

## Exploring the Issues of Denial and Blame in Relation to the Expulsion of Palestinians from Palestine in 1948

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### Abstract

This article investigates Palestinian refugees' current views regarding blame (responsibility) for their displacement from Palestine in 1948 from both generational and gender perspectives. The Palestinian refugee narrative posits the expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland in 1948 (*Al Nakba*) was a direct result of forced population transfer by the Zionist movement (Kanaana 2000). The aim of this research investigation is to determine if, or the extent to which, this narrative may have changed after many years of displacement. Palestinian refugees views regarding (responsibility) for their expulsion from Palestine in 1948 were captured via a self-completed survey. The survey was completed by 1200 male and female refugees aged between 18 and 75+ years representing four generations living in five refugee camps located in the West Bank in 2013. Participants were recruited from Community Centres, Local Refugees Committee Centres, Health Centres and United Nations offices located in each refugee camp. The findings showed that Palestinian refugees across all age groups and for both genders overwhelmingly continue to blame Jewish forces for the expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland in 1948. Based on these findings, the main conclusion drawn in this article is that the Palestinian refugee narrative of *Al Nakba* which blames the Zionist forces of 1948 remains active across the generations despite many years of displacement.

**Keywords:** Right of return, refugee, blame, responsibility, Al Nakba, expulsion.

### Introduction

In 1948 the first Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion declared in reference to the Palestinian exodus from Palestine that same year; *The old will die and the young will forget*. This statement points to the key issue of blame and responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem. The traditional Palestinian refugee narrative posits the expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland in 1948 (*Al Nakba*) was a direct result of forced population transfer by the Zionist movement and the state of Israel (Kanaana, 2000). Contrary to this view is the assertion that Palestinians left Palestine on orders from Arab leaders with the expectation that they would return following victory in the war against the newly borne state of Israel (Shlaim, 1988). A third view, closely related to the view of the key role played by Arab

leadership, is that Palestinians left their homeland voluntarily. Thus, there are at least three narratives to explain the expulsion of Palestinian refugees in 1948 which may be broadly categorised into two camps: the indigenous peoples' view, and the occupier's view. Given the inherent complexities surrounding the narratives explaining the 1948 exodus, it is important to capture refugees' views regarding the issues of blame and responsibility for this historical event. As such, this article aims to determine the dominant view among Palestinian refugees currently living in refugee camps in the West Bank regarding who *is responsible for the creation of the refugee problem in 1948*.

This article begins with a brief historical background of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This background is provided to contextualise the subsequent discussion of the Palestinian narrative of Al Nakba. Following this is an outline of the three “perspectives” of blame and responsibility for the 1948 Palestinian exodus. The methodological details of the broader research investigation which facilitated the collection of data on the issue of blame and responsibility are then provided. This is followed by a discussion of the main results to emerge from the survey. This article then concludes with a reiteration of the main finding and its implications.

## **Overview of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict**

The Palestinian–Israeli conflict (PIC) originated in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the conception of modern Zionism – a political movement that aimed to create a Jewish state in Palestine (Frangi 1983). In 1870 the Zionists organised large-scale Europe Jewish immigration, land purchase, and the construction of an exclusively Jewish colony in Palestine which was part of the Turkish Ottoman Empire (Frangi 1983). Violent clashes between the Palestinians and the Jewish immigrants however started to emerge as early as 1886 (Rubenberg, 2003).

Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, the League of Nations mandated authority over Palestine to the British. The Belfour Declaration of 1917 committed Britain to establish a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. As a result, Palestinians began to resist what they perceived to be the threat posed by Zionist colonisation (Sayigh 1979). In 1920, Palestine was placed under British rule and this continued up to May, 1948. Zionist colonisation of Palestine accelerated rapidly during this period on the back of

crucial assistance provided by the British (Said 1992). Palestinian resistance intensified, but was brutally crushed by the British forces (Sayigh, 1979).

