

2014

Al-Nakba: An Analysis of the Historical and Contemporary Israeli Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine

Will Zupan

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarcommons.scu.edu/historical-perspectives>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Zupan, Will (2014) "Al-Nakba: An Analysis of the Historical and Contemporary Israeli Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine," *Historical Perspectives: Santa Clara University Undergraduate Journal of History, Series II*: Vol. 19 , Article 11.

Available at: <http://scholarcommons.scu.edu/historical-perspectives/vol19/iss1/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Historical Perspectives: Santa Clara University Undergraduate Journal of History, Series II by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact rscroggin@scu.edu.

Al-Nakba: An Analysis of the Historical and Contemporary Israeli Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine

Will Zupan

Finding a solution to the Israeli and Palestinian conflict is continually at the top of the American foreign policy agenda. Secretary of State John Kerry worked to begin yet another round of peace negotiations between President Netanyahu and the Israelis and the Palestinian Authority this past October. Although it is now beginning to seem as though the talks are in jeopardy as “each side appears to be maneuvering and potentially laying the foundation to avoid blame should the talks fail,” it is likely efforts will continually be made until some sort of agreeable solution is found.¹

The United States has long been “Israel’s main patron and strategic ally.”² In terms of total money received, Israel is the largest cumulative recipient of military assistance from the United States since World War II.³ Much of this is due to the clout of pro-Israel

¹ Michael R. Gordon and Isabel Kershner, “While Kerry Pushes Peace Talks, Israeli Leader Airs Criticism,” *New York Times*, January 2, 2014, accessed February 24, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/03/world/middleeast/whil-e-kerry-pushes-peace-talks-israeli-leader-air-criticism.html>.

² Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Times Books, 1979), xxiii.

³ Jeremy M. Sharp, *U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel*, report, April 11, 2013, accessed February 11, 2014, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33222.pdf>.

lobbyist groups like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), amongst the most powerful in Washington. It is considered a foolish mistake for any American politician to criticize Israel.

Today, Israel is often pointed to as a bastion of democracy amidst the sea of turmoil that is the Middle East. Yet, there is a side to the country's history and politics that is all too often ignored or shied away from: its treatment of the Palestinian people, both historically and in the present day. This essay will argue that, since the nation's founding in 1948, Israel has engaged in the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people from as well as within their native homeland. The cleansing process still continues today in the form of Israeli settlement building in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as in the form of discriminatory and dehumanizing practices against members of the Arab population within Israel's formal borders.

This paper will examine the Israeli ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians in depth. It will first establish a working definition of the term "ethnic cleansing," as well as identify and scrutinize the common practices that ethnic cleansing involves. It will then examine both the historical and contemporary treatment of the Palestinians by the Israelis and apply that working definition and list of practices to that particular case.

Defining *Ethnic Cleansing*

Before analyzing the historical and contemporary Israeli practices that constitute the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians, it is important to define the term and examine the common practices that it entails.

With Security Resolution 780, the United Nations established ethnic cleansing as "a purposeful policy

designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas.”⁴ In the introduction of his book, *Ethnic Cleansing*, Andrew Bell-Fialkoff delineates ethnic cleansing as “a planned, deliberate removal from a certain territory of an undesirable population distinguished by one or more characteristics such as ethnicity, religion, race, class, or sexual preference. These characteristics must serve as the basis for removal for it to qualify as cleansing.”⁵

Ethnic cleansing involves the homogenization of a particular territory or region by purging it of any undesirable elements. It involves the permanent removal of these undesirable elements from their native land through either population transfers or large-scale killing. This is precisely what happened in the case of Palestine as “half of the indigenous people living” in the former British Mandate “were driven out, half of their villages and towns were destroyed, and only very few among them ever managed to return.”⁶

There are a number of different practices that constitute or accompany efforts at ethnic cleansing. They include, but are not limited to: the identification of a dominant, ideal group coupled with the simulta-

⁴ *Report of the Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to United Nations Security Council Resolution 780*, report, accessed February 24, 2014, https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/780%281992%29.

⁵ Andrew Bell-Fialkoff, *Ethnic Cleansing* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 3.

⁶ Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2006), 9.

neous ostracizing and dehumanization of an “inferior” or “other” group; the forced removal of people from their homes and lands; efforts to homogenize society along the lines of the dominant group; and efforts to erase the cultural memory of the “cleansed” peoples.

