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Forced Migration:
The 1948 Palestinian Refugees

Abstract

During the 1948 Palestine war, more than 700,000 Palestinian Arabs fled or were expelled from their homes, accounting for roughly half of prewar Palestine's Arab population. The exodus was a central component of the Palestinian society's cracks, disempowerment and displacement, known as the Nakba, during which between 400 and 600 Palestinian villages were damaged and others were exposed to the Hebraization of Palestinian place names, and it also relates to the wider period of the conflict itself and the subsequent oppression up to the present day.

The main aim of this research is to define the causes of the 1948 Palestinian exodus, which led to the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem. It also seeks to show the ways that the Nakba has influenced Palestinian history.

This study explores the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, a UN (United Nations) agency that supports Palestinian refugees' relief and human development.

Keywords: *Arab, Palestine, refugees, Nakba, exodus*

Introduction

This article will first address the destruction of the Palestinian society; the beginning of the refugee issue were the other significant outcomes of the 1948 war, in addition to the establishment of the State of Israel, where approximately more than 700,000 Palestinians were ejected from the areas that became the Jewish State and resettled in the territories that became the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as Transjordan, Syria and Lebanon. There were also small communities in Egypt, Iraq and the states of the Arabian Peninsula. At the end of the fighting, fewer than half

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of the Palestinian population – less than 150,000 in Israel, around 400,000 in the West Bank and 60,000 in the Gaza Strip – remained residing in their original homes.[2]

Some categories should be clarified, and some questions, such as: "What are refugees?" should be answered to better grasp the plight of the Palestinian refugees. How does forced migration work? Did the Palestinian Arabs emigrate "voluntarily", under duress or coercion from Arab government officials, or because of the conditions they experienced throughout the war? What is the verified narrative of what happened on May 15 during the war? And is it a war crime?

People who are outside their country of origin because they fear persecution, conflict, widespread violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disrupted public order and require international protection are regarded as refugees, according to the United Nations' definitions of both migrants and refugees.[3] And the term "forced migration" refers to the movements of refugees, internally displaced individuals (those uprooted due to conflicts within their country of origin), as well as individuals uprooted by natural or manufactured disasters, chemical or nuclear accidents, or development projects.[4]

In general, people migrate for economic, political, cultural, or environmental reasons, and there are two types of factors that explain why communities move from one location to another. The first is called a push factor, and it includes things like war, political instability, famine and drought, among others. The second factor called pull factor for a better opportunity include political stability, many jobs, natural resources, better learning institutions and a better climate.[5]

In case of the Palestinian refugees, the rise in the complexity of the issue has been influenced by a variety of factors, including the Arab–Jewish history since 1917, the establishment of the state of Israel, the rejection of a two-state solution by both sides and the Arab fears of coming under Jewish rule. Also, it is vital to note that the Palestinian society was particularly vulnerable to collapse due to structural flaws that existed in that community before the war.[6] Also, they were poorly organised, there were no representative leaders and there were no national institutions such as labour unions, health care, defence, tax collection, etc. Moreover, the Arab economy in Palestine had not been able to make the transition from a primarily agricultural production to an industrialised one, etc.[7]

The Palestinian Nakba

The British colonial power started carrying out its plan to establish a Jewish state on Palestinian territory when the Ottoman Empire fell after World War I and the Palestine Mandate was established. The Zionist movement was simultaneously pressuring

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[2] MORRIS s. a.
[3] UN s. a.a.
[4] Columbia University s. a.
[5] THET 2014.
[6] MASALHA 2005.
[7] MORRIS s. a.

Western governments to encourage the mass immigration of Jews to Palestine and to acknowledge the Jewish people's rightful claim to the region. In the 1917 Balfour Declaration, Britain supported the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine. The statement was made in a letter from Arthur James Balfour, Britain's then Foreign Secretary, to Baron Rothschild, a prominent figure in the British Zionist movement. According to the letter, the British would "make every effort to make this object a reality". This was a resounding triumph for Zionists when on the other side tens of thousands of Palestinians were uprooted from their homes because of Jewish property purchases for Zionist settlement.[8]

When David Ben-Gurion, who is regarded as one of the three founding figures of Zionism along with Chaim Weizmann and Theodor Herzl and is the founder of the State of Israel, made the following declaration in July 1937 that at least several hundred thousand Palestinian Arabs are transferred out of the areas of the Jewish state to be, he said: "I favor the forced transfer of the Palestinian Arab population. I don't see anything unethical about that." He further remarked: "Arabs can be moved more easily than any other group. Arab states can be found all around. And it is obvious that moving the Palestinian Arabs would improve the condition rather than make it worse."[9]

