

## **The Shaping of Palestinian Identity**

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*In the aftermath of the Nakba, the identity and culture of the Palestinians have shifted and manifested into more of a collective and shared identity. Palestinians within the Occupied Territories face displacement and an array of human rights abuses, along with the fear of losing their identity and culture. Palestinians inside the Territories continue to face the struggles of the occupation, and yet they continue to have the spirit of resistance. Those who were absorbed into Israel are forced to live as second-class citizens, since being Arab-Israeli means they have no citizenship rights within the apartheid state. Furthermore, the Palestinians who were displaced in the Middle East are left as perpetual refugees, rendering them essentially stateless. Regardless of where they end up geographically due to forced displacement, many Palestinians suffer from the firsthand or intergenerational trauma of the Nakba and current human rights abuses committed by Israel. Palestinians, no matter where they reside, fundamentally struggle with keeping their heritage and traditions alive – yet their community emphasizes the importance of enduring identity in the face of ethnic cleansing and other abuses. In the end, Palestinians still hold on to the hope of their eventual return to their homeland.*

A collective identity refers to a group of people who share common experiences, interests, and solidarities (Whooley, 2007). Due to the human rights abuses that Palestinians have faced for the past 70 years, Palestinian identity has been reshaped into one of national pride, shared solidarity, resistance, and resilience (see Atallah, 2014). This paper aims to shed light on and gain a deeper understanding of Palestinian identity and the struggles these people have faced since the 1940s. This includes outlining the history of the region and its conflicts, including how the Israeli State was constructed by Western imperial powers with little decision-making from Arab communities. This background is relevant to how Palestinians continue to face human rights abuses today. This paper also discusses what life is like both within the Occupied Territories, which is comprised of the West Bank and the Gaza strip, and what life is like for Palestinians within Israel. Their experiences differ, yet there are stark similarities, as both are treated as second-class citizens in an apartheid state (see Amnesty International, 2022). Furthermore,

this work illustrates how identities adapt and change as Palestinians cross borders, including how they use education as a tool to stay connected to their roots and history (Hijazi, 2015). Moreover, I will examine how Israel systemically attempts to erase Palestinian history and heritage, through both violent means and through the means of urbicide, and how the Palestinians resist the attempted destruction of their agricultural life and heritage sites.

In addition to discussing the lives of those within the borders of Palestine, I delve into the lives of Palestinians who are lost in the diaspora in the Middle East. Many of those who were displaced during the Nakba<sup>1</sup> were put into refugee camps in Arab states such as Lebanon and Jordan, but generations have passed and refugees continue to live within these camps. In this sense Palestinians are not so much perpetual refugees, but rather they are stateless – they do not have legal nationality in any country. Indeed, many Arab States refuse to give Palestinians citizenship; they want Palestinians to return to Palestine, rather than integrate and become nationals of their countries. Statelessness, and the rights issues associated with it, define the Palestinian struggle within the Middle East.

The events of the Nakba, including forced displacement and human rights abuses in the following decades, have caused intergenerational trauma among Palestinians. Many Palestinians still hold onto the fear of being displaced yet again, even if they have resettled into a new host country. Some of their fears have proven to be true, since some Palestinian refugees were displaced yet again following the Arab Spring in the various Middle Eastern States. Moreover, those who were born in refugee camps (and who might have never experienced displacement firsthand) still carry the trauma that their parents and grandparents went through (see Sayigh, 2013). No matter where Palestinians were displaced and relocated to, grandparents and parents share first- and second-hand accounts of the human rights violations they lived through with their children and grandchildren. This is not done to make younger generations live in fear, but rather to ensure that Palestinian history does not disappear or get rewritten.

Finally, I discuss what Palestinian shared and collective identity is comprised of. Palestinians share the hope of one day returning to Palestine, even if it is generations down the line. Furthermore, Palestinians continue their resistance through various means, including via art, advocacy, and other mediums. This is important because for many people, being Palestinian – and fighting for the fundamental rights of Palestinians internationally – is a part of their collective identity.

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<sup>1</sup> The “Nakba” refers to the destruction of Palestinian society and homeland in 1948 with the creation of the Israeli State, which led to the permanent displacement of a majority of Palestinian Arabs.

## **Background and History**

This story begins in 1916, when the whole layout of the Middle East was changed by Western imperialists with what is known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The Sykes-Picot Agreement was drafted and implemented by French and British officials to divide up the former Ottoman Empire after World War I (Gelvin, 2018). This agreement effectively cut out the borders of the Arab States as they are seen today, including countries such as Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and of course Palestine (Gelvin, 2018; see also Shoval, 2016). In addition to creating new borders, Western imperialists divided the control of these newfound states between themselves, so that Britain and France had power and influence over the region. This history is often overlooked and remains quite important when discussing the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Israel was officially declared a nation-state in 1948, as was promised by the British years before. In 1917, British officials had drafted and implemented the Balfour Declaration, which promised a Jewish state on Palestinian land (see U.S. Department of State, n.d.). The Declaration had garnered support from the Jewish communities across Europe and the United States. At the time, Palestine's population was made up of 90% Palestinian Arabs; therefore, the move to make Palestine a solely Jewish state would lead to the removal of Palestinians from their land. Furthermore, Palestinians, along with their other Arab allies, were against the Balfour Declaration. They saw it as another way that imperialist powers had imposed themselves on their lands and policymaking (Tahhan, 2018). Palestinians rejected the idea of Israel from the start, as the land of Palestine belonged to the Palestinians who had lived there long before the British came and imperialized the region. Indeed, there have been protests since the 1917 Declaration was first made. Despite this, Jewish settlers began populating the region starting from the late 1920s. However, everything had hit a turning point in 1948 when the United Kingdom withdrew from their British Mandate in the region and allowed Israel to claim itself as an independent and sovereign country (Tahhan, 2018).

When Israel declared independence, it set the catalyst for what was to occur next. To have a purely Jewish State, the Israeli government and military began systematically forcing thousands of Palestinians out of their homes in what is now referred to as the Nakba, or the Catastrophe. During the 1948 Nakba, more than 700,000 Muslim and Christian Palestinians were permanently displaced from Palestine with no means to ever return. Palestinian villages, including heritage and religious sites, were destroyed so Israelis could build their settlements.

