
12. Initially, Palestine was a geographical area covering the territory of modern Israel, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, the West Bank and parts of Jordan. This land was inhabited by tribes of Philistines and Phoenicians. Hence the original name “Philistia”.
13. H. Jaber states that “Between 1948 and 1970, the Palestinians were integrated into the administration, including the army (contrary to popular belief, since the “Jordanization” of the state is a late process in the history of the kingdom).”

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