While the Palestinian leadership in Jerusalem pressed for more talks with the British to ease the escalating tensions, the Zionists persisted in advancing their goal of establishing a Jewish state on Palestinian territory. Although the British encouraged large-scale Jewish immigration to Palestine, after a while, they started to restrict Jewish immigration to suppress Arab rebellion. The new immigration cap infuriated Zionists. To push them out, they carried out several terrorist attacks against the British Government. As violence got worse, the British chose to transfer control of Palestine to the newly created United Nations.[10]

The UN General Assembly adopted a plan in November 1947 to divide Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state. Jews made up only one-third of the population in Palestine, the majority of whom had immigrated from Europe a few years earlier, and they controlled less than 5.5% of the country's historic territory. However, they received 55% of the land under the UN proposal. The proposal was rejected by the Palestinians and their Arab supporters.[11]

The Zionist movement accepted it because it gave legitimacy to the notion of a Jewish state on Arab territory. However, they refused to accept the suggested borders and waged a campaign to annex even more of historic Palestine. Even though the British Mandate was still in place, by the beginning of 1948, Zionist armies had seized dozens of towns and cities, forcing thousands of Palestinians to flee. They carried out planned massacres frequently, as the Zionist movement's message was straightforward: Either the Palestinians leave, or they would die.[12]

Zionist forces accelerated their attempts to seize Palestinian land as the British Palestine Mandate's expiration date (14 May 1948) drew near. David Ben-Gurion,

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[8]   Damen 2008.
[9]   Shahak 1989: 22–37.
[10] Damen 2008.
[11] Damen 2008.
[12] Damen 2008.

the President of the Zionist Agency at the time, declared the creation of the state of Israel on the same day that British forces formally departed, leaving the Palestinians without a state. The United States and the Soviet Union, the two superpowers of the world, both recognised Israel right away. Here the Nakba, Arabic for "catastrophe", as the Palestinians refer to this mass expulsion, broke out between nearby Arab nations and the fledgling Zionist state as the Zionists carried out their campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Palestinians.[13]

By 1949, the Israeli military had killed more than 13,000 Palestinians and driven more than 700,000 of them into exile. The United Nations persisted in calling for an armistice agreement to be reached between Israel and the Arab nations it was at war with, and Israel was admitted to the UN in May 1949, solidifying its control over 78% of historic Palestine. The West Bank and Gaza Strip were designated as the remaining 22%. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees waited to go home to refugee camps during this time. The term "Palestine refugees" is defined as: "Persons whose customary place of abode was Palestine during the period of 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost their house and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict."[14]

The main causes of the war

In 1948, several "international and intraregional variables" interacted to produce a complicated situation that served as the starting point for conflict. Israel emerged victorious from the conflict, but its long-lasting effects on both regional politics in the area and global ties are still evident today. It is a complicated subject that has generated much historical discussion. Four key consequences – death, the Palestinian refugee issue, Arab divides and territorial changes – as well as three primary causes – Zionism, Arab nationalism and British foreign policy – must be addressed.[15]

The "deep-rooted biblical tradition" of a declared "land of Israel" where Jewish independence will be restored gave rise to the Classic Zionist idea. Modern political Zionism, however, emerged amid centuries of anti-Semitism and persecution in Europe. Assimilation was rejected as neither desirable nor practicable, and the "ideological underpinning" was founded on the idea that "the Jewish people established a country, and this nationhood ought to be completely embraced". Zionism was also made popular by the idea that the only way to combat anti-Semitism was by "physical isolation from Europe and self-determination".[16]

Palestine was regarded as the "only realistic and permanent solution to the Jewish dilemma" due to its religious and cultural ties to the Land of Israel. Zionism thereby encouraged the idea that Jews had a right to Palestine and strengthened their resolve to strive for self-determination. Furthermore, "a newfound and fierce determination" to find a Jewish state was "produced" because of the Holocaust in Europe.[17]

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[13] Beauchamp 2018.
[14] UN s. a.b.
[15] Kaur Rai 2014.
[16] Kaur Rai 2014.
[17] Shahak 1989: 22–37.