Even today, 78 years after the first Nakba had occurred, Palestinians still remember what happened to their parents and grandparents. Many Palestinians in the now-occupied Palestinian

territories still face the same human rights abuses as their parents, as Israel continues to bulldoze through their villages to build even more settlements. These Palestinians face apartheid within their own territories and are given the rights of second-class citizens. Life for some of the Palestinians who were lost in the diaspora during or after the Nakba may not be situated better, as many have been living in refugee camps for generations. Unable to attain citizenship in any other country, they are stateless. Other countries that took in Palestinians, such as Syria, did not integrate them completely; many Palestinians born in Syria do not have a Syrian passport or identification, but rather their IDs are stamped with their country of origin: Palestine. This means they do not have the same legal status as those of actual Syrian descent. These types of injustices are what shape the Palestinian experience and reaffirm their identities. Even the Palestinians who were able to reintegrate into the United States or European countries have not forgotten their heritage, as their identity is intertwined with Palestine. This paper aims to talk about each one of these points in-depth and illustrate just how the human rights abuses facing Palestinians have shaped their collective identities.

### **Palestinian Identity Inside the Territories**

After the Nakba and the 1967 Palestinian exodus, the Palestinian territories were shrunken into the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (Flapan, 1987). While there are millions of Palestinians lost in the diaspora abroad, a census data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (n.d.) estimates there were approximately 5,354,656 Palestinians living within the territories in 2020. In addition to that population, there are thousands who are internally displaced, though it is difficult to estimate accurate numbers as there is a lack of organizations that thoroughly maintains or updates this data (Masalha, 2008). The lives of those within the territories are not easy nor peaceful, as Israel continues to systematically displace Palestinians. There have been many violent conflicts over land, property, and political rights over the years, as well.

The Palestinians within the West Bank and Gaza are essentially treated as second-class citizens. Finally, after years of settler colonialism, the United Nations has referred to the situation in Palestine as “apartheid” (UN News, 2022). The apartheid can be seen in the everyday lives of Palestinians; for example, they are often unable to use the same roads as Israelis. Palestinians are also forced to wait at checkpoints to move about their territories, which has proven to be fatal in some cases where ambulances are delayed on their way to the hospital (Khalidi, 2010). Israel has created and given the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) the power to monitor the Palestinian territories, and declare Palestinian villages “closed military zones” to prevent displaced Palestinians from returning (Masalha, 2008, p. 125).

This essentially creates the environment of an open-air prison within the Territories. Notably, the act of apartheid is a violation of international law, as it is considered a crime against humanity (see United Nations, 1998).

In addition to the crime of apartheid, Israel continues to commit crimes against humanity toward the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Examples of the war crimes that continue to be committed are seen in continued forced displacements and seizures of property. For instance, a court in Israel recently ruled for the expulsion of the Palestinian-Bedouin communities in the region of Masafer Yatta, which is located in the occupied West Bank (Al Jazeera, 2022b). Israel has been making plans to remove thousands of Palestinians from this region for the past two decades, to build more Jewish settlements and additional military zones on the occupied territory. Currently, the Palestinian inhabitants of Masafer Yatta are being told to evacuate and leave their homes for the second time and are in danger of being displaced and forcibly removed from Palestine (Al Jazeera, 2020). Mass displacements, such as what is happening in Masafer Yatta, are against international law and are considered a crime against humanity. The 1948 Rome Statute of 1948 outlines the illegality of forcibly transferring a population of people from their homes and land, yet Israel has been forcibly displacing Palestinian citizens since its inception (United Nations, 1998).

Additionally, Israel has raided Palestinian religious sites while Palestinians were worshipping. Most recently, the Al-Aqsa Mosque was raided during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, when thousands of worshippers congregate to pray. Approximately 150 Palestinian worshippers were injured., At least 300 Palestinians were arrested, according to the Israeli police, although Palestinian sources claim that at least 400 were arrested. During this raid, videos surfaced online showing Palestinians throwing rocks and the Israeli police firing tear gas, stun grenades, and shooting rubber bullets, even at those who were not resisting or trying to run. Al Jazeera reporters interviewed a cameraman who witnessed the raid and was hurt, Rami al-Khatib, who said: “[Israeli forces] brutally emptied the compound. They were attacking the mosque staff, normal people, elders, young people. There were many injured people, they fired rubber bullets inside Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. They were beating everyone, even the paramedics, they hit them” (quoted in Al Jazeera, 2022a). The Palestinian Red Crescent claims that Israeli police blocked ambulances and paramedics from entering the mosque, leaving dozens of injured Palestinians stuck in the mosque without medical care (Al Jazeera, 2022a). This is not the first time that the Al-Aqsa Mosque has been targeted by the Israeli forces, as similar reports could be found from prior years. This illustrates how even the smallest parts of Palestinian life have been interfered with by the occupation. Palestinians face human rights abuses in every aspect of their

lives, as they are even unable to attend their place of worship in peace. Despite the raids on the mosque and the Israeli police continuing to “guard” the premises, Palestinians continued to go to prayer for the rest of Ramadan; a reported 250,000 Palestinians showed up for the night of Laylat al-Qadr. This encapsulates the attitude that Palestinians have in the face of occupation, despite being attacked and the attempt to be driven out of their place of worship: they continued their resistance, and even more Palestinians attended the prayer services throughout the month.

Palestinians who are outspoken and work for human rights protection are often targeted by the IDF. In 2021, human rights lawyer and Palestinian activist Salah Hammouri was arbitrarily arrested and taken to the Ofer Israeli Military Prison (Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, 2022). For years, Hammouri had been detained, interrogated, and harassed by Israeli forces because of his activism and criticism of the Israeli state. Hammouri, who is a dual citizen of Palestine and France, is facing the risk of being deported and no longer being able to work for his non-governmental organization (NGO) in Jerusalem. Many human rights activists and lawyers are arbitrarily harassed and targeted by the Israeli forces, but unlike Hammouri, many do not have the option to be arrested or deported. During the Muslim month of Ramadan in April 2022, human rights lawyer Muhammad Hassan Muhammad Assaf was shot in the chest and killed in Nablus while taking his nephews to school. Israeli forces claim they meant to shoot people who were rioting in the area; however, eyewitnesses claim that Assaf was merely walking his nephews to school when he was shot and killed (Agence France-Presse, 2022).

Human rights lawyers are not the only ones to be targeted and killed, however, as countless Palestinian journalists have been killed by the IDF. In May 2022, Palestinian American Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh was killed while trying to cover the human rights abuses in a refugee camp inside Jenin, Palestine. Abu Akleh, along with her colleagues, was believed to be intentionally targeted by the Israelis. Abu Akleh and colleague Ali Samoudi were both shot in the head and in the back, even though they had vests and caps that read “Press” in bold, English letters. Samoudi and journalist Shatha Hanaysha both survived the unexpected attack and believed that they were intentionally targeted because of the work that they do (Abdulrahim & Kingsley, 2022; see also Al Jazeera, 2022c). Many believe that this was a deliberate killing, since Abu Akleh was a renowned journalist in the Arab world and had spent the past 20 years uncovering human rights abuses against Palestinians. Notably, journalists are protected persons under Protocol I of the Geneva Convention (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1987). Despite the dangers, many Palestinians continue their activism in the community, as journalism and the law are both ways to share their narratives and continue their resistance against the occupation.