In 1936 Jews comprised 28 per cent of the total population of Palestine (Abu-Lughod 1987). The Zionist leadership developed the concept of ‘transfer’ – the organised movement of the indigenous population to neighbouring countries – as a form of cultural cleansing. In November, 1942 the official goal of the Zionist movement became the creation of a Jewish state (Chomsky, 1999). In 1947, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) voted to partition Palestine whereby 56 per cent of the territory was allocated to the Jews for the creation of a future state (Hadawi, 1970). At this time the Jews represented a minority community comprising about 31 per cent of the population and owning around seven per cent of the land (Rubenberg 2003). Following the partition vote hostilities between Palestinians and Israelis erupted into a full-scale civil war. On 15 May 1948 following the declaration of the state of Israel, Arab states entered the war in support of the Palestinians. By the end of the war in January, 1949 Israel had conquered 78 percent of Palestine, with Jordan and Egypt taking control of the West Bank and Gaza, respectively. As a consequence, 750,000 Palestinians were displaced from their homes to now live in newly created refugee camps (Masalha, 2001).

The reasons for and ramifications of the Palestinian exodus became the focus of discussion within the international community and many plans emerged to resolve the Palestinian refugee issue. In fact, the plight of the Palestinian refugees is still the subject of great interest to many intellectuals, politicians and sociologists at the local and global level. In turn, it may be easy to suggest a dichotomous relationship between the views of the Palestinian refugee and the views of the occupier on the issue of blame; that is, the occupier is solely to blame, and the Palestinian is solely to blame, respectively. However, findings from research studies suggest a much more complex landscape (Karsh, 2000).

### **The Palestinian Narrative of *Al Nakba***

The issue of blame for *Al Nakba* and its ramifications for Palestinians remains a central element in refugee narratives passed on from generation to generation. In fact, it is asserted in the literature that Palestinians were forced to leave their homeland due to the direct attacks on their cities, villages and homes. In addition, Palestinians were under direct threats and fear due to the psychological warfare being waged by the Zionist and Jewish forces on the ground. I personally remember conversations between my parents about their village and the reason

of the exodus. I recall my father narrating that the Jewish forces surrounded their villages and shot at people until they left the village. It was my understanding at the time that they did not leave voluntarily because they fought until the last minute and a number of the villagers died resisting the Jewish forces. Indeed, I recall my father telling us about the massacres that took place in the village next to theirs. My father described that the direct killing, daily attacks, and war propaganda created a state of fear and chaos and, as a result, many Palestinians fled to safer areas. Subsequently, they were not permitted to return to their homes and even those who try to return found their homes destroyed and under the control of Jewish forces.

This version of *Al Nakba* is captured in a study by Zayed (2013) of Palestinian refugee narratives. To undertake an intergenerational comparison, the researcher interviewed first, second, third and fourth generation refugees living in the West Bank. During the interview participants were asked to provide their thoughts on the reasons for the 1948 exodus. Zayed (2013) reported that the predominant refugee narrative was that Palestinians were forced to leave their villages and town by Jewish forces as a result of direct attacks and massacres. Participants spoke of Jewish forces that continued to fight Palestinian civilians until they had taken control of the villages and towns or until they were totally destroyed. In terms of voluntary departure, the participants in Zayed's (2013) study recalled or reported that they left to seek safety because they did not have the weapons required to fight and defend their town. Moreover, some participants commented that they left to escape the rape of Palestinian women perpetrated by Jewish forces. Overall, most refugees were of the view that Palestinians left Palestine in 1948 because they were forced out of their homes and living in fear. The participants in Zayed's (2013) study referred to two village massacres in particular: at Dawima and at Deir Yassin where they witnessed or heard about the killing of hundreds of men, women and children. Indeed, I recall my father telling us about both massacres and I remember other children from our refugee camps whose parents were originally forced out of Dawima. They told us about their village and the massacres that took placed which forced them to leave.