To Arab nationalist radicals, Israel was an opponent not only because of the "injustice against their brethren in Palestine", but also because of its "close association with what it perceived as Western imperialist aspirations towards the region", particularly in terms of oil reserves. As a result, their criticisms and suspicions of the West were confirmed when the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution calling for the establishment of a Jewish state. Arab leaders were perplexed as to why they should have suffered because of the Holocaust. As a result, Arab nationalism was a major cause of the 1948 war because it provided Arab nations with a common goal, allowing them to band together and fight not only Zionism but also Western power.[18]

Another contested cause of the 1948 Arab–Israeli war was the impact of British foreign policy, and thus the United Nations policy in the Middle East. Following World War I, both sides (Zionists and Arab nationalists) "believed the British had promised them Palestine". As a result, there were already inconsistencies in British policy because neither side was sure where they stood. Following WWII, Britain held the mandate for Palestine. However, the situation was "completely transformed" by Nazi Germany's massacre of European Jews. Because of the "wave of sympathy" felt for Europe's persecuted Jews, as well as a sense of responsibility, "Britain came under increasing pressure to permit Jewish immigration into Palestine".[19]

The British found themselves in an impossible situation, caught between two opposing but understandable points of view. As a result, they decided to hand over the problem to the UN and withdrew from Palestine in 1948. The United Nations established a Special Committee for Palestine (UNSCOP), which reached the same conclusion as previous commissions: the Jewish and Arab claims had "equal validity", and "the only viable solution to the conflict was the separation of the two communities". As a result, UNSCOP devised the Partition Plan. This was, of course, problematic, and both Jews and Arabs began to arm themselves. Palestinians opposed the UN partition plan, claiming that it was "inherently biased and ignored Palestinians' legitimate rights".[20]

The 1948 Arab Israeli war had several major consequences. One obvious result was the destruction and loss of life. Not only did soldiers on both sides lose their lives, but innocent people were also killed. Another significant result of the 1948 Arab–Israeli war was the problem of Palestinian refugees. In more details, the Arab defeat had far-reaching consequences. First of all, it demonstrated the Arab League's lack of common goals and cooperation. The Arab governments "all pursued their own objectives", with Transjordan's King Abdullah willing to accept a Jewish state in exchange for territorial gains. As a result, Arab states were divided, with Palestine playing a passive role. Most importantly, the Arab defeat had "significant domestic ramifications". It delegitimised the existing leadership, resulting in revolutions, military coups, and insecurity.[21]

Another result of the Arab–Israeli war was territorial shifts. This was positive for Israel, as it increased its territory by 21% in comparison to the partition resolution

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18 UN s. a.c.
19 Kaur Rai 2014.
20 UN (s. a.c).
21 Kaur Rai 2014.

boundaries. On the other hand, this could be viewed negatively because it increased hostility from Arabs who believed Israel should have no land at all. The Arab states expanded their territory, with Transjordan gaining control of the West Bank and Egypt gaining control of the Gaza Strip. All of this demonstrates that the Arabs intended to expand their power and territory as well. However, due to the Arabs' or Israel's acquisition of land, Palestine "lost any possibility of having their own state".[22]

The creation of the Palestinian refugees

After winning the British Government's approval for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, Zionist forces proclaimed the State of Israel's existence on 14 May 1948, upon the end of the British Mandate. This action precipitated the first Arab–Israeli war. Zionist military forces struck important Palestinian cities between 1947 and 1949 and destroyed almost 530 villages. A series of mass murders, including numerous massacres followed.[23]

Momentous changes occurred in the Palestinian community, which can be classified into four stages. The first occurred between December 1947 and March 1948, when approximately 75,000 Palestinians fled. These families could have settled comfortably in Cairo, Nablus, Amman, or Beirut, and most saw their exile as temporary. Hostilities between Jews and Arabs were only one manifestation of a broader breakdown in law and order in Palestine following the UN General Assembly Partition Resolution. There was also a gradual breakdown of public services and a loss of British authority. The flight of the upper and middle classes resulted in the closure of schools, clinics and hospitals, businesses and offices, resulting in unemployment and poverty. This was the context for the second stage, the mass exodus from overrun Jewish neighbourhoods and rural areas in the spring of 1948.[24]

The primary cause of the April–June mass flight was Jewish military attacks or fear of such an attack. In no case did a population flee its homes in the face of an attack, brutal expulsion, or deliberate harassment. The decline and flight from major cities spread pessimism and despair to surrounding villages. Flight from one clan led to a flight from neighbouring clans in the countryside, and a flight from one village to a flight from neighbouring villages. Specially the echo of the massacre in Deir Yassin on April 9, augmented by Arab atrocity propaganda about what happened there, and some were intimidated by propaganda disseminated by Haganah agents, the main Zionist paramilitary organisation of the Jewish population in Mandatory Palestine between 1920 and 1948 when it became the core of the Israel Defense Forces.[25]

