

The Effects of the 1948 Arab Israeli war on Palestinians:

[The Arab Israeli War in 1948](#)

obliterated the Palestinian landscape, destroyed 531 villages, uprooted 800,000 people, and resulted in millions of Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP).ⁱ Jewish military forces such as Haganah, Irgun and Stern Gang instilled fear in Arab villagers as a tactic used to depopulate villages in order to create a Jewish National home. This was done through means of cleansing and harassing eventually leading to a total expulsion from their homeland. Several massacres in villages such as Dawaymeh, Sa'sa and Deir Yassin were horrific to the extent that babies' skulls were cracked open, men were killed and women were raped and burned alive in front of their families.ⁱⁱ In 1948, the village of Sa'sa, fifteen inhabitants was slaughtered including five children. Many were left injured. Israeli air attacks caused collateral damage to many villages, erasing

Palestinian history and geography by demolishing all the houses, reshaping borderlines and building Jewish *Kibbutz* (farms) on top of these ruins.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Refugee Problem:

On May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was created establishing a Jewish national home. Although 1948 is known as Israeli Independence Day, Palestinians commemorate 1948 as the *Nakba* (Catastrophe). Ilan Pappé, an Israeli Historian at Haifa University, in his book, [The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine](#) asserts that Palestinians were victims of the 1948 ethnic cleansing operation.^{iv} Pappé refers to UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) definition of ethnic cleansing which includes 'separation of men from women, detention of men, explosion of houses' and subsequently repopulating the remaining houses with another ethnic group."^v As a result, this is what occurred in historic Palestine. The Israeli government

evicted the indigenous Arab population, by breaking up families and social relations, destroying their villages and creating Jewish settlements or natural forests.^{vi} Arabs were resettled in camps in neighboring countries and were prevented repatriation because Israel felt that if they accept the return of refugees, it would politically destabilize the Jewish state.^{vii} Pappé stated that in 1948, “85% of the Palestinians living in the areas that became the state of Israel became refugees. It is estimated that there were more than 7 million [Palestinian refugees](#) and displaced persons at the beginning of 2003.”^{viii} Most of the refugees were expelled to Jordanian and Lebanese camps such as [Naher al-Bared](#), a refugee camp near Tripoli Lebanon, Rashidiyya camp near Tyre, and [Shatila Camp](#) in Southern Lebanon as figure 1.1 shows.^{ix}

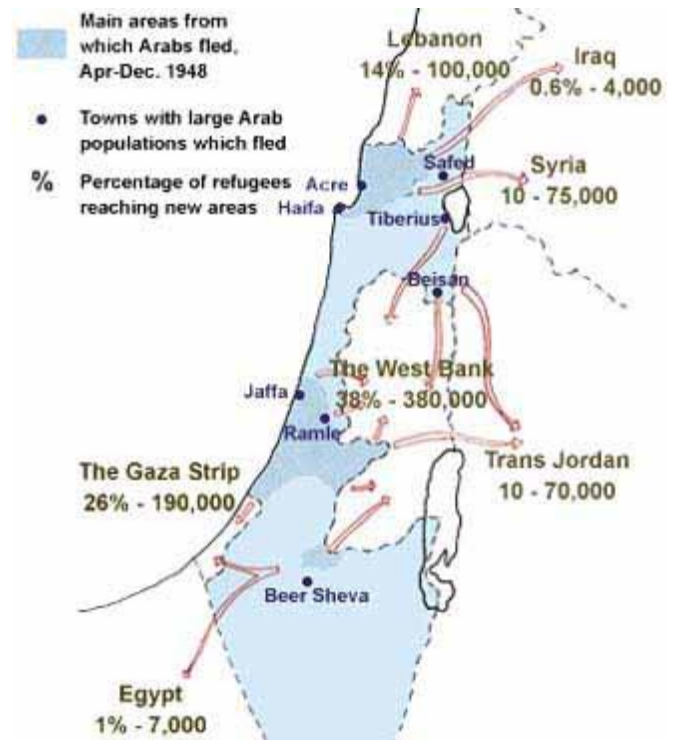


Figure 1.1

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/images/refuge.jpg>

Rashidiyya Camp:

Although Jewish armed forces attempted to erase Palestinian geography by renaming Arab villages to Hebrew names, constructing new Israeli towns, factories and farms and replacing mosques with nature parks in efforts to instill Jewish nationalism, [Palestinian refugees](#) continue to hold attachments to their homeland by reshaping their national and cultural identity in their everyday practices in hope for a possible

return to their birthplace.^x For instance, it is common for older generations to share their stories with their grandchildren of how life was like for a Palestinian before 1948. Oral history does not only act as a tool of memory for older crowds, but it creates the child's national identity.