Establishing and Demonizing “The Other”

The ostracizing of an “inferior” group is a very important component of ethnic cleansing and one that has been present in every genocide or example of ethnic cleansing in the twentieth century. Research Professor in Genocide Studies and Prevention at George Mason University, Gregory H. Stanton outlines “classification,” “symbolization,” and “dehumanization” as the first three components of any genocide or ethnic cleansing.⁷

The Nazis’ infamous application of these three processes is widely known. The 1935 Nuremberg Laws classified people according to the amount of “German blood” that they possessed and then instituted discriminatory statutes against those with inferior “Jewish” or “mixed” blood. Classification was then expressed through symbolization, as a plethora of ciphers were instituted to demarcate those who were Jewish, gypsies, criminals, etc.; most famous of course the Star of David that Jews were forced to wear. Finally, long before any killing began, German Jews were subjugated to all sorts of dehumanizing treatments: their businesses were boycotted, they were

⁷ Gregory H. Stanton, “The Eight Stages of Genocide,” , accessed January 31, 2014, <http://www.genocidewatch.org/images/8StagesBriefingpaper.pdf>.

forced to endure humiliating public rituals, and they were required to carry and present paperwork documenting their religion and ethnicity upon request.

Similar circumstances unfolded in Rwanda in the decades leading up to the country's brutal genocide. In 1916, the Belgians, at the time the colonial power in charge of Rwanda, took the Hutu and Tutsi, essentially two different socioeconomic groups, and classified them racially according to differing physical features. The Tutsi were also given legal privileges over the Hutu by the Belgians. Then, with the 1959 Hutu Revolution, the existing social order was overturned and it became the Hutu's turn to wield power over the Tutsi minority.⁸ In the years leading up to the genocide, numerous acts of violence were perpetrated by the Hutu against the Tutsi. The Tutsi were also given the dehumanizing name of "inyenzi," which is the Kinyarwanda word for "cockroaches."

What many are not very aware of, especially in the United States, is the amount of classification, symbolization, and dehumanization that gets carried out by the Israelis against the Palestinians, both those living in Israel, as well as those in the occupied territories. "There are more than thirty laws that discriminate against Palestinian citizens of Israel, directly or indirectly, based solely on their ethnicity."⁹ There are also widespread anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab sentiments

⁸ "Rwanda: How the Genocide Happened," *BBC*, December 18, 2008, accessed February 2, 2014, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/1288230.stm>.

⁹ "Discrimination Against Palestinian Citizens of Israel," Institute for Middle East Understanding, September 28, 2011, accessed February 4, 2014, <http://imeu.net/news/article0021536.shtml>.

held by Israelis. They will be explored later in this essay when it comes to discussing the contemporary Israeli examples of ethnic cleansing.

Population Transfer

The concept of population transfer is central to the events of 1948 and the mass-scale removal of the Palestinians from their homeland. It has also been considered or actually implemented in almost every twentieth century example of genocide or ethnic cleansing. Take the Armenian Genocide, for example. Although there is ample evidence that the Young Turks desired to exterminate the Ottoman's Armenian population all along, their forced deportations for security reasons and as part of the general drive to eliminate non-"Turkish" elements from the Empire were most certainly population transfers.¹⁰ This effort at ethnic cleansing resulted in genocide, as thousands of those forced to do the compulsory marches perished in the unforgiving deserts of Mesopotamia.

Most are familiar with the population transfers that were the Nazi deportations of Jews in Germany, Poland, and other occupied territories to the extermination camps. However, few are aware that following Kristallnacht, Nazi economics minister, Hjalmar Schacht, actually suggested a plan to deport the remaining German and Austrian Jews, roughly 600,000 people, to Madagascar. Hitler even initially approved the Madagascar plan in December 1938, at which point he "called for Jewish institutions in the

¹⁰ Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 30.

West to put up the capital for the forced emigration of Jews of working and child-bearing age and their families.”¹¹

Population transfer and expulsion were also at the core of Slobodan Milošević and the Serbians’ efforts at ethnically cleansing various parts of the former Yugoslavia during the Wars of Yugoslav Succession—from Kosovo to Croatia and, above all, to Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹²

Population transfer is at the core of any attempt at ethnic cleansing. Identifying an “ideal” group while simultaneously singling out and ostracizing an “other,” inferior group paves the ground for this process, but it is the forced expulsion itself that principally defines any effort at ethnic cleansing. The Israelis have labored on their cleansing operations ever since, but at the core of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine is the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, which will be examined later.

Selective Memory

Another important component of ethnic cleansing involves the re-writing of history and the erasing of the cleansed group from collective national memory. It seems this is a key feature that actually separates the term “genocide” from the term “ethnic cleansing.” Genocide attempts to physically exterminate a group while ethnic cleansing is more about the complete removal of that group from all facets of society, albeit not necessarily through killing.