The Arab commanders in some areas ordered villagers to evacuate to clear the ground for military purposes. As a result of this order, more than a half-dozen villages just north of Jerusalem and in the lower Galilee were abandoned during those months. During the second stage of the exodus, two to three hundred thousand Palestinians

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22   KAUR RAI 2014.
23   HADDAD 2022.
24   MORRIS s. a.
25   MORRIS s. a.

fled their homes. Later, lots of abandoned villages were razed or mined, or later filled with new Jewish immigrants; abandoned urban neighbourhoods were filled with new Jewish immigrants; fields were set on fire, landowners still in place were urged to sell out and leave, and new settlements were established on Arab sites and began cultivating the abandoned fields.[26]

In the third and fourth stages of the mass migration, in July and October–November 1948, approximately 300,000 more Palestinian Arabs fled and not only due to the military attacks or expulsion that were the primary cause of flight, but also the exodus was the result of a cumulative process and a set of causes: months of sniping and bombing, bad business, extortion by Arab irregulars, the collapse of law and order and the gradual withdrawal of the British, Haganah attacks, fear of living under Jewish rule, isolation among clusters of Jewish settlements, a sense of being cut off from Palestinian centres.[27]

From April 1948 until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, there was pressure on the Yishuv (the body of Jewish residents in the Land of Israel prior to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948) to allow refugees to return. The pressure was exerted by Arab leaders who demanded repatriation. Furthermore, Western pressure resulted in two Israeli offers to allow some repatriation as part of a larger peace settlement. In July 1949, Israel stated that it would return "100,000" Palestinians if Arab states agreed to resettle the remainder in their own lands and reach a peace settlement. Alternatively, Israel may be willing to absorb the Gaza Strip's population by incorporating it into its territories.[28]

The Arabs saw the offer as far too low, and most Arab states demanded that Israel return all refugees, while Egypt refused to hand over the Gaza Strip. During the years that followed, the refugees rejected efforts to resettle them in Arab states, and the Arab states did little to absorb them. Israel refused to let them return, both because it needed the abandoned lands and houses for new immigrants and because it was concerned about the refugees' potential for destabilisation, so the problem lingered in the Middle East, and indeed the world.[29]

After the 1948 Arab–Israeli War, Israel and Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria formed an armistice deal in January 1949, ending the hostilities. The Green Line, also known as the 1949 Armistice Line, is the internationally recognised border between Israel and the West Bank. The (pre-) 1967 borders are another name for the Green Line. It served as the de facto border of the State of Israel from 1949 until the Six-Day War in 1967.[30]

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[26]   Morris s. a.
[27]   Morris s. a.
[28]   Morris s. a.
[29]   Morris s. a.
[30]   Haddad 2022.

The role of UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency)

In order to provide humanitarian aid to the more than 700,000 refugees and displaced people who had been forced to flee their homes in Palestine as a result of the 1948 Arab–Israeli war, the United Nations General Assembly established the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) by resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949. A human development and humanitarian services include emergency response, microfinance, primary and vocational education, medical services, relief and social services, infrastructural and camp development, and primary health care, especially in armed conflict circumstances, movement restrictions, the wall between the two countries, property seizures, and home demolitions are all issues that hinder UNRWA's ability to execute its job.[31]

The Agency's operations started in May 1950, despite initial predictions that it would not last long. But even though there is not a comprehensive answer to the Palestine refugee issue, the General Assembly has continuously extended UNRWA's mandate. Today, the organisation did a lot of achievements such as reaching 1M refugees in Gaza access food aid, 438K refugees impacted by the conflict in Syria, 1.9 M refugees access health services, 545K student, 400K refugees supported by social safety net and 5.8M registered refugees covered.[32]

The Agency's human development, humanitarian and protection work is centred on eradicating poverty and upholding human rights, two of the key tenets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UNRWA actively contributes to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda by making investments in the human capital of Palestine refugees. The following Sustainable Development Goals are at the heart of UNRWA's activity because it is the largest direct service provider to Palestine refugees in its operational areas, namely Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the occupied Palestinian territory. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well-Being, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Reduced Inequalities, Climate Action and Partnerships.[33]

UNRWA offers some degree of protection to Palestine refugees in its area of operations through its primary programs of relief and human development as well as its variety of interventions with state authorities. However, it is not part of the UNRWA's mandate and is instead the responsibility of the parties to the dispute and other political players to find a comprehensive solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the Palestine refugee crisis.[34]