## **Forced Expulsion**

Support for the view in the Palestinian refugee narrative of forced expulsion is even forthcoming from a number of Israeli scholars and historians in their proposition that Palestinians were subject to attempts at ethnic cleansing in 1948 (Frankelstein, 2008). In support of this perspective, Palestinian scholars also argued that Jewish troops were well

trained and armed, whereas Palestinian militiamen were mostly volunteers and poorly trained (Abu Sitta, 2001). As argued by Said (2001), the destruction of Palestine was not an unintended outcome, but was in fact a well-planned event to create the Jewish presence in Palestine. Furthermore, they argued Palestinians had limited access to automatic guns and were therefore unable to defend their land and property (Abu Sitta, 2001). Kanaana (2000) argued that the expulsion of Palestinians and the de-Arabization of the country was not an historical accident or due to the weakness of Arabs. Rather, it was once consequence of Zionist ideology that called for the establishment of a wholly and exclusively Jewish State. As such, Pappé (2007) asserted that the aim of the expulsion was to cause the evacuation of as many Palestinian residents as possible. The evacuation of refugees also included indiscriminate massacres against the civilian Arab community (Finkelstein, 2008). The Zionist movement considered Palestine as an empty land and the native Palestinians who lived there as invisible people (Pappé, 2007).

Said (2003) argued that Moshe Dayan, Israel's Major General Commander during the exodus, had affirmed Israel's role in creating the refugee problem through statements such as: "There is no place built in this country that did not have a former Arab population and "We took them by force, do not forget that."

The Zionists plan to cleanse Palestinians from the region was reflected in a statement by Ben Gurion, the primary founder and the first Prime Minister of Israel, as late as October 1948. Ben Gurion said: "The Arabs of Eretz Israel have but one function left, to run away" (Morris 1987). The founder of the transfer policy always claimed there was no place for Palestinians in the state of Israel. Therefore, his policy called for the forced removal of all Palestinians from Palestine and the re-distribution of their land and property among the newly arrived Jews (Abu Sitta 2001). The aggressive approach endorsed by Ben Gurion was further evident when he stated: "We should prevent Arab return at any cost" (Masalha, 1992). In addition, Morris (2008) claims:

*The destruction of 418 Palestinian villages inside the green line [pre-1967 Israeli border], concealing the landmarks of Palestinian life and the massacres against the Palestinian people are the best evidence for the brutality to which the Palestinians were exposed. They were dispersed throughout the world.*

Thus the Palestinian narrative states the expulsion was planned and created by the Zionist movement with the aim to colonise Palestine (Zayed 2013). As such, Israel is blamed for the forced expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland and the creation of the refugee problem.

## Orders from Arab Leaders

The view that Palestinians left Palestine in 1948 under instruction from Arab leaders is one maintained by successive Israeli governments. This is well-illustrated in the claims made by former Israeli Prime Minister, Shimon Peres. Peres claimed the Arab states within the region were the main reason for the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem. According to Peres, claims made by Arab states to the contrary were untrue, and therefore Israeli troops did not force Palestinians from their homes (Peres, 1993). When reading his book, *The New Middle East*, it is clear to the reader that Peres attempts to shift blame for the evacuation and its consequences onto Arab states and even onto the victims (i.e. Palestinians). According to his account, Arab leaders failed to host the Palestinian refugees and offer them a permanent home as Israel had done when it absorbed Jewish war refugees. Indeed, blaming the victims still appears to be a ploy used by Israeli officials and Zionist activists even today to prevent the return of Palestinians to their homeland.

Central to the Zionist claim is that the event of 1948 would not have occurred if the Arab armies and leaders did not get involved (Kananna, 2000; Finkelstein, 2008), a view which has support in the literature. For instance, in his book titled *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, Morris (1987) claimed he “carefully, dispassionately and objectively” investigated the issue of blame and found no evidence of Arab leaders issuing calls to Palestine's Arabs to leave their homes and villages. Moreover, he found no evidence of a radio or press campaign urging them to flee. However, in his text; *The birth of the Palestinian refugee problem revisited*, Morris (2004) changed his position and asserted that Arab leaders did on fact encourage their brethren to leave. Starting in December 1947, he said, “Arab officers ordered the complete evacuation of specific villages in certain areas, lest their inhabitants ‘treacherously’ acquiesce in Israeli rule or hamper Arab military deployments.” He concluded, “There can be no exaggerating the importance of these early Arab-initiated evacuations in the demoralization, and eventual exodus, of the remaining rural and urban populations”.