This was the case with the Armenian genocide. To this day the Turkish government still refuses to

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹² *Ibid.*, 139-84

acknowledge that the actions of the Young Turks toward the Armenian population during World War I constituted either genocide or ethnic cleansing. In fact, it is a crime in Turkey to label the events as genocide and, in March 2010,

Turkey withdrew its ambassador to Washington after a United States congressional committee narrowly approved a resolution branding the killings as 'genocide.' The House Foreign Affairs Committee endorsed it, despite the objections of the White House. Barack Obama's administration has called for the resolution not to be 'acted upon' by the full Congress.¹³

This phenomenon of essentially trying to rewrite history has been present in other genocides and ethnic cleansing efforts as well, including the Holocaust, the Rwandan Hutu genocide of the Tutsis and the Serbian ethnic cleansing of Bosnia's Muslim population. It has also been a part of the story of Israel's ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians.

Nationalism

There is one more very important component of ethnic cleansing that correlated with its dramatically increased occurrence in the twentieth century. That driving force is nationalism. American historian, Norman A. Naimark, argues this point, claiming that the increased prevalence of ethnic cleansing ran

¹³ "Q&A: Armenian Genocide Dispute," *BBC*, March 5, 2010, accessed February 5, 2014, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6045182.stm>.

concurrent with the “increasing popularity of modern, racist nationalism as it developed throughout Europe and the West during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.” In his view, this “post-positivist, post-Darwinian, and new extreme form of nationalism represented an essentialist view of nations, a view which excluded the ‘other’ and forswore assimilation.”¹⁴

Essentially the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw an increasing tendency by people, in particular Europeans, to define and differentiate themselves along racial and ethnic lines. This in turn led to the desire to replace more multi-cultural empires with smaller, more ethnically homogenous nation states. This process, of course, helped spawn the rise of identifying dominant, desirable groups in contrast with unwanted, other groups that were slated for removal.

Historically, nationalism has gone hand in hand with almost every example of genocide or ethnic cleansing in the twentieth century. Assuming power in a crumbling Ottoman Empire that had been for centuries a powerful and multicultural entity, the Young Turks promulgated their nationalistic beliefs about Turkish pride and superiority. Though the Armenians had been persecuted before under previous sultans, this new ideology certainly played a role in making the genocide possible.

As is well known and documented, the Nazis propagated highly nationalistic views as part of their strategy to reinvigorate a Germany that had been left in shambles by World War I and the world wide de-

¹⁴ Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 7.

pression of the late 1920s and 30s. This nationalistic sentiment soon took an infamously dark turn as a “true” German came to be equated with members of the Aryan race and the desire to purge all inferior elements slowly grew.

Under General Marshall Tito in Communist Yugoslavia, nationalistic sentiments had been fairly well suppressed as part of the General’s desire to strengthen the state as a whole. However, with the deterioration of the former Yugoslavia, nationalistic fervor began to sweep through Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and other former regions that had previously been a part of the communist state. The result of this nationalism was brutal violence between members of the various regions, particularly between the Serbs and Bosnians. The end result of it all was the creation of relatively ethnically homogenous states harboring resentment toward one another.

Nationalism played a role in the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, too. Zionism was very much a European, nationalistic movement and it ultimately led to the creation of a new Jewish state.

The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine

Now that a working definition of ethnic cleansing has been established and the common practices that it involves have been examined, this essay will scrutinize three important periods in Israeli history: the Mandate years, the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, and the post-war era to demonstrate Israeli policies and practices.

Zionism, Anti-Arabism, and the Mandate Years

Behind ethnic cleansing is the “the intent of driving

victims from territory claimed by the perpetrators.”¹⁵ Though the actual ethnic cleansing of Palestine did not begin until after the UN Partition plan was formulated and especially with the onset of the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, it is important to point out that there is ample evidence of Zionist intent to cleanse the territory of its Arab inhabitants that dates back to the late 1800s and early 1900s.

The concept of population transfer was, and is, deeply rooted in Zionist thought. From the founder of the Zionist movement, Theodor Herzl, to the main leaders of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine, cleansing the land was a valid option. As one of the movement’s most liberal thinkers, Leo Motzkin, put it in 1917:

Our thought is that the colonization of Palestine has to go in two directions: Jewish settlement in Eretz Israel and the resettlement of the Arabs of Eretz Israel in areas outside the country. The transfer of so many Arabs may seem at first unacceptable economically, but is nonetheless practical. It does not require too much money to resettle a Palestinian village on another land.¹⁶

Zionist leader and founder of Israel, David Ben-Gurion was aware that armed force would be necessary to establish the state of Israel and drive the Palestinians out over a decade before any action was taken. In the conclusion of a letter that he wrote to the Jewish Agency Executive of June 9, 1936, Ben-Gurion “re-garded the Arabs of Palestine as a national movement

¹⁵ Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 3.