Rashdiyya Camp in Lebanon is a perfect case in point. The camp's physical landscape signifies the growth of Palestinian nationalism in refugee camps. Palestinians express their hope to return to their homes by displaying murals, posters and flags which clearly portrays their attempts to produce and reproduce Palestinian national identity.^{xi} For example figure 1.2 shows the rise of Palestinian activism in camps with the use of graffiti art on camp walls that state, "Freedom for Palestine" which clearly designates how art can spark the growth of nationalism.



Figure 1.2 <http://img.ibtimes.com/www/data/images/full/2012/03/23/252716-palestinian-girls-walk-past-a-graffiti-at-dehaishe-refugee-camp-in-bet.jpg>

Geographer Adam Ramadan in his article, "A Refugee Landscape: Writing Palestinian Nationalism in Lebanon," gathers evidence of several Palestinian camps, including Rashdiyya camp, through intense readings of these landscapes. He shows a few images that portray how Palestinians reproduced their national identity. Figure 1.3 is a prime example. This image stood out on one of the central roads into the upper part of Rashdiyya camp in Southern Lebanon on June 11, 2005 that states, 'no homeland for the Palestinian people except Palestine.'^{xii} This catchphrase is written within the borders of a Palestinian flag, while Yasser Arafat, Palestinian former

President, looks at the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.^{xiii} This illustration symbolizes the desire for repatriation. It also recreates national memory for the refugees. In the perspective of [Palestinian refugees](#), the camp is only temporary as they wait to return to their homes. However, regardless of this, the camp's physical landscape created a mini-homeland which helped refugees to create a sense of belonging.^{xiv}



Figure 1.3 Adam Ramadan, "A Refugee Landscape: Writing Palestinian Nationalisms in Lebanon," *School of Geography*, Oxford: University of Oxford, 70.

Another method used to reproduce Palestinian identity was the establishment of nationalist movements such as the [PLO \(Palestinian Liberation Organization\)](#)

Militant political activist groups such as the PLO attempted to liberate the homeland from Israel's control.^{xv} Martyrs among this group were honored on camp walls through posters or graffiti drawings. Another example is the symbolic image of the [Kuffeiyah](#) (figure 1.4), which was a headscarf initially worn by Palestinian *fellahin* (peasants) before 1948. However, the [kuffeiyeh](#) now holds a more national significance than cultural.



Google

Figure 1.4 A *kuffiyeh* is a symbol of Palestinian nationalism. Its colors black and white are linked with Fatah, a Palestinian political activist group.

Palestinian refugees usually hold onto their old house keys as a way of remembering their identity and homes. Ramadan states, "A key (an important symbol of the lost home, keys from

Palestine have been saved a venerated by many Palestinians in exile until today), the map (the lost homeland) and the word ‘*intifada*’ (uprising) holds the key to the Palestinians’ return to their homeland.^{xvi} Not only does this image symbolize the desire for repatriation, but the key is also used as evidence that this refugee once settled in what is now Israel as shown in figure 1.5.^{xvii}



Figure 1.5

<http://3.bp.blogspot.com/gfbEg9M4xmE/UfSeOcPbdXI/AAAAAAAAD8/3xhHwehczfQ/s320/Filistin%2Bkey.jpg>