UN Member States, notably regional governments, and the European Union, generously fund UNRWA. Together, these sources account for around 93% of the Agency's funding. In addition to programs assisting Palestine refugees in other multi-sectorial sectors, sister UN agencies collaborate with UNRWA to contribute their knowledge and expertise, strengthening the UN system in the region. These partnerships have

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[31] UN 2006.
[32] UN 2006.
[33] UNRWA s. a.a.
[34] UN 2006.

a $15 million economic value in 2021. It also collaborates with firms and foundations, ranging from big global corporations to tiny local tech startups; each collaboration is customised to maximise the benefits for both parties and make the greatest use of our partners' skills.[35]

Also, they collaborate closely with local NGOs and small community-based groups, utilising each group's distinct assets and skills to provide Palestine refugees with high-quality services. Operating in a resource-restricted environment, and dependent on volunteer assistance, UNRWA distributes its limited resources among the programs offered to Palestine refugees, giving the most vulnerable people's needs priority. Focusing on spending 58% on education, 15% health, 13% support services, 6% relief and social services and 4% infrastructure and camp improvements.[36]

For several years, UNRWA has been undergoing renovation. With more than 30,000 employees spread across five operational areas, the Agency is one of the largest UN programs and is unique in that it provides services directly to beneficiaries. The Agency constantly strives to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of its operations by recognising opportunities, taking advantage of those opportunities, and mitigating risks and challenges. There are two UNRWA headquarters: one in Gaza and Amman. The Agency operates field offices in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, as well as liaison offices in New York, Washington, Brussels and Cairo in each of its operational areas.[37]

Two resolutions of the UN General Assembly have endorsed the humanitarian principles, which serve as a framework for all parties engaged in humanitarian action. The Humanitarian Principles not only direct the work as an organisation with a humanitarian mandate – namely, to aid and defend Palestine refugees – but also make it possible. The values of humanism, neutrality, impartiality and independence are at the core of all UNRWA operations, from safeguarding the sanctity of our shelters in times of crisis to maintaining access to the most vulnerable populations to campaigning on behalf of Palestine refugees. Centralisation, Modernisation and Transparency will be the Agency's top priorities for Humanitarian Principles programmes starting in 2020 to improve oversight and integration of these fundamental values.[38]

Conclusion

The Middle East has suffered the most of any region on the planet. The 1948 Arab–Israeli war was the first brutal and hostile battle, triggered by Israel's declaration of independence on 14 May 1948.[39] Unsurprisingly, the beginning of the Palestinian refugee dilemma is remembered very differently by Palestinians and Israelis. While Palestinians perceive a years-long, deliberate Jewish plan to ethnically cleanse Palestine

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[35] UNRWA s. a.b.
[36] UNRWA s. a.c.
[37] UNRWA s. a.d.
[38] UNRWA s. a.e.
[39] Kaur Rai 2014.

of Arabs, Israelis frequently blame Arab armies, unlucky military incidents, or spontaneous Arab fleeing.

After examining Zionism, Arab nationalism and British foreign policy as three major causes of the 1948 Arab–Israeli war, as well as three major consequences of the war, it is possible to conclude that the 1948 Arab–Israeli war was a complex conflict with origins. Also, the effects of the First and Second World Wars influenced British foreign policy in handing over the Palestine Mandate to the UN, which resulted in Israel's declaration of independence. This declaration sparked outrage among Jews and Arabs alike, triggering the war. And even today, the consequences of this war have had a devastating impact on Middle Eastern politics. According to Hinchcliffe, "while major military confrontation between Israel and its Arab neighbors has not occurred since 1982", the "absence of meaningful peace" has persisted until the end of the century.[40]

In case of the Palestinian refugees, there is still a demand in peace negotiations for justice for these refugees, most usually expressed as a "right of return" to the homes their ancestors fled in 1948. But giving up either its Jewish or democratic identity would be necessary for Israel to recognise the right of return. Therefore, one of the key concerns in negotiations is producing a solution to the refugee problem that both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples can agree on.[41]

Finally, according to international law, refugees have the right to return to their homes and property from which they have been exiled, and there are currently almost six million registered Palestinian refugees residing in at least 58 camps spread throughout Palestine and adjacent countries who are still hopeful about moving back to their homeland because even the Arab states did not do much to take in the refugees until this unresolved refugee issue is considered the world's longest-running case.[42]

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[40]   Kaur Rai 2014.
[41]   Beauchamp 2018.
[42]   Haddad 2022.

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