Not only had Israel violated the Palestinian's physical and mental human rights, but they had also violated their environmental rights. Since the Nakba, Israeli forces have systematically and intentionally destroyed the Palestinian environment in what some researchers refer to as urbicide – that is, violence against the city (Bleibleh & Awad, 2022, 2020). This process relies on the systematic destruction of the native agriculture and ecosystem by the means of violence and destruction by the settlers. The practice of urbicide manifests itself in several ways. When Israel claimed its sovereignty in the 1940s, for instance, it destroyed Palestinian homes and businesses, places of worship, heritage sites, and farmland. These are some of the same tactics that the colonizers who invaded Indigenous lands in North and South America had used to ruin lands Indigenous peoples depended on. This served to drive Indigenous peoples from the area, erasing them from existing in a modern-day context (Salih & Corry, 2020). Some theorists describe this phenomenon as a type of “ecological imperialism” (Amira, 2021). In the context of Palestine, farms were burned, heritage sites were bulldozed over, and other signs that the Palestinians were living in the region were destroyed. This was intentional, as it takes away from the Palestinian indigeneity in the region and posits Palestine as a barren region in need of ecological cultivation and devoid of any sign of indigenous human life. This image justifies the Zionists settling the land and expelling the Arabs who lived there, creating the illusion that Zionist settlers entered a wasteland and brought prosperity to an otherwise empty place (Salih & Corry, 2020). These attempts to erase Palestinians have fueled symbols of Palestinian resistance, including symbols derived from the agricultural history of Palestine such as the olive branch and watermelons.

In addition to the more blatant forms of urbicide, there are also other subtle types of urbicide to consider. One way that Palestinian agricultural life has been uprooted is by the release of non-indigenous wild animals into the Palestinian region. When the Israeli settlers began to occupy the villages of the West Bank, they brought destructive animals with them. The influx of non-native wild boars, for example, proved detrimental to Palestinian farmers and their cultural life. In many villages, such as Salfit, the agricultural farmlands and gardens became overrun by wild boars, ruining social and economic livelihoods (Amira, 2021). Seemingly overnight, the Palestinian identities inside these agricultural villages went from being producers to consumers. Before the wild animals were brought in, Palestinians were able to live off the foods that they grew in their farms and gardens, such as wheat, wild thyme, barley, carob, olives, tomatoes, lettuce, chickpeas, and much more (Salih & Corry, 2022). Palestinians had been able to export and sell their agricultural commodities, and therefore partake in the transregional economy. Palestinians' ways of survival through agriculture were ruined in villages such as Halfit, when the increase of non-native animals destroyed their farms and villages. Farmers in

the region believe that the influx of animals was deliberate, as for decades they had “observed Israeli trucks unload tens of these boars onto [their] village” (Amira, 2021, p. 8). This illustrates how the Israeli government intentionally tries to uproot all facets of Palestinian life. Agriculture had been a deeply rooted part of Palestinian history, identity, and economy for generations; the destruction of farming through the introduction of non-native animals can be seen as an attack on Palestinian agricultural and cultural life.

Palestinian social life and mobility, especially for women, were also ruined by urbicide. Village women often played an integral role in their individual families and in the community as a whole (Amira, 2021). The farms and gardens became a meeting place for women, where they were able to move freely and engage in cultural life. Palestinian women had the opportunities to become both economically and politically involved in their towns through their farms, since they were able to bring their families money by selling their goods and even make investments by buying and selling plots of land. However, the wild boars in the region have essentially halted the economic and social lives of Palestinian women, as they are unable to work on land that has essentially been rendered a wasteland (Amira, 2021). Palestinians refer to the boars as “mini bulldozers” due to the amount of damage they had done to their villages, destroying every farm and garden in sight (Amira, 2021). It is notable that when Palestinians tried to find options to repel the wild animals from their farms, they were immediately struck down by the Israeli agricultural sector. Palestinian farmers had tried to use pesticides to get rid of the wild boars, prompting Israel to ban the pesticides from being sold in Palestine (Amira, 2021). Palestinian farmers are forced to change their way of living to survive due to the Israeli occupation, limiting options for rural communities and particularly women.

Palestinian agriculture is an important facet of Palestinian life and has been a symbol of resistance in recent years. During the Nakba, the thickets of olive trees served as hiding spots for women and children, who would wait there for days as the Israeli forces attacked and ethnically cleansed the area (Salih & Corry, 2022). Palestinian agriculture has multiple layers and meanings attached to it. Palestinians continue to resist the erasure of their identities and their customs by trying to preserve what fertile farmland they have left by teaching the younger generations how to grow and harvest the indigenous vegetation. Additionally, many have kept the seeds of various trees and fruits for safekeeping, since in some areas like Salfit, Palestinians are unable to grow plants on their land without imported animals completely destroying their hard work (Amira, 2021). Many Palestinians who were forcibly displaced from their villages in Palestine later re-planted their fruit trees and herb bushes on the rubble of their old homes, even if they were not permitted to rebuild there. In some areas of Palestine,



the scenery is one mixed with rubble and destruction of old Palestinian homes and cities. Vegetation continues to grow, shielding the devastation as vines grow along the walls of half knocked down buildings, and thickets of cacti and olive trees have overrun the unused area (Salih & Corry, 2022). It is not just those who are internally displaced that have regrown their vegetation, however, as many of the Palestinians who were displaced from Palestine entirely have taken on the task of regrowing and cultivating new farms and gardens in the refugee camps. This is a way to reconnect with what was lost and to teach the new generations the importance of their agricultural culture and history and ensure that this important part of Palestinian life and identity is not permanently erased (Salih & Corry, 2022). The regrowth and preservation of agrarian culture and customs encapsulate how agricultural life is inherently intertwined with the Palestinian identity. Palestinian agrarian life has a long, multi-generational history and is a key feature in their resistance movements. Palestinian agriculture will not simply be erased by Israeli bulldozers or non-native animals, as Palestinians have found ways to reinstate their agricultural practices by teaching the next generations and replanting over the rubble.

### **Palestinians Within Israel**

Outside of the Occupied Territories, there is also a population of Palestinians who reside within Israel itself and are often referred to as “Israeli Arabs.” According to the Institute for Middle East Understanding (2021), as of 2019 there were approximately 1.9 million Palestinians who live in and have citizenship in Israel, constituting 20% of the population. Even though they have citizenship, they still live under extreme oppression and systematic discrimination in Israel. Palestinian Israelis are essentially “citizens without citizenship rights” and, like their counterparts in the Occupied Territories, are treated as second-class citizens under an apartheid state (Molavai, 2009).