The camp’s physical landscape reproduces memories of Palestine before and after 1948. For some, Palestine lives in their memories, but for most Palestine exist in their everyday practices. Mothers used to

describe the beauty of Palestine to her children as though it looked like heaven and expressed the fact they, too, were Palestinians.^{xviii} It is important to note, however, that reproducing Palestinian national identity by reforming the camp’s landscape was not to divert [Palestinian refugees](#) from what was realistically happening, the loss of homes, lives, the harsh conditions and violence Palestinians faced as a result of the *Nakba*.^{xix} Nevertheless, the visuals of these repeated symbols indicate that this space is Palestine and it automatically turns into a national space regardless if this it is under Lebanese rule. It also instills the thought that they are Palestinian. Finally, it sparks a nationalist cause and movement and that is to return to their origins.^{xx}

The Living Conditions of Refugees in Lebanon:

By the summer of 1948, approximately 250,000 Palestinians were

dispossessed. The number increased to about one million in mid-July.^{xxi} Palestinian refugees traveled across borders to neighboring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria and into the Gaza Strip and West Bank. They commuted by buses, taxis, boats and by foot as shown in figure 1.6.^{xxii} Figure 1.7 and 1.8 evidently show the living conditions of Palestinian refugees in these cramped and unhygienic camps. It was dreadful to the extent that there was extreme poverty, food and water scarcity, power outages and little outside communication. Tents would often have holes, infestation of bugs and muddy beds. Barbed wire fences surrounded camps, which were often monitored by Lebanese authorities as though Palestinians were prisoners. Camp dwellers had to place their names on a list every time they left the camp and were expected to return promptly.^{xxiii} Each tent was the size of a cubicle. Families lacked privacy to the degree in which only a blanket separated the families.^{xxiv}



Figure 1.6 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_refugees



Figure1.7<http://cdn.greenprophet.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/refugee-camp-lebanon-al-jazeera560x315.jpg>



Figure 1.8

<http://ww3.hdnux.com/photos/12/10/01/2654294/8/628x471.jpg>

Lebanese State Restrictions on

Palestinian Refugees:

The ethnic cleansing of Palestine, in addition to the severe restrictions imposed by the Lebanese added to the refugee struggle. Palestinians felt out of place, and their identity was often threatened. Not only were they denied citizenship, but they were confronted with Lebanese checkpoints. The idea of checkpoints and the role of identity cards was a constant reminder that Palestinians were trespassers.^{xxv} Identity was also dynamic. Palestinians who scattered to other countries still identified themselves as Palestinians from categories of place. For instance, a Palestinian living in Kuwait would be referred to as “Palestinians of Kuwait.” This clearly implies that Palestinian identity relied on space in creating their identities.^{xxvi}

Although Palestinians were living under harsh conditions and were discriminated against by Lebanese

authorities, Palestinians felt that leaving the camps would be the same as erasing their identity since they felt a connection between the camps and their right to return to their homeland. Unfortunately, this was just the case when Palestinians were forced to leave the camps in search of an affordable living space when the price of rent increased after Shiite and Syrian workers settled in the camps. Zeina Halabi, in her article, “Exclusion and Identity in Lebanon’s Palestinian Refugee Camps: A Story of Sustained Conflict,” states “The Palestinian refugees, therefore, faced an impasse between Lebanese legislation, which refused them settlement in Lebanon, and the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, which refused them the right of return.”^{xxvii} Palestinians had no choice, but to remain within the camps.

Refugees, under Lebanese state legislation, were denied human rights. They were not allowed to access Lebanese public

schools. Instead they could only access schools provided by the UNRWA. Furthermore, Lebanese authorities restricted Palestinians from ownership of land and housing. Halabi states that under Lebanese labor laws, Palestinians were considered “stateless foreigners” and were denied work permits and forbidden from working 73 professions in Lebanon.^{xxviii}

In refugee camps, as populations increase so did poverty. Some factors that led to poverty were relentless restrictions on residency, employment and travel.^{xxix} It was common for children to play barefoot in the streets, for unemployed men to spend most of their time in coffee shops while women were indoors taking care of house chores^{xxx}. Unfortunately, Palestinians were prone to violence, harassment and insults. Rape accounts grew within the camps, with most sexual assaults were committed by young Syrian men.^{xxxi} They also worked in sex trade forcing Palestinian women into

prostitution. Moreover, expired cans were being sold in markets. Drugs and pornographic magazines were openly sold in these markets which made them easily accessible to children.^{xxxii}