¹⁶ Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing*, 7-8.

that by its very nature was bound to resist the encroachment of Zionism on its land.” He demonstrated an understanding of the fact that the Palestinian Arab population would not willingly make way for a Jewish state, as well as the belief “that the Arabs would continue to fight for as long as they retained any hope of preventing the Jewish takeover of their country.” Ben-Gurion went on to conclude “that only insuperable Jewish military strength would eventually make the Arabs despair of the struggle and come to terms with a Jewish state in Palestine.”¹⁷

Thirteen years earlier, revisionist Zionist leader, Ze’ev Jabotinsky, had concluded virtually the same thing in two articles that he published under the heading “The Iron Wall.” As Ben-Gurion would later, Jabotinsky acknowledged that an agreement between the Zionists and Arabs would be virtually inconceivable, that the Palestinian Arab population would fiercely resist any outside colonization efforts and that force was the most viable option if the state of Israel were to be created. He concluded his letter with the following statement:

“We cannot promise any reward either to the Arabs of Palestine or to the Arabs outside Palestine. A voluntary agreement is unattainable. And so those who regard an accord with the Arabs as an indispensable condition of Zionism must admit to themselves today that this condition cannot be attained and hence that we must give up Zionism. We must either

¹⁷ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 19.

suspend our settlement efforts or continue them without paying attention to the mood of the natives. Settlement can thus develop under the protection of a force that is not dependent on the local population, behind an iron wall which they will be powerless to break down.”¹⁸

Essentially, in much the same vein that Ben-Gurion would advocate over a decade later, Jabotinsky was arguing that if the Zionists were to have their Israeli state, it would only be through the use of powerful military force against the native population and any opposition to the Zionists’ goals.

Israeli historian, Benny Morris, argues that the idea of mass transfer of the Palestinian Arabs to Transjordan or elsewhere has a much longer history and significance in Zionist thinking than is commonly acknowledged. He cites Israel Zangwill’s well-known 1905 remark that the Arabs should “fold their tents and silently steal away,” Arthur Ruppin’s proposal in 1911 for “a limited population transfer,” Chaim Weizmann’s suggestion in 1930 that a “quasi-exchange of population could be fostered and encouraged” and Ben-Gurion’s statement before the Zionist Congress in 1937 that “transfer...is what will make possible a comprehensive settlement programme” to help support his argument.¹⁹

The Zionists even created what became known as “the village files,” further evidence of the

¹⁸ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, 14.

¹⁹ Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-1999* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 139-144.

systematic planning for population transfer that was built into Zionist thinking. The suggestion for the plan “came from a young bespectacled historian from the Hebrew University by the name of Ben-Zion Luria, at the time an employee of the educational department of the Jewish Agency. Luria pointed out how useful it would be to have a detailed registry of all Arab villages, and proposed that the Jewish National Fund (JNF) conduct such an inventory. ‘This would greatly help the redemption of the land,’ he wrote to the JNF.”²⁰

In fact, “precise details were recorded about the topographic location of each village, its access roads, quality of land, water springs, main sources of income, its socio-political composition, religious affiliations, names of its muhktars, its relationship with other villages, the age of individual men, and many more.”²¹ There was even a category that attempted to measure a particular village’s level of “hostility” toward Zionism based on which villages and people participated in the 1936 revolt. Yigael Yadin, who served as the second Chief of Staff of the Israeli defense forces would later recall

that it was this minute and detailed knowledge of what was happening in each single Palestinian village that enabled the Zionist military command in November 1947 to conclude ‘that the Palestine Arabs had nobody to organize

²⁰ Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing*, 17.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

them properly.’ The only serious problem was the British: ‘If not for the British, we could have quelled the Arab riot [the opposition to the United Nations Partition Resolution in 1947] in one month.’²²

What becomes clear is that the need for the transfer of the Arab population out of Palestine and the need for the use of military force in order to create the Israeli state were intertwined from an early stage in Zionist thought. Furthermore, there is ample evidence, in particular with the case of the village files, that systematic plans were indeed in place for a future ethnic cleansing.

Proving intent can often be a difficult task when it comes to genocide or ethnic cleansing because rarely can one find a definitive document or order that gives the go ahead to expel or kill hundreds of thousands of people. However, it is clear that the Zionist leaders understood that they would not have their coveted state without engaging in some form of ethnic cleansing or forced population expulsions, and that is exactly what unfolded in 1947 and 1948 following the United Nations’ Partition Resolution and subsequent withdrawal.

Al-Nakba

Though the intent to create a Jewish homeland and purge the region intended for its creation dates back decades earlier, the 1948 war, “which the Israelis call the War of Independence and the Arabs call *al-Nakba*, or the disaster,” was the single greatest watershed

²² *Ibid.*, 19-22.

mark in the ethnic cleansing of Palestine because of the very large number of people who were driven from their homeland and never permitted to return.²³ Tensions had been growing between Jews and Arabs living in the region over the previous decades but this was truly the historical turning point and the birth of the modern state of Israel.

