



Complex World

Palestinian Displacement and Resistance: The Nakba of 1948 Continues

Historical Context

The history of Palestinian displacement is one of profound loss, survival, and resistance. It begins most clearly in 1948, during a period Palestinians call the Nakba, or "catastrophe." The Nakba was not just a moment of war; it marked the collapse of Palestinian society and the beginning of a long era of statelessness, forced exile, and cultural marginalization supported by the [Balfour Declaration \(1917\)](#) and the [British Mandate for Palestine \(1920\)](#). In 1947, the United Nations proposed a partition plan to divide Palestine into separate states. The plan was accepted by the Zionist leadership but rejected by Arab leaders and Palestinian representatives, who saw it as unjust. After the British withdrew in 1948, and the State of Israel was established, war broke out between Israeli and Palestinian forces. In the violence that followed, over 750,000 Palestinians were expelled or fled from their homes. Palestinians faced this dispossession of their land and property to establish and expand the new Israeli state. More than 500 villages were destroyed or depopulated, and countless families were never allowed to return. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians became refugees in neighboring countries or within the newly established State of Israel confined to the [Gaza Strip](#) and the [West Bank](#). The Nakba was not accidental. Historians, including many Israeli scholars, have documented how deliberate policies including military campaigns, psychological warfare, and legal measures were used to prevent Palestinians from returning to their homes. Entire communities were erased, renamed, or repopulated. For Palestinians, the Nakba remains a foundational trauma, remembered every year on May 15 through marches, ceremonies, and calls for the right of return. These commemorations are not only acts of mourning but also of resistance and cultural survival. They keep alive stories that were nearly erased and challenge dominant historical narratives that ignore Palestinian suffering. But the Nakba is not just a historical event, it is a continuing reality.

In modern times, the Gaza Strip is facing what many Palestinians describe as a "new Nakba." Over the course of twenty months, Israel carried out sustained bombardments by air, land, and sea, and imposed a full siege on Gaza. These actions came in response to the October 7, 2023, attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups, which they describe as a legitimate response to Israeli occupation. At least 1,200 Israelis were killed and more than 5,400 injured. Since then, Israel's military operations have resulted in the deaths of over 54,000 Palestinians (around 70 percent of whom were women and children) and injured more than 123,000 others. An estimated 14,000 people remain missing, possibly buried under rubble. Nearly 70 percent of civilian infrastructure across Gaza has been damaged or destroyed. Since March 18, 2025, Israeli military operations have displaced over 665,000 people, nearly the entire population of Gaza. Thousands have been killed, and many more are living in overcrowded shelters with little access to food, water, or medicine. International aid systems are collapsing under the pressure, and the United Nations has condemned Israel's handling of humanitarian assistance, calling parts of the aid delivery process dangerous and even deadly. The parallels between 1948 and today are striking. Just as the Nakba resulted in long-term exile for millions of Palestinians, the current crisis in Gaza raises fears of permanent displacement for another generation. Survivors of the original Nakba and their descendants see this not as an isolated conflict, but as part of a long, ongoing pattern of dispossession that is driven directly by the orders of the Israeli government and military since 1948.

Connection to Habit

The history of Palestinian displacement, from the Nakba of 1948 to the present crisis in Gaza, reminds us that the world is complex, filled with competing narratives, deep emotions, and uncertain futures. In 1948, Palestinians fleeing their homes did not know they would remain refugees for generations. Today, families in Gaza face that same uncertainty, unsure of where they will sleep tomorrow or whether they will return home at all. By studying this topic, we learn to navigate a world that is not defined by one truth. We examine multiple perspectives: the trauma of Palestinians who lost everything, the fears and goals of Israelis building a new state, and the global response shaped by politics, media, and memory. Understanding these layers requires empathy and critical thinking. This habit encourages us to resist easy answers. It reminds us that historical and current events are shaped by fear, hope, power, and resistance and that acknowledging different viewpoints does not mean ignoring injustice. Instead, it means seeing the full human picture and approaching today's uncertain world with humility and care.

Discussion Questions

- Why do many Palestinians view the current situation in Gaza as a continuation of the Nakba of 1948? What similarities and differences do you notice between the two?
- How does understanding the history of the Nakba help us make sense of the current conflict in Gaza?
- How might the same events be viewed differently by Palestinians, Israelis, and international observers?
- Why do some global leaders and organizations describe what is happening in Gaza as a "second Nakba" or even a form of genocide? What evidence or arguments support or challenge these claims?
- What are the long-term impacts of displacement on individuals, families, and entire communities? How might this shape Palestinian identity across generations?
- Why do many Palestinians continue to demand the right to return to their homes lost in 1948? How might that demand be understood by different groups?
- What role does remembering events like the Nakba play in shaping cultural identity and resistance? Why might memory be considered a form of political or cultural power?
- In what ways have Palestinians used art, poetry, and public protest to resist erasure and tell their own stories?