Furthermore, when presenting his views on the Arab-Israeli conflict to the *Irish Times*, Morris[2008] stated:

*There was no Zionist 'plan' or blanket policy of evicting the Arab population, or of 'ethnic cleansing' and the demonisation of Israel is largely based on lies—much as the demonisation of the Jews during the past 2,000 years has been based on lies. And there is a connection between the two.*

Underpinning the Zionist claims of not being responsible for the Palestinian exodus are assertion that radio broadcasts in Arabic called for Palestinian to leave their towns and villages. Such claims are disputed however is the study by Childers 1961 of the BBC archives of radio traffic monitoring from Cyprus in 1948. He claims "[T]here was not a single order, or appeal, or suggestion about evacuation from Palestine from any Arab radio station, inside or outside Palestine, in 1948," and that to the contrary (Arab) broadcasts gave flat orders to civilians to stay put. In light of such evidence it may be argued that Israel's position to place the blame for the exodus in 1948 onto Arab leaders allows it to reject any responsibility for the exodus. As Said (2003) claims, Israeli assertions that Palestinians left Palestine under instruction from Arab leaders should be regarded as little more than propaganda.

### **Voluntarily Exodus**

The claim that Palestinians left Palestine voluntarily in 1948 is perhaps not unexpectedly also at the centre of Israel's version of the exodus. As stated by Peres (1993), Arabs living in the region left their homes before the establishment of Israeli institutions and, in particular, the Israeli Defence Force. Of course, the assertions by Israel that Palestinians left voluntarily further strengthens their argument that Israel should bear no responsibility, material or moral, for the Palestinian plight.

However, the view that Palestinians left Palestine voluntarily also has some support in the literature. For instance, the perspectives of Zionist historians such as Joseph Schectman, Leo Kohn, Jon Kimche and Maria Syrkin are described by Steven Glazer (1980) below:

*The Arabs in Palestine were asked to stay and live as citizens in the Jewish state. Instead, they chose to leave, either because they were unwilling to live with the Jews, or because they expected an Arab military victory which would annihilate the Zionists. They thought they could leave temporarily and return at their leisure. Later,*

*an additional claim was put forth, namely that the Palestinians were ordered to leave, with radio broadcasts instructing them to quit their homes (97)*

In addition, Bickerton & Klausner (2005), offered the following explanation:

*Israelis have long contended that during the Israeli War of Independence the Palestinian Arabs abandoned their homes and villages of their own free will. Not only that, they did so at the urging of the Arab leadership, who, the argument goes, told the Palestinians to leave until the Jewish state was destroyed and then they could return.*

The above claim is strongly rejected by Khalidi (2005) in his assertion that Arab governments called on Palestinian to remain in their homes. He argues that a number of Arab radio broadcasts urged Palestinians to remain in their homes and to resist the Zionists. While it is not disputed that Palestinians did in fact leave their homes, the voluntarily nature of their departure is widely disputed. Of some consideration is the reported level of fear felt by Palestinians as a result of the direct attacks by the Zionists and the propaganda war being waged against them. In turn, Abu Sitta (1996) has even attempted to quantify the reasons for the Palestinian exodus in 1948, stating:

*the Palestinian did not leave on Arab orders. They were expelled or removed from their villages by force ...89% left due to direct Israeli military assaults, 10% left due to psychological war and the remaining 1 % left on their own initiatives.*

Astonishingly, some Zionist historians claim that wealthy Palestinians left Palestine voluntarily in anticipation of Arab army victory (Glazer, 1980). In short, this argument has not been widely supported by scholars, however, Israeli officials and some scholars have attempted use this claim as part of their propaganda initiative to deny Palestinians the right of return.