In 1947 the newly formed United Nations devised a plan to create a dual-state system in the former British Mandate of Palestine. The territory was to be divided into seven sectors: three were to be allotted to the Palestinians, three to the Israelis, and the seventh, the city of Jerusalem, was to become an international neutral zone that both parties were to be allowed access to.

The UN's Partition Resolution "was adopted on November 29, 1947, and the ethnic cleansing of Palestine began in early December 1947 with a series of Jewish attacks on Palestinian villages and neighborhoods in the Palestinian protest against the UN resolution during the first few days after its adoption. Though sporadic, these early Jewish assaults were severe enough to cause the exodus of a substantial number of people (almost 75,000)." The middle of February 1948 saw further coerced expulsions "when Jewish troops succeeded in emptying five Palestinian villages in one day." By the end of April, roughly 250,000 Palestinians had been uprooted. Their removal coincided with several massacres, "most notable of which was the Deir Yassin massacre. At this point, the Arab League decided to intervene militarily once

²³ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, 29.

the British Mandate officially came to an end.²⁴

An important development from this time period and component of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine was the adoption of Plan Dalet, also known as Plan D. It was prepared by the leaders of Haganah, the Jewish paramilitary organization, on March 10, 1948. According to British-Israeli historian, Avi Shlaim,

The aim of Plan D was to secure all the areas allocated to the Jewish state under the UN partition resolution, as well as Jewish settlements outside these areas and corridors leading to them, so as to provide a solid and continuous basis for Jewish sovereignty. The novelty and audacity of the plan lay in the orders to capture Arab villages and cities, something the Haganah had never attempted before. Although the wording of Plan D was vague, its objective was to clear the interior of the country of hostile and potentially hostile Arab elements, and in this sense it provided a warrant for expelling civilians.²⁵

The following is an excerpt from the Plan itself:

These operations can be carried out in the following manner: either by destroying villages (by setting fire to them, by blowing them up, and by planting mines in their rubble), and especially those population centers that are difficult to control permanently; or by mounting

²⁴ Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing*, 40.

²⁵ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*,

combing and control operations according to the following guidelines: encirclement of the villages, conducting a search inside them. In case of resistance, the armed forces must be wiped out and the population expelled outside the borders of the state.²⁶

With the implementation of Plan Dalet, the Haganah, “directly and decisively contributed to the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem.”²⁷ The Jewish military offensive intensified throughout 1948 and led to the disintegration of Palestinian society and the Palestinian expulsion had begun: “By the end of 1948 the number of Palestinian refugees had swollen to around 700,000. But the first and largest wave of refugees occurred before the official outbreak of hostilities on 15 May.”²⁸

Not only were Palestinians expelled from their homes, but they were also subjected to brutal treatment by Israeli forces and many were even killed. Perhaps the worst example was the massacre that occurred in the village of Deir Yassin on April 9, 1948. Jewish soldiers burst into the village, spraying it with machine gun fire and “the remaining villagers were then gathered in one place and murdered in cold blood, their bodies abused while a number of women

²⁶ Walid Khalidi, "Plan Dalet: Master Plan for the Conquest of Palestine," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18, no. 69 (Autumn 1988): 4-20.

²⁷ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, 31

²⁸ *Ibid.*

were raped and killed.”²⁹ A twelve year old, Fahim Zaydan, witnessed the murder of his own family:

They took us out one after the other; shot an old man and when one of his daughters cried, she was shot, too. Then they called my brother Muhammad, and shot him in front of us, and when my mother yelled, bending over him – carrying my little sister Hudra in her hands, still breastfeeding her – they shot her, too.³⁰

Zaydan also was shot, “while standing in a row of children the Jewish soldiers had lined up against a wall, which they had then sprayed with bullets, ‘just for the fun of it’, before they left.”³¹

To seal the fate of the expelled Palestinians and to ensure that they would be unable to return in the future, the Israeli government engaged in numerous anti-repatriation policies. An August 1948 Israeli governmental decision was made to “destroy all the evicted villages and transform them into new Jewish settlements or ‘natural’ forests.”³² Essentially the homes of the former Arab inhabitants were destroyed so that they would have no homes to come back to or claim any sort of right of return to.

The Israeli government even worked to control the demographic distribution of the remaining Palestinians. Some of these remaining Palestinians were taken

²⁹ Daniel A. McGowan and Matthew C. Hogan, *The Saga of Deir Yassin: Massacre, Revisionism, and Reality* (Geneva, NY: Deir Yassin Remembered, 1999).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing*, 90.