UN Relief Agencies:

Although refugees were severely restricted under Lebanese sovereignty, relief agencies such as UN International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and UN Reliefs and Works Agency (UNRWA) provided refugees with shelter, medical aid, education and economic opportunities. The role of women shifted socially and politically.^{xxxiii} Peteet stated, “With mass schooling, particularly of elementary age children, women’s daily routine began to revolve around the school schedule. In pre-1948 Palestine, women’s time had been organized around agricultural labor and the production of consumable foodstuffs and household management and childbearing. The daily routine followed a pattern set by

the seasons, the demands of agriculture and infant care. Preparing children for school was another choice added to their daily agenda. Older daughters were called on to help in the preparations, which sometimes had the effect of reducing their time for school.^{xxxiv} Women also made friends in the camp bakeries where they learnt new recipes and interacted with women from various camps.^{xxxv}

Teachers from UNRWA cautiously incorporated Palestinian themes in their core curriculum because they understood that the youth were politically active in the Palestinian cause. Schools were also used as a means of interaction. It brought children from different villages together, which prior to 1948 would have had few chances to know each other due to restrictions imposed by social classes.^{xxxvi} Although UNRWA suggested building brick homes, many refugees were cynical and thought that improving their living conditions would

imply that their refugee status would be permanent. Palestinian refugees continued thinking that the camps were temporary and that they would soon return to their villages.

Current Status of Palestinian exodus:

The [Palestinian exodus](#) still exists today. Palestinians are still confronted with harsh living conditions under both foreign rule in refugee camps and under Israeli military occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. According to UNRWA's statistic of registered refugees, there are over five million refugees in 58 camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. UN relief agencies still provide education and health services to refugees. As of January 2012, more than 32,000 refugees in Lebanese camps were enrolled in schools. [Palestinian refugees](#) are still waiting for repatriation. In the meantime, they are relying on inadequate supplies as a means of survival. Although they are anticipating the moment of return,^{xxxvii} the camp's physical

landscape correlates with Palestinian national and cultural identity and recollections and this continues to motivate [Palestinian refugees](#) to strive for basic human rights.

See Also:

- [1948 Palestine War](#)
- [List of villages depopulated during Arab-Israeli conflict](#)
- [Palestinian Diaspora](#)
- [1967 Palestinian exodus](#)
- [Nakba Day](#)
- [New Historians](#)

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UNRWA, Statistics: Field of operations, official camps, registered refugees and total registered persons

<http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=25>

3 Last accessed 12 March 2013

iii Ibid.,183.

iv Ibid.,12.

v Ibid.,2.

vi Ibid.,188.

vii Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004),549.

viii Ibid.,179.

ix Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, 183.

x Rochelle Davis, *Palestinian Village Histories: Geographies of the Displaced*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 2.

xi Adam Ramadan, "A Refugee Landscape: Writing Palestinian Nationalisms in Lebanon," *School of Geography*, Oxford: University of Oxford, 71.

xii Ibid.,70.

xiii Ibid.

xiv Ibid.,74.

xv Ibid.,73.

xvi Ibid.,82.

xvii Ibid.

xviii Ibid.,85.

xix Ibid.

xx Ibid.,86.

xxi Julie Peteet, *The Ethnography of Political Violence : Landscape of Hope and Despair : Palestinian Refugee Camps*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 70-1.

xxii Ibid.,54.

xxiii Ibid.,108.

xxiv Ibid.,114.

xxv Ibid.,102.

xxvi Ibid.,101.

xxvii Zeina Halabi, "Exclusion and identity in Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps: a story of sustained conflict." *Environment and Urbanization* 16, no. 2 (2004), 42.

xxviii Ibid.

xxix Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, 14.

xxx Halabi, 44.

xxxi Ibid.,46.

xxxii Ibid.,45.

xxxiii Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, 50.

xxxiv Ibid.,89.

xxxv Ibid.,116.

xxxvi Ibid.,115.

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ⁱ Ilan Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, (Oxford: One World Publications, 2006), 12.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.,197.