The Palestinian Diaspora 1947 Onwards: Social and Political Reasons

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The Palestinian Diaspora 1947 Onward: What Were the Social and Political Reasons for the Palestinian Diaspora in 1948?

By

Margaret Sheppard

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A. Plan of the Investigation

Question: What were the social and political reasons for the Palestinian diaspora in 1948?

My topic is the Palestinian diaspora from 1947 onwards. I will be focusing on the social and political causes of the diaspora in 1948 while leaving out the economic causes. In order to complete this Internal Assessment I will need numerous sources. With the help of my teacher, I have already found a couple sources, written mainly from the Israeli perspective. In this investigation I would like to use a variety of sources so that all views and perspectives are acknowledged.

One source I plan on using is *Expulsion of the Palestinians* by Nur Masalha. I plan on using this source because, unlike a lot of the other sources, it is written by a Palestinian historian. Another source I plan on using is *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace* by Shlomo Ben-Ami. I plan on using this source because the author talks about many of the political reasons for the diaspora.

B. Summary of Evidence

The Palestinian diaspora of 1948 had many social causes. Firstly, the impact of the Holocaust in Europe affected
the social structure in Palestine. The Holocaust in Europe had an impact on Palestine. In *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace*, historian Shlomo Ben-Ami writes that “It was the full truth and awesome impact of the Holocaust of European Jewry, as it was exposed worldwide after the war, that served now as the platform upon which Zionist diplomacy could mobilise governments and international opinion in order to attain its major political objective, a Jewish state in Palestine” (ch. 2). He also writes “Britain could not resist the moral pressure created by the struggle of thousands of Holocaust survivors to reach the shores of Palestine” (Ben-Ami, ch.2). Additionally, Jewish immigration impacted Palestine. Ben-Ami writes that “In the years 1945-8, 40,000 illegal immigrants landed on the shores of Palestine” (ch.2).

The diaspora also had many political causes. Firstly, the UN partition of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states. The results of partition changed the balance of power in Palestine. Zionists gained a major foothold: “The Zionist movement was ‘given’ a state that stretched over more than half of the country” (Pappe, ch.3). In *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, historian Ilan Pappe writes that “The Jews, who owned less than six per cent of the total land area of Palestine and constituted no more than one third of the population, were handed more than half of its overall
Shlomo Ben-Ami quotes Israel Galili, Chief of Staff of the Haganah, of saying that “the borders of our state will be defined by the limits of our force...The borders will be the fruit of our conquest” (ch.2). As a result of the war in 1948 between Israel and much of the Arab world, many Palestinians became refugees. The Israeli government put the number at somewhere between 550,000 and 600,000 people (Karsh).

Zionism was also a major social and political force behind the Palestinian diaspora. Ilan Pappe writes in The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine, “Zionism secularised and nationalized Judaism. To bring their project to fruition, the Zionist thinkers claimed the biblical territory and recreated, indeed reinvented, it as the cradle of their new nationalist movement” (ch.2). Pappe also writes that “for many Zionists Palestine was not even an ‘occupied’ land...the native Palestinians who lived there were largely invisible to them” (ch.2). Shlomo Ben-Ami writes that “Zionism is both a struggle for land and a demographic race; in essence, the aspiration for a territory with a Jewish majority” (ch.2).

C. Evaluation of Sources

My first source is The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine by Ilan
Pappe. This book was written in 2006 by Israeli historian Ilan Pappe. The purpose of this book is to show why Palestinians were forced to leave Palestine and the causes of the Palestinian diaspora. The value of this book is that it highlights the impact of Zionists and Jewish immigration on the Palestinians. It mentions many political and social causes for the Palestinian diaspora of 1948. The limitation is that the author of the book shows bias. By using terms like “ethnic cleansing”, the author is showing a bias towards the Palestinians and saying that they were persecuted and forced out by the Jewish settlers, when in reality the conflict may be more complicated than that.