Israel was created to be a Jewish State and has put in laws to assert the Jewish population's power and influence over the region while diminishing the rights of the non-Jewish citizens (Institute for Middle East Understanding, 2021). Many of Israeli laws, including legal norms within the Constitution itself, are inherently discriminatory. For example, in Israel's Basic Law, there is nothing written or codified to grant equality to all citizens of Israel. Motions have been made to include minority communities within the frame of the Basic Laws, but they were immediately shut down by the Knesset (Molavai, 2009). These laws impact the everyday lives of Palestinian Israelis because the law prohibits them from buying and selling land, having access to equal education and employment, and partaking in political life (Molavai, 2009).

As Israel strives to be a homogenous State, meaning that they prefer to give out “Ethno-National Citizenship” to incoming Jewish settlers while not providing non-Jewish people with the same opportunities, they have created a legal system of discrimination. Palestinian Israelis, many of whom became citizens after the Nakba if they were not ethnically cleansed from their land, were absorbed into the Israeli state and left to live in the country’s slums (Institute for Middle East Understanding, 2021). It is difficult for these citizens to build a life for themselves in Israel, since the Israel Land Administration has prohibited the selling and leasing of land to non-Jewish people (Molavai, 2009). Furthermore, the Palestinian Israelis who have illegally built property in the settlements face legal consequences or deportation, even if their families had owned that property for generations before the Israeli settlers arrived. This leaves Palestinian Israelis at a grave disadvantage because they are unable to find adequate housing or engage in the economy, since they cannot buy any type of property or invest. Moreover, the Israeli forces continue to encroach on the areas that the Palestinians live in and drive them out to build more Jewish-only settlements. This action violates Article 17 of the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which asserts that “no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property” (United Nations, 1948).

As a result of this systemic discrimination, Palestinians in Israel also lack access to an equal education. In Israel, the school system is divided into four separate categories: public secular schools, State minority schools, state religious schools, and private religious schools (Leoncini, 2014). The state-run schools, including the secular public school system, are riddled with ultra-nationalistic and pro-Zionist ideologies, therefore making these secular institutions not so secular by definition. In Israeli Educational Law, it is required that all curriculums (including the secular schools' curriculum) teach Jewish history, culture, and religion (Molvai, 2009). All schools, including the minority Arab schools, are therefore required to spend more time learning the Torah, Hebrew, and Jewish thought rather than students’ own religion, language, and history (Molvai, 2009). Moreover, the curriculum also teaches about the creation of Israel and the events of the Nakba in a non-objective manner, thereby erasing the narratives of Palestinian history (Agbaria, 2018). The schools do not provide many resources that are written by Arab scholars or historians, which prohibits Palestinian youth from learning about the narratives and history of their heritage. In addition to these educational inequalities, the funding of the schools is also unequal, which affects the quality of education that students receive. The Arab schools are generally underfunded in comparison to the state Jewish and secular schools, making them inherently unequal in comparison. Because Jewish schools get more funding, they have more resources, teaching staff, extracurricular activities, and newer technology (Agbaria, 2018). The minority schools, in

comparison, have a limited number of teachers on hand, a higher ratio of students to teachers per classroom, limited resources, and older infrastructure (Molvai, 2009). The minority schools are still unable to create a curriculum that best suits them and their needs, as they are still bound to follow the Israeli curriculum, which is predominantly based on ethnonationalism and Jewish thought (Leoncini, 2014). This poses an issue regarding equal education, which is in violation of Article 26 of the UDHR (United Nations, 1948).

Palestinians in Israel do not enjoy equal citizenship rights, including their inability to be involved in politics and to have an active political voice. Israel prides itself in being a democratic country in the Middle East with a parliamentary system, yet Palestinian Israelis are essentially excluded from the democracy. Arab Israelis have been systematically discriminated against and barred from partaking in important committees and political positions within the Israeli government. They are therefore unable to have a voice in advocating for their rights, as they are excluded from important political sectors ranging from foreign affairs and defense to even financial institutions (Molvai, 2009). Without the means to become politically involved in the country where they have citizenship, Palestinian Israelis are unable to improve their lives within the country. By not allowing non-Jewish citizens to partake in political life, Israel is in violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which they signed and ratified in October 1991. Article 25 states that every citizen of a State must be granted the right and opportunity “to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives,” and to be able “to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections” (United Nations Human Rights, 1966). Yet the Palestinian and non-Jewish populations of Israel are deprived of these universal human rights.

Palestinians in Israel are furthermore faced with the erasure of their heritage and culture within the State. The erasure and gentrification of old Palestinian towns and cities could be seen throughout Israel. One of the most noticeable methods of Palestinian erasure is in the Hebraicization of old Arab towns and street names. For example, a town originally called “Lubya” in Arabic is now written on the map as the Hebrew name of “Lavi.” The once Palestinian village of “Balad-al Sheykh” is now called “Nesher” by the Jewish settlers who live there (Masalha, 2008). The renaming of these towns was done intentionally to take away from the Palestinian history and claims on the land. This tactic also went hand in hand with processes of urbicide utilized in the Nakba, since the erasure of names perpetuates the idea that Palestine was essentially a vast and empty land before the Israeli settlers arrived (Masalha, 2008). As a way of resistance, many Palestinians still refer to the streets and cities as their original Arabized names. Moreover, many Palestinians chose to name their children after regions and villages

they have family ties to; there are many Palestinians with the names such as Haifa, Jenin, Bisan, and Yaffa (Masalha, 2008). This is a way for Palestinians to keep these names from being erased, even if the old city names may no longer be on the map. It also ties into the Palestinian sense of identity, since names are an important aspect of oneself; to be named after a Palestinian village or town intertwines one's personal identity with their national identity and pride.

On a broader scale, Palestinians also work to preserve their history and narratives through legal means aimed at protecting cultural and heritage sites. Just as Israel has Judaized many of the names of villages and cities within their nation-state, they have also done the same with many Palestinian cultural and heritage sites. The Israeli government, along with attacking and destroying historical and sacred sites, often reinvents the sites to give them seemingly Jewish roots – and therefore giving the State the rights to the site. To save these sites from demolition or gentrification, Palestinians and various NGOs have engaged in legal battles to preserve them. Many of the sites at risk are holy sites, graveyards, and old architecture. Already, some graves have been changed from Muslim-oriented (where gravestones were decorated and etched with verses from the Quran) to Jewish-oriented (the gravestones were replaced with Jewish scripture) (Masalha, 2008). Over the decades, many historic Palestinian graveyards have been exhumed or desecrated. In 2021, Israel approved plans to build a theme park atop of al-Yusufiya cemetery in East Jerusalem (Jazayeri, 2021). These gravesites are important to Palestinians as their resting places, and yet even in death they are desecrated.