³² *Ibid.*, 188.

to prison, others were deported, and a substantial number were forced to relocate to different homes in different villages so as to ensure that no Israeli town would have too high of an Arab population.³³

The traditional Israeli view of the events of 1948 recounts the tale of a sort of Israeli David mustering up all its strength and courage to fend off an invading, Goliath, coalition of Arab armies. However, most of the events detailed above and much of the forced Palestinian expulsion and destruction of their villages occurred before any Arab army set foot in Israel. In a little under a year and a half, the earlier thinking of men like Jabotinsky and Ben-Gurion became a reality. The Israeli government and its paramilitary organizations, the Haganah and Irgun forces, through violence or intimidation expelled nearly 750,000 people from their own homes, killing thousands in the process and did all they possibly could to ensure that those refugees would never see or set foot in their homes again.

Over the next several decades, Palestinian Arabs continued to be expelled from Israel or imprisoned for extended periods of time. Arab villages were destroyed and, in many cases, either turned in to parks or supplanted by Jewish villages. Constitutional laws were passed that prohibited the Jewish National Fund from selling, leasing, or even sub-letting land to non-Jews. This was yet another part of the effort to “prevent Palestinians in Israel from regaining ownership, through purchase, of their

³³ *Ibid.*

own land or that of their people.”³⁴ Furthermore, the Palestinian minority was never allowed to build any new rural settlements or villages, let alone any new cities or towns. However, the Israelis, “with a much slower national growth rate,” were allowed to build any settlement, city, or towns as they wanted and wherever they wanted. According to Pappé, “the Palestinian minority in Israel, seventeen percent of the total population after ethnic cleansing, has been forced to make do with just three percent of the land.”³⁵

Occupied Palestine

The Six-Day War in June 1967 witnessed the further expansion of Israel and the beginning of the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the remaining two parts of the original Palestinian Mandate. Life under occupation is a brutal existence for the hundreds of thousands of refugees living in those territories. According to a 2013 United Nations report, there are roughly 750,000 Palestinian refugees living in the West Bank and additional 1.2 million living in the Gaza Strip.³⁶ Though Gaza is no longer under formal occupation, it is still subjected to numerous military strikes annually; strikes which are carried out by the Israeli military.

Life under Israeli occupation has been an addi-

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 222.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 222-3.

³⁶ *UNRWA in Figures*, report, July 1, 2013, accessed March 10, 2014, http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/unrwa_in_figures_nov2014_10nov2014.pdf.

tional harsh component of the Israeli ethnic cleansing:

The military occupation government combined security measures such as curfews, house raids, and surveillance with a web of administrative regulations that left no aspect of daily life untouched. As 'resident aliens,' Palestinians could be forced to obtain Israeli permission for everything from buying a refrigerator to building a porch. Books and newspapers were censored, the gathering of ten or more Palestinians outlawed, and such incendiary behavior as holding one's fingers in the form of a 'V' reprimanded by patrolling soldiers.³⁷

Narimen, a Palestinian woman who lives in a village near Bethlehem, recounted her feelings about what it is like to live under occupation:

When you live under occupation it's like you get squeezed from the pressure. Before the *Intifada* I used to go to Bethlehem without any problems. But I had to think it over one hundred times before going to Jerusalem, which is just eight kilometers farther away. I was just scared that a soldier would stop me and make me get out of the car and prevent me from going...How am I supposed to think about moving forward with my life, when I can't even move forward to the next village? How am I supposed to think

³⁷ Wendy Pearlman, *Occupied Voices: Stories of Everyday Life from the Second Intifada* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2003), xiv-xv.

about continuing my education? How am I ever supposed to live like normal people do?³⁸

Experiences like Narimen's are common in the occupied territories. The Israeli military forces, as well as the settlers that live in the territories, actively work to constrict the personal freedoms of Palestinians. They demoralize and humiliate them at every possible opportunity.

The film, *5 Broken Cameras*, winner of the International Emmy Award for a Documentary, disturbingly captures the brutality and humiliation of life under occupation. It follows the everyday experiences of Palestinian farmer, Emad Burnat, as he and other Palestinians protest the Israeli bulldozing of village olive groves to build a barrier to separate their settlements from the Palestinian village of Bil'in. In the film, Burnat shows the Israeli army and police mercilessly beating protestors, as well as subjecting them to a barrage of tear gas. He documents Israeli settlers setting the symbolic and tradition-steeped olive groves ablaze, as well as Israeli soldiers raiding his village in the middle of the night to arrest children. Burnat shows his friends and brothers being arrested and even shot—many of the arrests without any formal charge and for indefinite periods of time.³⁹

The United Nations Human Rights Commission has repeatedly stated its “grave concern at the continued deterioration of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and at the gross violations of

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁹ *5 Broken Cameras*, dir. Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi (Kino Lorber, 2011), DVD.