Another source is I used was Expulsion of the Palestinians by Nur Masalha. This book was written in 1992 by a Palestinian historian. The purpose of this book is to explain the Zionist policy of “transfer” and its implications. The value of this book is that it is written by a Palestinian historian and provides a Palestinian perspective. It is also valuable because it covers the conflict from 1882 to 1948 so it shows the history and the reasons for the diaspora of 1948. In addition, it also goes into great detail about the policy of transferring the Palestinians. The limitation of this book is that it focuses solely on one of the reasons behind the diaspora, the Zionist policy of “transfer”. This would not be a
good source for someone who wishes to gain a broad understanding of the issues.

D. Analysis

There were many social causes for the Palestinian diaspora of 1948. Firstly the social changes caused by the Holocaust in Europe. Historian Ilan Pappe writes that “the UN accepted the nationalist claims the Zionist movement was making for Palestine and, furthermore, sought to compensate the Jews for the Nazi Holocaust in Europe” (ch. 3). Jews fleeing Europe ended up in Palestine. In the aftermath of the shock and horror of the Holocaust, Zionists gained European support for immigration and the formation of a Jewish state in Palestine. This support led to the division of Palestine by the UN. Additionally, the increase in Jewish immigration changed the demographics within Palestine. Immigration meant that more and more Palestinian land was being occupied by foreigners. Palestinian land was taken, forcing the Palestinians to leave. As a result of partition and immigration, the balance of power shifted.

There were also many political reasons for the diaspora. Firstly the partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. Historian Nur Masalha wrote that “the events that led to the
Palestinian exodus began on 29 November 1947, when the United Nations General Assembly passes resolution 191 endorsing the partition of Palestine into two states, Palestinian Arab and Jewish" (ch. 5). According to Pappe, the Jewish minority was given more than half of the country (ch.3). This gave them political control over previously Palestinian areas. The Jewish minority gained a disproportionate amount of power. But this was not enough. Historian Shlomo Ben-Ami uses a quote from a Haganah official to show that new Israeli state planned to expand its borders through the “fruits of our conquest” (ch.2). They were not content with what the partition gave them, they wanted more, possibly all, of Palestine. Historian Rashid Khalidi states that “the 1948 war, whose result for the Palestinians was what they called al-nakba, the catastrophe of their dispossession, and which for Israelis marks the independence of their national state” (ch.4) in his book The Iron Cage. The Palestinians were defeated, and this loss benefitted the new State of Israel. This war was a war between the Israelis and much of the Arab world. Many refugees from this war were forced to leave Palestine.

Zionism was a social and political cause of the 1948 diaspora. The evidence in Part B shows that Zionists wanted to create a country and did not care about the people who were
already there. Historian Ilan Pappe goes further to say that “the Zionist movement started its ethnic cleansing in Palestine, in early December 1947” (ch.3). A main aspect of Zionism was removing the Palestinian Arabs to make room for the new Jewish state. Zionists “encouraged” Palestinians to leave. The Zionists wanted the Palestinian territory. They wanted to transplant the Palestinians into other Arab territories. There could not be a Jewish state if the land was still occupied.

E. Conclusion

The Palestinian diaspora was caused by many different social and political issues, mainly the impact of Jewish immigration, conflicts between the Arab world and the new Jewish State, and the influence of Zionist ideas. Prior to 1948, there was an influx of Jewish settlers into Palestine. They came as a result of the Holocaust in Europe and wanted to establish a Jewish country, or homeland, in Palestine. Eventually the Jewish settlers were given large portions of previously Palestinian territory by the UN. This forced many Palestinians out. Additionally, there were conflicts between the new Jewish state and the Arab countries surrounding it. The war of 1948 resulted in many Palestinian refugees fleeing Palestine. Also, the social
and political ideologies behind Zionism influenced the decisions of Palestinians to leave. Zionists wanted to create a Jewish state free of Palestinians. They "encouraged" Palestinians to leave and go to other Arab countries. These factors resulted in the Palestinian diaspora of 1948.

F. Sources and Word Limit


Word Count: 1503
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