Local and international NGOs such as The Old City of Jerusalem Revitalization Program, Riwaq Center for Architectural Conservation, and The Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation all work towards the preservation of heritage sites. These organizations also work with UNESCO to list the sites and cities in their World Heritage List (Bleibleh & Awad, 2020). These NGOs attempt to rebuild parts of Israel where Palestinians are still living, such as in Jerusalem, to preserve history and to revitalize Palestinian culture and identity. These initiatives also help Palestinians economically, since they too work in or with these organizations (Bleibleh & Awad, 2020). Much of the efforts to keep the heritage and cultural sites from being destroyed coincide with Rule 38 of the Customary International Humanitarian Law, which prohibits the destruction of cultural property in times of conflict (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1949). Furthermore, the revitalization of cities is part of the broader Palestinian resistance, especially since Israel tries to prevent Palestinians from living in their deteriorating buildings and has set rigid regulations that limit the Palestinian's ability to rebuild completely. NGOs are able to adhere to these regulations or engage in legal battles when needed in order to preserve and maintain these heritage sites, which allows the Palestinian residents to continue

living in and enjoying their towns. Moreover, these organizations have allowed Palestinians to regain their culture, since projects to revitalize these towns have brought the Palestinian community back together. Despite the Israeli government suing various NGOs, old city squares and revitalized cultural sites have become hubs for Palestinian social life, and old Palestinian crafts and traditions are being brought back to life. This allows Palestinians to reconnect with their heritage and identities, even within Israel (Bleibleh & Awad, 2020).

### **The Palestinian Diaspora and Statelessness: Within the Middle East**

Many Palestinians today continue to suffer from the effects of forced displacement. Amnesty International (2019) estimates there are around 5.2 million Palestinian refugees who live in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and within the occupied Palestinian Territories. Many of these refugees still live within refugee camps, as they are unable to get the proper identification or legal status to become citizens of other countries. Moreover, the children of male Palestinian refugees carry their fathers' refugee status, which sometimes prohibits the children from attaining the nationality of their birth country (Knudsen, 2009).

Notably, Palestinian refugees – whether they are first, second, or third-generation refugees – are not provided the same protections or rights that are granted to refugees under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (see United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1951). This is due to the Convention not applying to demographics that receive aid from other branches or agencies of the United Nations (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016). Palestinian refugees currently receive aid from The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Therefore, they are not afforded protections under the 1951 Convention, and what aid they receive from UNRWA only applies to the refugees who lost their homes and sought refuge in a country where the institution operates (Knudsen, 2009). UNRWA's position and influence in the region continue to dwindle; the institution has been losing funding and has “been targeted continuously, [as] there have been nonstop attempts by Israel and the USA to terminate its role, an attempt to remove the last and only international witness of Palestinian refugee suffering since 1948” (Siklawi, 2019, p. 87). This leaves these refugees in the position of statelessness, since they are unable to get legal status or a nationality in other Middle Eastern states, nor are they allowed to return to their original state and regain their Palestinian nationality and citizenship. This is a violation of the UDHR, which allows every person the right to a nationality under Article 15 (United Nations, 1948). Additionally, it is in violation of Article 6 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which also gives every

Indigenous person the right to a nationality (United Nations, 2007). Without a state to protect their rights, stateless Palestinians and refugees are more susceptible to human rights violations (Pérez, 2011).

Trapped in the refugee camps for decades and without the means to resettle elsewhere, many Palestinians are rendered stateless. When a person is referred to as stateless, it means that the person “is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1954). When a person is not considered a citizen of any State, this frequently leaves them without government forms of identification. Stateless people face an array of human rights issues, as they are left without a government “duty bearer” or protector. Many Arab States, such as Lebanon and Jordan, have not granted citizenship to Palestinians because they fear it would infringe on their right of return, which was granted to the Palestinians by the United Nations in Resolution 194 (United Nations, 2021). Over the decades, the Arab League had passed various resolutions pertaining to the treatment of Palestinian refugees. In 1959, Resolution 1547 called for the League countries to “be compassionate towards refugees, while calling for the preservation of their Palestinians nationality” (quoted in Bastaki, 2020, p. 161). The League also passed Resolution 2455 in 1968, which required its Arab members not to issue Palestinians Arab passports, as that posed a threat to their Palestinian nationality (Bastaki, 2020). This creates a human rights issue for the Palestinians within these countries, however, since they are now prohibited from obtaining a nationality and legal documentation in both Palestine and elsewhere in the Middle East. This leaves Palestinians within the Middle East in a perpetual cycle of refugee-ness and statelessness. For decades, statelessness and the lack of human rights have been at the heart of the Palestinian refugee problem (Shiblak, 2006).

Stateless Palestinians have their voices and livelihoods taken away indefinitely. They are unable to equitably access employment and education, or even open a bank account without the proper documentation or buy or sell property. This hinders their ability to prosper economically or even improve their living situation in the countries they are stuck in (Gabiham, 2015). Palestinians in countries such as Lebanon are also deprived of their political rights, left unable to vote in the country they have been living in for decades due to lack of proper documentation. This violates their political rights, including Article 25 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which stipulates that all citizens have the right “to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic election” (United Nations Human Rights, 1966). The issue with this Covenant is that political rights are only given to those with citizenship, excluding the stateless and/or undocumented. Stateless Palestinians also are unable to freely travel, and in some of the worse cases they are unable to freely move from the refugee camps they were placed in (Gabiham, 2015). This is a direct violation of Article 14 of the UDHR, which states that

“everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state” (United Nations, 1948). Without State recognition, displaced Palestinians are not only rendered stateless, but their human rights are once again violated and they are left without the means to regain their rights.

There are approximately 58 Palestinian refugee camps still around today, with 15 of them located in Lebanon (Knudsen, 2009). Life for the Palestinians inside the refugee camps in Lebanon is one of suffering, as they have no quality of life or human rights (Siklawi, 2019). These refugees have been essentially trapped within the refugee camps for decades, and the Lebanese government has made it a point to not resettle any Palestinian refugees. Despite being forced to stay within these camps, the Lebanese government has completely banned the Palestinians from building or fixing their shelters. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Palestinian camps were originally a series of tents. Then they were replaced with shelters made of stones and bricks, and yet today Palestinians are not allowed to fix up their houses, schools, or any other infrastructure within the camps, lest they get in legal trouble with the Lebanese authorities (Knudsen, 2009). The infrastructure in these camps is deplorable; the camps are severely overcrowded, and the lack of new or well-maintained buildings poses a health risk to those who live there. There is unreliable electricity, old water systems, and faulty sewage systems within the camps. By not allowing refugees to maintain their camps, the Lebanese government violates several articles of the UDHR, including Article 25, which indicates that all persons have the right to “a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family” (United Nations, 1948). The Palestinians do not have a good standard of living within Lebanon, but rather they are trapped within open-air prisons in the refugee camps just as their counterparts are trapped in similar open-air prisons in Gaza and the West Bank.

