

Encountering the Nakba: Slideshow Notes

Slide 1: What is the Nakba?

- “Nakba” is an Arabic word that means “great disaster” or “catastrophe.” On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly approved a plan to partition Mandate Palestine between Jews and [Palestinian] Arabs to follow the end of the British Mandate on May 14, 1948.
- About 750,000 [Palestinian] Arabs—the figure was later to be a major point of dispute, the Israelis officially speaking of some 520,000, the Palestinian themselves of 900,000-1,000,000—were ejected or fled from the areas that became the State of Israel and resettled in the territories that became known as the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as Transjordan, Syria, and Lebanon. In addition, some people also fled to Egypt, Iraq, and the states of the Arabian Peninsula. The war’s end found less than half of the Palestinians in their original homes—fewer than 150,000 in Israel, some 400,000 in the West Bank, and 60,000 in the Gaza Strip.
- Palestinians commemorate the Nakba on May 15, the day after the anniversary of Israel’s independence (Yom HaAtzmaut), according to the Gregorian calendar.
- The Nakba is a foundational event in the history of Palestine and of Israel. While most Jews in Israel aren’t familiar with the term, it is a central element of Palestinian collective identity. Its absence/presence (as we will see below) structures the identity of Israeli society and its reality. In the course of this slideshow we will see that the Nakba is present not only in the memories of Palestinians both within and outside of Israel, but is a palpable, physical presence throughout Israel, if one only looks with fresh eyes.
- In this slide on the top right we see a 1943 photo of the tents and buildings in an early Zionist settlement, Kvutzat Yavne. The intention of the founders was to make the area near ancient Yavne (from which it takes its name) the site of a religious kibbutz and a yeshiva. What we don’t see in the photo is any sign of the nearby Arab village of Yibna. The country is typically portrayed as one that was clean, empty – a land without people for a people without a land – while, in fact, a substantial Palestinian society existed here living a rich life. You can see Yibna in the map below, part of a 1941 map of Palestine.
- Yibna’s roots go back to the Roman period. In the late nineteenth century, a visitor described Yibna as a large village partly built of stone and situated on a hill. In 1944/45 there were 5,420 villagers living in Yibna and 1,500 nomads living on its outskirts.
- The map on the top left is from 1946, prepared by the “Religious Kibbutz Fund.” It shows other Jewish localities in the Yavne area. Between 1948 and 1955, five other Jewish villages were founded on Yibna’s land.
- The photo on the bottom left is from 1991 and it shows what remains of Yibna’s mosque.

Slide 2:

- Much of Israel bears traces of the Nakba, even if people aren't aware of them. These pictures testify to the ways in which Palestinian life has been overwritten and erased.
- This slide shows a postcard of vacationers on the beach at Achziv Park; those ruins in the background are the remains of the village of Al-Zeeb.
- Al-Zeeb was captured by the Haganah's Carmel Brigade prior to the engagement of armies from other Arab countries in the 1948 War on May 14, 1948, as part of the same operation that resulted in the capture of the city of Akka (now Acre). According to Haganah accounts, the residents immediately "fled upon the appearance of Jewish forces, and the Haganah command decided to hold onto [it]." However, Israeli historian Benny Morris writes that the Israeli forces attacked Al-Zeeb with mortars and razed it to the ground. Two Jewish-Israeli villages were established on Al-Zeeb's lands.

Slide 3:

- Moshe Shertok later changed his name to Sharett. In 1949 he became Israel's first Foreign Minister. Nahum Goldmann, was a leading Zionist and the founder and longtime president of the World Jewish Congress. The day after this letter "the Israeli cabinet decided to bar refugees--who already numbered over 300,000--from returning to their homes. An order went out to the IDF to fire upon any Arabs trying to return. That marked the beginning of the Palestinian refugee crisis. It also put the Israelis on the other side of the right to return, a principle of international law that would be codified by the United Nations in December 1948." (From *Genesis: Truman, American Jews, and the Origins of the Arab/Israeli Conflict* by John B. Judis, New York, 2014, Farrar, Straus, Giroux).

Slide 4:

- *"Jewish localities were established in place of Arab villages. You don't even know the names of those Arab villages, and I don't blame you, because those geography texts no longer exist. Not only the books are gone; the Arab villages are also gone: Nahalal in place of Ma'lul; Kibbutz Gvat in place of Jibta; Kibbutz Sarid in place of Huneifis; Kfar Yehoshua in place of Tal Al-Shuman. Wherever Jews built, they built on land where Arabs once lived."* (Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan, April 4, 1969, from Ha'aretz).
- Actually the maps and texts do exist but when Dayan said this they were hidden in Israeli archives. If you want to pursue the matter of the archives further here are some links:
 - ["History suppressed: Censorship in Israel's archives"](#)
 - ["Why Are Countless Palestinian Photos and Films Buried in Israeli Archives?"](#)
 - ["People of the \(Stolen\) Book: Did Israel's National Library Engage in Systematic Theft?"](#)

- [“Overdue Books: Returning Palestine’s ‘Abandoned Property’ of 1948”](#)
- Palestinian place names were often echoed in the new names Israel gave the localities (for example: Baysan – Beit Shean; Yaffa – Yafo; Bir alSaba – Beersheva; Yajur – Yagur; Ayn Hawd – Ein Hod).
- Jerusalem is an interesting example of what became of the Arab names. People in Jerusalem still call neighborhoods by their Arab names despite the fact they had been renamed into Hebrew, because the Hebrew names didn’t catch on and people didn’t use them. For example: Talbieh (“Komemiyut” in Hebrew); Katamon (“Gonen”); alMaliha (“Manahat”). Most Israelis don’t know that they’re calling these neighborhoods by their Palestinian names.

Slides 5-8: Palimpsests

Facilitator Note: *The palimpsests appear when you activate them in the “slideshow” mode of PowerPoint.*

- Slide 5: In these slides, you can see the physical replacement of the old Palestinian cities with the new. This slide shows: Saffuriyya – Zipori
- Slide 6. Al-Musrara – Morasha
- Slide 7. Ayn Karim – Ein Karem
- Slide 8. Al-Lydd – Lod