human rights and international humanitarian law”, and has decried, among other violations, Israel’s “acts of extrajudicial killing, closures, collective punishments, and the persistence in establishing settlements, arbitrary detentions, siege of Palestinian towns and villages, the shelling of Palestinian residential neighbourhoods by warplanes, tanks and Israeli battleships, and incursions into towns, villages and camps to kill innocent men, women and children.” A 2004 report strictly “condemned the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories as being an aggression and an offense against humanity and a flagrant violation of human rights.”⁴⁰

Recent comments by the UN’s special rapporteur on Palestine, Richard Falk, strongly criticized Israel’s policies as “annexationist, colonialist” and examples of ethnic cleansing, “especially in relation to the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.”⁴¹ Commissioner General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees, Filippo Grandi, pointed out in early March of this year that “with every year that passes, their impact on Palestinian lives becomes harsher; for young Palestinians, they define a very bleak future.”⁴²

⁴⁰ "Human Rights Documents," United Nations Human Rights, accessed March 18, 2014, http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/sdpage_e.aspx?b=1&c=140&t=11.

⁴¹ Richard Falk, "Colonialism, Apartheid and Ethnic Cleansing': UN Rapporteur on Palestine Blasts Israel," RT News, March 22, 2014, accessed May 01, 2014, <http://rt.com/news/israel-palestinians-ethnic-cleansing-521/>.

⁴² Filippo Grandi, "Remarks by the Commissioner-General at CEAPAD | UNRWA," UNRWA, March 1, 2014, accessed May 03, 2014, <http://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official->

There is more to ethnic cleansing than just forcible relocation itself. A large part of it, as discussed earlier, is the dehumanization of the target group. This has been a disturbing component of Israeli policy and treatment of the Palestinians for decades and has only intensified since the 1967 Six-Day War and the beginning of the now almost fifty-year old occupation.

Settlement Building and Discrimination Today

The ethnic cleansing of the remainder of Palestine is still being undertaken by the Israelis in the form of settlement building in the West Bank. “Although settlement in occupied territory is patently illegal according to international law, the Israeli government offers its citizens tax breaks and other benefits in order to move from Israel proper to Palestinian territory.” Israeli settlers are allowed to traverse the “Palestinian Territories at their convenience” while “Palestinians themselves cannot travel without facing Israeli checkpoints, searches, delays, or permit applications.” The Israeli government has confiscated hundreds of Palestinian homes, as well as thousands of acres of Palestinian land. Much of that land has in turn been used to build Israeli settlements.⁴³

Iman, a college student living in Hebron, related some of her experiences about encounters with the Israeli settlers near her village:

The situation in Hebron is really volatile, and we have no protection whatsoever. There are Jewish settlers in the heart of town, which is

statements/remarks-commissioner-general-ceapad.

⁴³ Pearlman, *Occupied Voices*, xiv-xv.

where you have to go shopping and run errands...When you're going home at night, you can get beaten by the settlers or by the soldiers themselves. Once we were passing near a park, and they let their dogs out and made them chase us. Another time my mother and I were out walking and a settler lady stopped us. She spit on us and then just walked off. And then there are the settlers' children. They'll follow you on the street and try to provoke you, just because...If we say a thing they can accuse us of trying to kill them. Or maybe they'll shoot at us from one of the high buildings. So we just have to accept it. We have to swallow what we hear. We have no right to react.⁴⁴

"More than 550,000 Israelis now live in the West Bank and East Jerusalem," and a recent report released by Israel's central bureau of statistics said that work began on 2,534 new housing units in the settlements in 2013, more than double the amount built in 2012, as well as the highest number built since 2000.⁴⁵

Settlers come to the West Bank for a number of different reasons. Some are ideologues who "think the land has to be 'redeemed' by Jewish settlement so the Messiah will come. Others are 'economic settlers,'" who live in settlements because of the huge subsidies that

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 169-70.

⁴⁵ Aron Heller, "Israeli Settlement Construction Doubles in 2013," *ABC News*, March 2, 2014, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/netanyahu-vows-tough-line-white-house-talks-22739633>.

the Israeli government provides for them.⁴⁶ The Israeli government motive behind settlement building should not be surprising though; it is the same general purpose that drove them to destroy Arab villages in Israel and build over them in 1948 and the years that followed. Namely, it allows the Israelis to erode Palestinian land even further and slowly but surely turn it over to Israeli jurisdiction. It also steadily takes away from the land that would belong to a future Palestinian state should a peace deal ever be accomplished by using the settlers and their homes as a bargaining chip. This is ironic, as the Israelis evicted the Palestinians from their own homes, yet there has been little more than vocal warnings on the part of the international community to stop the settlements.