Palestinians inside the Lebanese camps have restricted mobility, which negatively affects all aspects of their lives, from education to employment. Palestinians, who are not allowed to attain Lebanese nationality, are unable to leave their refugee camps to find employment in wider Lebanon. This poses an issue for the Palestinians to enjoy any economic growth, and it prohibits them from being able to live out their lives freely because they cannot mix with the broader economy. Another way that Lebanon restricts Palestinian's mobility is by requiring re-entry visas for refugees who travel abroad in a mandate implemented in 1995 (Knudsen, 2009). This essentially bars Palestinians from finding employment abroad, since many were once able to find some type of employment in the Gulf states and return to their families in the camps with remittance money. Without the means to find legitimate employment abroad or within Lebanon, Palestinians are forced to either work with UNRWA in the

refugee camps or work illegally outside the camps, which is often the only choice available for many refugees (Serhan, 2019). Palestinians who engage in illegal labor are often exploited by their employers, paid below minimum wage, and forced to work longer hours (Serhan, 2019). These restrictions on mobility and the prohibition of employment are violations of the UDHR under Articles 13 and 23, respectively. The human rights abuses occurring within these camps highlight that rights challenges do not disappear once people leave the Palestinian territories, but rather they face a new set of struggles abroad.

Palestinians in camps face obstacles to their political rights, but this does not stop them from having a political identity. Similar to the identities of Palestinians in the Territories and Israel, identities in the camps are also centered on resistance and national unity. The Palestinians inside the refugee camps often become advocates for the Palestinians back home, as well as advocates for better living conditions within the refugee camps themselves (Siklawi, 2019). This advocacy occurs without having any real representation in the Lebanese government, which their rights to political and legal representation under Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (United Nations Human Rights, 1966). This is why the right to nationality, as granted to everyone in Article 15 of the UDHR (United Nations, 1948), is vital for the Palestinian cause: It would not only solve the issue of statelessness, but it would give them the means to advocate for their rights within their country of residence.

Compared to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, the status of Palestinians in Jordan is much more complicated because there are Palestinians residing within refugee camps and also resettled into broader Jordan. In the 1950s, Jordanian King Hussein bin Talal annexed a part of the West Bank in Palestine, effectively making the territory part of the Jordanian kingdom (Pérez, 2011). Even though part of historic Palestine is under Jordanian rule, many Palestinians (especially those who were displaced from Gaza) do not have Jordanian citizenship. Rather, while the Gazan refugees were once granted citizenship in the 1960s and into the 1980s, their nationalities were stripped and they were given the status of Jordanian residents instead (Pérez, 2011). A recent Human Rights Watch (2015) investigation found that the Jordanian government continues to systemically and arbitrarily deprive Palestinian Jordanians of their citizenship. Approximately 2,700 Palestinians had their Jordanian citizenship stripped from them between 2004 and 2008 alone (Human Rights Watch, 2015). The arbitrary revocation of citizenship is a violation of Article 15 of the UDHR, which also states that “no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality” (United Nations, 1948). The removal of Jordanian citizenship poses an issue for Palestinians, who were once allowed to reap the



benefits of Jordanian citizenship – including the education, employment, property, and political rights, as well as the right to move freely in and out of the country.

Those who live within Jordan face an array of human rights abuses due to their stateless status, and it affects nearly every aspect of their lives. While Palestinian Jordanians were once allowed to seek employment in almost any field when they had citizenship status, those revoked of their citizenship status (and those who were never given Jordanian nationality from the start) now face issues seeking legitimate employment. Due to the Jordanian labor laws, only Jordanian nationals can acquire secure employment within the country. Those who do not have citizenship must apply for work permits in the country, which are hard to come by because they require the applicant to prove that they have skills or experience that are not already available among the workers already present (Pérez, 2011). This leaves Palestinians without a means to find employment. Many are rejected after applying for work permits, forcing them to work illegally within the country and making them unable to unionize and advocate for better working conditions (Pérez, 2011). The lack of access to equal employment in both Jordan and Lebanon is a human right violation; Article 23 of the UDHR ensures that everyone, no matter nationality, or lack thereof, has the right to employment, favorable work conditions, and the right to form and join unions (United Nations, 1948). Subsequently, the Palestinians' lack of employment rights also impacts their right to property, which is a right granted in Article 17 of the UDHR (United Nations, 1948). Not only has their lack of finances hindered their abilities to buy or rent property, but stateless Palestinians are unable to buy or rent property on their own. This leads to many Palestinians relying on others who have Jordanian citizenship, such as a spouse or a friend, to buy property under their name to get around the law (Pérez, 2011). The inability to acquire property is harmful because it prohibits non-citizens from buying a home or business space, and it also essentially closes them off from the economic gains and forces many Palestinians to stay within the overcrowded and structurally unsafe refugee camps in Jordan (Pérez, 2011).

The refugee camps in Jordan have similar regulations to their counterparts in Lebanon, and the education system has been designed to hold Palestinian children back. Refugee camps in Jordan are again extremely old and overcrowded. One camp hosts approximately 25,700 refugees, and there are around 2130 individual "home" units within the camp (Pérez, 2011). These camps are extremely overcrowded, which leads to each individual home being overcrowded as well; an average Palestinian family lives in houses with around 12 family members (Pérez, 2011). The living conditions in the camps are extremely unsafe. Jordan has instilled regulations that prohibit refugees from fixing up their homes in the camps, as well (Pérez, 2011). Many of the units in the camps have no electricity, deteriorating

sewage systems, and limited access to clean water (Khawaja & Tiltnes, 2002). These abysmal living conditions have a negative effect on the Palestinians' health, as they are unable to thrive in such an unhealthy living environment. Yet non-citizens of Jordan do not have the right to healthcare; they are not given health insurance or the same benefits of free medical treatments at certain health care facilities provided to Jordanian citizens (HRW, 2015). Furthermore, many of Palestinian refugees live in deep poverty and cannot afford the high expenses of medical care, leaving them to suffer from their illnesses, or in the worst-case scenario die from their sickness. Every person, no matter nationality, deserves the right to an adequate life and good health under Articles 3 and 25 of the UDHR (United Nations, 1948). This situation often leaves Palestinians in the camp with a sense of dejection, as 40% of poor Palestinians in Jordanian refugee camps are reported to feel hopeless about their futures (Khawaja & Tiltnes, 2002).