Suggested Activity

Materials Needed:

- Gallery Photos:
 - [Palestinian Displacement Sources \(Gaza Strip, 2025\)](#)
 - [Palestinian Displacement Sources \(Nakba\)](#)
- Notebook Paper

Part 1: Visual Analysis [30–40 mins]

1. Gallery Walk or Slide Show
 - Display the images from both PDFs around the classroom or in a digital slideshow.
 - Students circulate or view slides and take notes using See, Think, Wonder chart:
 - What do you see?
 - What does this image make you think about?
 - What do you wonder?
2. Group Discussion
 - Ask students to compare images from 1948 to those from 2025.
 - What patterns do they notice? What has changed? What has remained the same?

Part 2: Complex World Reflection [30 mins]

Have students respond in writing or discussion to the following prompts:

1. How do these images help you understand the personal impact of historical and ongoing displacement?
2. In what ways do the images from 1948 and 2025 show continuity in Palestinian experiences?
3. How might different groups (Palestinians, Israelis, international observers) interpret these images differently?
4. What emotions do you think the people in the photos might be feeling? How does this help you understand the idea that people in the past and today live with uncertainty?
5. Why is it important to understand events like the Nakba not just as history, but as part of an ongoing story?

Optional Homework Extension:

- Write a letter, poem, or short narrative from the perspective of a person in one of the photos.
- Research the latest updates from Gaza and write a short reflection on how international communities are responding or not responding.

Primary Sources

Palestinian Displacement (Nakba, 1948)

Image 1: 1948 expulsion of the Tantura women and children to Furaydis



Primary Sources

Palestinian Displacement (Nakba, 1948)

Image 2: Palestinians being displaced after the fall of Haifa, accompanied by armed Haganah personnel, April 1948



Primary Sources

Palestinian Displacement (Nakba, 1948)

Image 3: Nahr al-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon, 1952



Primary Sources

Palestinian Displacement (Nakba, 1948)

Image 4: Palestine refugees initially displaced to Gaza board boats to Lebanon or Egypt, in 1949



Primary Sources

Palestinian Displacement (Nakba, 1948)

Image 5: Palestinian woman, a child and a jug



Source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1948_Palestinian_expulsion_and_flight#/media/File:Woman_nakba_dress_jug.jpg

Primary Sources

Palestinian Displacement (Nakba, 1948)

Image 6: Nakba, 1948, old man and baby in a tent



Source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1948_Palestinian_expulsion_and_flight#/media/File:Olddman_boy_nakba.jpg

Primary Sources

Palestinian Displacement (Nakba, 1948)

Image 7: Palestine Nakba Refugees, 1948



Source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1948_Palestinian_expulsion_and_flight#/media/File:Oldman_girl_nakba.jpg

Primary Sources

Palestinian Displacement (Gaza Strip, 2025)

Image 1: Displaced Palestinians arrive in Khan Younis, Gaza
Sunday, March 23, 2025



Primary Sources

Palestinian Displacement (Gaza Strip, 2025)

Image 2: Behind a tent camp for displaced Palestinians, smoke rises from a building after it was targeted by an Israeli army strike in Gaza City, Saturday, March 22, 2025



Primary Sources

Palestinian Displacement (Gaza Strip, 2025)

Image 3: Palestinians who fled Rafah after Israeli evacuation orders, arrive in Khan Younis, Gaza, on Monday, March 31, 2025



Primary Sources

Palestinian Displacement (Gaza Strip, 2025)

Image 4: Palestinians who fled Rafah after Israeli evacuation orders, arrive in Khan Younis, Gaza, on Monday, March 31, 2025



Primary Sources

Palestinian Displacement (Gaza Strip, 2025)

Image 5: Palestinians who fled Rafah after Israeli evacuation orders arrive in Khan Younis, Gaza, on Sunday, March 23, 2025



Primary Sources

Palestinian Displacement (Gaza Strip, 2025)

Image 6: Palestinians wait for donated food at a distribution center in Beit Lahiya, northern Gaza Strip, Sunday, March 16, 2025



Primary Sources

Palestinian Displacement (Gaza Strip, 2025)

Image 7: Palestinians walk through Al-Shati camp, Gaza City
Tuesday, March 25, 2025



Primary Sources

Palestinian Displacement (Gaza Strip, 2025)

Image 8: Displaced Palestinians carry their belongings on the outskirts of Gaza City, Friday, March 21, 2025



Primary Sources

Palestinian Displacement (Gaza Strip, 2025)

Image 9: An aerial photograph taken by a drone shows displaced Palestinians returning to Rafah, a day after the ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas came into effect, Gaza Strip, Monday, Jan. 20, 2025.