The International Court of Justice has repeatedly condemned the building of Israeli settlements and walls in the occupied territory and has denounced them as a violation of international law. In July of 2004, the Court found by a majority of 14 to 1 that Israel's "building of a barrier in the occupied Palestinian territory...violated principles outlined in the UN Charter and long-standing global conventions that prohibit the threat or use of force and the acquisition of territory that way, as well as principles upholding the right of peoples to self-determination." The judges continued on to argue the wall's construction "would be tantamount to de facto annexation' as it explained that the barrier could create a potentially permanent

⁴⁶ Pamela Olson, *Fast Times in Palestine: A Love Affair with a Homeless Homeland* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2013), 27-8.

‘fait accompli’ on the ground.”⁴⁷

The Israeli government has also instituted numerous discriminatory policies against the Arabs living both in Israel and the occupied territories that are reminiscent of policies featured in other twentieth century examples of ethnic cleansing. Palestinians are required to obtain Israeli permission before they can attend a conference abroad, launch a business, or build a home.⁴⁸ Arab citizens of Israel are forced to carry their identification papers on them at all times and are subject to checks at any point by Israeli police, a policy that is reminiscent of the Nazi treatment of Jews in 1930s Germany.⁴⁹

Even the road systems within the occupied West Bank are segregated. A modern freeway system connects Israeli settlements in the territories to one another, as well as to Israel proper. However, “vehicles with Palestinian licenses are completely prohibited from traveling on approximately 105 kilometers of West Bank Roads.” Palestinians are permitted to “travel on the remaining 180 kilometers of Israeli-built roads in the West Bank only if they can obtain a special permit or if they travel in an ambulance.” Even the way that the road system “crisscrosses the West Bank” appears to be “designed to prevent the formation of a contiguous and viable Palestinian state”

⁴⁷ "Opinion of the International Court of Justice," B'Tselem -- The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, January 1, 2011, accessed May 16, 2014, http://www.btselem.org/separation_barrier/international_court_decision.

⁴⁸ Pearlman, *Occupied Voices*, xviii.

⁴⁹ *Close to Home*, dir. Vidi Bilu and Dalia Hager (Jerusalem, Israel: Transfax Film Productions, 2005), DVD.

moving forward.⁵⁰

Conclusion

The overwhelming majority of the land that once belonged to Palestine and its native inhabitants was conquered and cleansed by the Israelis in 1948, and the eroding of land ownership and ethnic cleansing has continued to be organized by Israeli administrations and even the settlers themselves since that time.

As to the proposed transfer of population, it seems clear that, even on the most optimistic view, it is highly improbable that any such transfer will in practice be capable of being carried out on the scale or at the pace contemplated by the Peel report. If it is not carried out rapidly and on a large scale, it will leave the Jewish State with a minority problem of the most formidable dimensions. If it is carried out rapidly and on a large scale, then, whether the Jewish State is formally responsible or not, the odium attaching to the swift and wholesale evacuation of Arab peasants from their homes will fall mainly on the Jews, with results which will be embarrassing not only to the Jewish State itself, but to Jews in other parts of the world. The odium will be all the greater because, notwithstanding the euphemisms em-

⁵⁰ "Israel's Segregated Roads," The Seattle Mideast Awareness Campaign: Discussion of Israel's Apartheid Policies Against Palestinians, accessed June 03, 2014, <http://seamac.org/SegregatedRoads.htm>; also consult www.btselem.org and www.peacenow.org for addition documentation on the issue of separate roads.

ployed by the Royal Commission, it will in fact be a case of unilateral transfer and not of ‘exchange.’⁵¹

These were the ironic words of Political Secretary of the Zionist Organization, Leonard Stein, in August of 1937. The transfer of population that he worried about was carried out a decade later and with remarkable swiftness. It continues to this day and with little more than finger wagging from the rest of the world, as opposed to the odium he anxiously anticipated.

The story of the creation of the Israeli state and the expulsion of the Palestinians is a classic case of ethnic cleansing, one that bears many of the same hallmarks as the pogroms carried out by the likes of the Young Turks, the Nazis, the Rwandan Hutu , and the Milošević-led Serbian nationalists. At its core was an aggressive, European-inspired nationalism. Intertwined with that nationalism was an understanding that achieving the movement’s goals would mean mass-scale transfers of a local population, something that came to fruition with the British and United Nations’ abandoning of the Palestinian mandate.

The Palestinian Arabs were identified as an inferior “other” long before the creation of Israel and they continue to be ostracized as such, in particular through Israeli laws that discriminate against them and restrict their livelihoods. Finally, there has been a concerted effort (and now arguably a general acceptance on the part of many, especially a significant percentage of the Israeli population) to erase the true nature of the *Nakba* and the monumental injustice

⁵¹ Wasserstein, *Israelis and Palestinians*, 111-2.

done to the Palestinians.

Will Zupan is a senior history major with an emphasis in Latin American history. He is a member of Phi Alpha Theta and credits Professor David Skinner with sparking his interest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Will is travelling to Argentina after graduation to teach English for a year before eventually returning to pursue a law degree.