Leaders in Middle Eastern States such as Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan often refuse to give Palestinians citizenship because they believe that it would hinder Palestinians' right of return. However, the acquisition of citizenship elsewhere does not negate their right of return, as some leaders might have believed in the past (Bastaki, 2020). Rather, the issue of only having one citizenship is ever-changing, since the world has become increasingly more open and cosmopolitan. Today, many people have the option of dual-citizenship, and many migrants have shown to hold multiple allegiances across national borders (Bastaki, 2020). This means that Palestinians who are left stateless in refugee camps can acquire citizenship within other countries while still holding onto their identities and allegiances with the state of Palestine. If their right of return is granted, they may move back to their familial lands. By not giving Palestinians citizenship after more than 70 years of waiting, countries such as Lebanon and Jordan are in violation of Article 15 UDHR, which gives everyone the right to a nationality (United Nations, 1948). Palestinians have been deprived of this human right not only by the Israeli settlers, but by the countries where they sought refuge in.

The Palestinian identity in the diaspora within the Middle East is also one of continual struggle and resistance. They face human rights struggles on two fronts – the first in their homeland of Palestine, and the second in refugee camps filled with first-, second-, and third-generation refugees. It is a struggle to survive within these refugee camps, where people face an unhealthy environment and lack of citizenship rights. This affects the mental health of the Palestinians, as many feel hopeless or depressed about their seemingly endless situation (Khawaja & Tiltnes, 2002). Some do what they can to have a sense of normalcy within the camps, and many try to recreate some aspects of their old homes within their new makeshift ones. The elderly, especially, continue to share the oral history of Palestine with the

new generations so that the histories and stories are not lost to time. Moreover, “elderly refugees keenly insist on reproducing the rhythms, smells, and taste that were left behind decades ago (Salih & Corry, 2022, p. 392). When looking at the outskirts of the overcrowded refugee camps, one would find a plethora of growing olive groves and other fruit trees, the trees that were once grown by Palestinians in their villages, as some Palestinian farmers and gardeners were able to salvage and take the seeds with them (Salih & Corry, 2022). The everyday aspects of Palestinian culture, such as gardening, cooking, language, and even the way Palestinians dress is what keeps the Palestinian identity alive in the refugee camps. Deeper elements of Palestinian identity, such as political resistance and activism for freedom and equality, can be found both within the camps and in Palestine itself.

### **The Nakba’s Intergenerational Trauma**

The Palestine-Israel conflict has been ongoing since the 1940s when the initial Nakba occurred, and today Palestinians suffer from the trauma inflicted upon them and their families. The Palestinians inside the Palestinian Territories and Israel still face the first-hand trauma and human rights abuses by the Israeli government and military police (Khalidi, 2010). The intergenerational trauma – that is, the trauma inflicted to the children and grandchildren of the Nakba survivors – is similar to secondhand trauma, as those people did not live through the forced displacements or the apartheid state themselves but suffer its consequences. The Palestinians who survived the catastrophe in 1948 suffered not only the loss of their homes and livelihoods, but also faced a collective trauma from being ethnically cleansed from their homeland. This trauma was passed down to their children and grandchildren, who may have resettled to a different country or who may even still reside within Palestinian refugee camps. This leads to a type of intergenerational trauma experienced by both Palestinians within the Territories and in the diaspora.

Many Palestinians who live abroad still face fear, even if they have citizenship in a different country. This type of trauma comes from the experiences that the Palestinian individuals might have faced when they were evicted from their homeland and left without the protections afforded by legal nationality. This is especially true of Palestinians who moved to Western States on work or student visas, since those could expire or be revoked at moment’s notice (Gabiam, 2015). Many fear they will have nowhere to go if their host country decides to no longer accept them. Many Palestinians abroad speak of their uneasiness, especially in times when harsh political rhetoric is used in their host country, and fear the country turning on them and no longer accepting them as the “type” of refugees wanted in the country (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016). This adds onto existing trauma, as many Palestinians still do not have

a permanent country to reside in (see Mamdani, 2022). Therefore, the fear of being displaced yet again always remains in the back of their minds. Notably, their fear might not be particularly unfounded, as some Palestinians who may have resettled or lived in refugee camps in the Middle East have already been displaced several times over. During the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, for example, 35,000 Palestinians were expelled from their homes in the crossfire of the 1990s (Siklawi, 2019). More recently, the Syrian war, which caused one of the biggest migration crises in the twenty-first century, displaced thousands of Palestinian refugees to Europe and the United States (Siklawi, 2019). The intergenerational trauma of the Palestinians is valid, and it further shows how their personal struggles and identities have been impacted by the events of the Nakba and the years following it.

### **Shared Identity and Hope**

Despite modern Palestinians being displaced and scattered into different regions of the world, they are all united with a shared identity. They pass their culture, language, and history of what happened during the Nakba to their children and to their children's children. Many still hope to return to Palestine one day, and many Palestinians do what they can to raise awareness about the human rights abuses that continue in their homeland.

Despite being forced out of their villages in the mass displacements that occurred since the 1940s, many Palestinians believe they will one day be able to go back home. Parents and grandparents teach their children about their national and ethnic identity as Palestinians and teach them to never let their identity disappear or be forgotten. This is true of those in the diaspora abroad and those internally displaced in Palestine. Even those born abroad still view themselves as Palestinian first, and their host country's nationality second (Bastaki, 2020). In a study done about the Palestinian personality, Banat and Dayyeh (2019) found that many Palestinians came up with similar answers when asked about their identity. Their overall responses were, "we are Palestinians, we were Palestinians, we are still Palestinians, we will stay like this forever, we will return to Palestine sooner or later" (Banat & Dayyeh, 2019; see also Banat et al., 2018).

When Israel declared its independence in 1948, Prime Minister Ben Gurion assured Israeli settlers that Palestinians would never return as "the old will die and the young will forget" (Bastaki, 2020). Yet his prediction of the future did not come to fruition; the collective Palestinian identity is one made up of ethnic and national pride, and the elders work to ensure that the future generations do not forget Palestine and continue to resist the occupation. This pride and security in their identity is a way to ensure that their history, culture, and the very essence of their humanity are not erased. As Palestinians

are native to the region, they are entitled to be able to preserve and practice their culture and identity. According to Article 33 of the UNDRIP, all “indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect, and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions” (United Nations, 2007).

Many Palestinians have held onto the deeds of their original houses and lands in Palestine, in hopes of one day returning and resettling (Bastaki, 2020). These deeds are passed down within families for generations, in hopes that the rights given to them through Resolution 194 will be granted. Some Palestinians who live in the West, such as American passport holders in the United States, are sometimes able to return to their familial villages and live in or rebuild their homes (Bastaki, 2020). This is an example of how Palestinians can resist occupation through gaining citizenship in another country, since they have far more opportunities than they would have if they remained stateless. The safekeeping of deeds and the desire to rebuild and return is what shapes the Palestinian identity, no matter where people are.

The shared pride that Palestinians have over their land is expressed in many ways. Palestinian singers, filmmakers, artists, and poets all took on the task of showcasing Palestinian resistance and the shared identity of people scattered around the world. Palestinians feel visible and united through these different forums. The Palestinian singer Mohammed Assaf (2015), who was raised in a refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, wrote a song about the identity of Palestinians. His music often discusses the struggles and the national pride that Palestinians have, and his music is a source of pride and unity. In the song *Dammi Falastini, or My Blood is Palestinian*, the lyrics shed light on the mindset of resistance that many Palestinians share and the song is extremely popular. Palestinian poets use their artistic skills to also highlight the struggles and feelings of resistance that their people face. Poets such as Mahmoud Darwish (1964) are able to create poetry that transcends time, as many of the feelings and issues that have occurred in the Palestinian territories since Darwish was writing in the 1960s are still applicable to this day. One of Darwish’s (1964) most controversial poems, *Identity Card*, discusses how the use of Israeli checkpoints and the demand for Palestinians to use identification cards are a way to humiliate the Palestinians and reduce their identity to mere numbers. The poem expresses the anger and frustrations that the Palestinians feel under such a demeaning and inhumane system, as well as the worry they feel for the next generation. Though this poem was written almost 60 years ago, the same frustrations around the Israeli use of identity cards, and the loss of their personhood, are still relevant today. These types of art forms are important for the culture of Palestinian resistance. They are also important for the

collective identity that Palestinians share, as any Palestinian can listen to the music or read the poetry and mourn for what was lost, while also feeling pride and unity for who they are.

Palestinian resistance movements are supported around the world, in part, because many Palestinians share the hope to one day return to Palestine as part of their “right of return.” In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 194, which gave the Palestinians the right to return home (Fiddian- Qasmiyeh, 2015; see also American Friends Service Committee, 2021). Resolution 194 states that “refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible” (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 1948). This right exists even though there have been “continual attempts and proposals to terminate this Palestinian right of return to historic Palestine” (Siklawi, 2019, p. 89). In the 1970s, Resolution 3236 was passed by the United Nations and also gave Palestinians the right to return, along with the rights to self-determination and sovereignty (United Nations, 2021). Yet neither stipulation of the Resolution has been implemented.

Palestinian identity also centers on concepts of freedom and resistance. Palestinians want the freedom to be able to move and live freely. They want to be able to move from the refugee camps and to be able to move around the West Bank and the Gaza strip without being stopped at checkpoints (Khalidi, 2010). This is an important aspect of their collective identity. Palestinians continue to advocate for themselves politically, whether they are in Palestine, in the wider Middle East, or abroad in the West. Some join the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which has helped to shape the collective political consciousness and advocate for Palestinian rights in Palestine and in the refugee camp (Siklawi, 2019). Many Palestinians chose to resist the occupation and shed light on the suffering in the refugee camps through their career paths, such as going into journalism, the law, or policymaking. In the West, many Palestinians advocate for Palestinian rights and their right of return in various ways, since they enjoy more political freedoms than their counterparts in the Middle East (Mokadi & Yousef, 2022). In the United States, for example, Palestinian American Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib introduced a 2022 resolution to Congress to have the United States officially recognize the Nakba as the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians (Harb, 2022). This type of advocacy is important, as it shares the human rights abuses and history with a much broader and international audience. In 2021, over 100,000 Palestinians took to the streets in over 75 U.S. cities to commemorate the Nakba (Farber, 2021). In 2022, thousands across

European cities also gathered in remembrance of the Nakba and to protest the unjust killing of Shireen Abu Akleh, who was killed days before the Nakba's 74th anniversary (Al-Jazeera, 2022).

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The aftermath of the Nakba was harrowing for all Palestinians involved, as it displaced thousands and left many more under the new rule of an apartheid state. The Palestinians inside the Territories and Israel continue to suffer from human rights violations by the Israeli government and IDF; arbitrary arrests, forced displacement, and killings have become the new normal in Palestinian life. Palestinians find it difficult to go about their daily lives, as they are forced to go through daily checkpoints, show their ID cards, and face systematic oppression at every turn. Palestinians are not only in danger of losing their physical homes, but they are in danger of losing their identities as well. Indeed, there have been many attempts by the Israeli State to destroy heritage sites and even farmland, which is important to Palestinian farmers. Despite the human rights violations that they face, the Palestinians continue to resist by preserving their culture and heritage sites, continuing to farm and cultivate their land, and teaching their children the oral history of Palestine. Even those in the diaspora continue to share their history and their stories with their children and grandchildren so that the Palestinian identity is not lost to time. Today, 70 years since the first generation of Palestinians were ethnically cleansed from their homes at gunpoint, families continue to share their stories and many hope to one day return to their familial lands.

For Palestinians to be liberated in Palestine and abroad, many governments must work to protect Palestinians' human rights – that is, the rights they are entitled to as humans, no matter their nationality, religion, race, or background. Human rights violations within refugee camps in countries such as Jordan and Lebanon need to be acknowledged and addressed, and the governments of these countries need to be held accountable and begin work towards helping these refugees. Middle Eastern states that host refugee camps should do better to protect refugees' basic human rights. This includes the right to equal employment and education, as outlined by the UDHR and international human rights law. It is most important that Palestinians have the means to attain citizenship within these States, as the right to nationality is guaranteed in Article 15 of the UDHR (United Nations, 1948). If Palestinians were able to attain citizenship in countries such as Jordan or Lebanon, it would not negate their ability to return to Palestine if their right to return is granted. In today's cosmopolitan world, dual citizenships are becoming common. Therefore, the fear that the leaders in the Arab League have regarding this issue is unfounded; Palestinians can have two citizenships while keeping their Palestinian nationality and

identity. Obtaining citizenship in these countries would address a host of human rights issues, including the right to participate in politics and the right to own property. However, it is still important to improve the quality of the refugee camps in these countries regardless of the Palestinian's citizenship status. These camps are overcrowded, unsanitary, and do not provide the inhabitants with the means to live a successful and dignified life. It is necessary to improve camp infrastructure, including sewage and water systems. Moreover, the residents in the camps should have access to equal employment, education, and healthcare. States should work towards upholding the rights granted to Palestinians by the international human rights regime and start integrating them into the broader society, all while advocating for their right to return.

It is also important for the international community to advocate for the stateless Palestinians and to demand an end to the apartheid state in Israel and the Occupied Territories. One of the ways to gain international attention and support is for the United Nations to include the Palestinians in their *I Belong* statelessness campaign. The campaign currently excludes Palestinians from their efforts to end statelessness worldwide, as Palestinian statelessness was caused by "political" means (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016, p. 306). Furthermore, it is essential for Israel, and the rest of the international community, to follow through on the promised right of return outlined by Resolution 194 (Siklawi, 2019). For the Palestinians to be made whole again, they should be able to freely move to and from their familial homes in Palestine. The Occupied Territories should be freed from the apartheid rule of Israel and have the freedom to govern themselves as a free and independent state.

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