The discussion above clearly points to conflicting views as to who is primarily responsible for the exodus of Palestinian refugees from Palestine in 1948. As such, an examination of the current views of Palestinian refugees on this issue is warranted in an attempt to provide some clarity for the reader.



## Methods and Design

This article emerges from a survey of Palestinian refugees living in the West Bank in 2013. The survey used for data collection on Palestinian refugee views of who is responsible for the creation of the refugee problem in Palestine in 1948 was conducted as part of a PhD. research study examining their attitudes towards the right of return. The following question was included in the survey instrument:

*There are different opinions on the question of who is responsible for the creation of the refugee problem in 1948. In your opinion, who is the party responsible? Please chose one only: (i) Mainly, Palestinians left voluntarily; (ii) Mainly, Palestinians were told to leave by Arab leaders; (iii) Mainly, Jewish forces expelled the Palestinians; (iv) A combination of all of the above: and (v) Don't know.*

This study took place in the West Bank in Palestine. According to UNRWA records, there are (19) nineteen official refugee camps and (4) four unofficial camps in the occupied West Bank. The collective refugee population in these camps as of 2014 was 221,328 people (UNRWA 2015). Of the (19) nineteen official refugee camps in this region, five (5) were included in this study: (3) three in the City of Bethlehem (Dheisha, Aida, and Al'Azzeh); and (2) two in Hebron in South Palestine (Al' Arroub and Fawwar).

A quantitative survey was regarded as the most suitable approach as it allows for an objective examination of the Palestinian refugees' views on this issue. Quantitative methodology is commonly used by researchers to apply a positivist approach to objectively understand social phenomena (Bryman, 1984).

A common method employed for data collection in quantitative social research is the survey questionnaire (Bryman 1984; Henn et al. 2006). Approximately 3000 copies of the survey instrument for data collection were distributed among the 20 centres. Of the 3000 copies, 1200 were completed and returned and were eligible for inclusion in the data analysis process. The data collection period was for two months from March 2013 to May 2013. Participants typically completed the questionnaire at home at their convenience within the data collection period.

Convenience sampling to recruit a representative group of Palestinian refugees was employed in this study to facilitate the production of results which could be used to formulate generalisations. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where

subjects are selected because of their accessibility and proximity to the researcher (Bryman; 2004). Specifically, refugee camps in the cities of Hebron and Bethlehem were targeted because of this researcher's familiarity with the five refugee camps in these cities; having family members living in two of these camps.

The directors of Community Centres, Refugees Local Committee Centres, Health Centres, and United Nations offices located in each of the five camps were contacted either by email or in person to seek permission to display the flyers that described the aims and purpose of this study. The directors from 20 centres and community agencies located in the southern region of the West Bank agreed to display the flyers to facilitate participant recruitment. In addition, some agencies – particularly women's centres – supported participant recruitment by making known the availability of the questionnaires before and after workshops held on unrelated matters. To further support the recruitment process I continued visiting the health centres and women centres to distribute surveys.

The directors also agreed to make available to potential participants (regular clients / customers) an envelope containing a cover letter or Participant Information Sheet outlining the aims and purpose of the study along with a copy of the surveys instrument for data collection. I also provided a short overview regarding the length of the survey, the name of the university, the supervisor in charge of my research, and UN approval to conduct the research.

## **Data Analysis**

Prior to data entry, each returned survey questionnaire was assigned a unique code in order to ensure participant anonymity and to differentiate each survey in preparation for data entry. Microsoft Software Package for Statistical Analysis (SPSS) version 14.0 was used to analyse the data in this study. The rationale for using this software was that it is acknowledged as useful for the comprehensive analysis of data. SPSS can take data from any file and use them to generate tabulated reports, charts and plots of distributions and trends (Coakes & Steed, 2009). It can also provide descriptive statistics and complex statistical analysis. Furthermore, SPSS makes statistical analysis more accessible for a researcher reading any type of chart. Lastly, SPSS version supports the data analysis process by making dynamic modifications that are reflected immediately in the viewer window. The researcher is also able to change from bar to lines, switch variables, add error bars, separate bars into clusters, change the bins

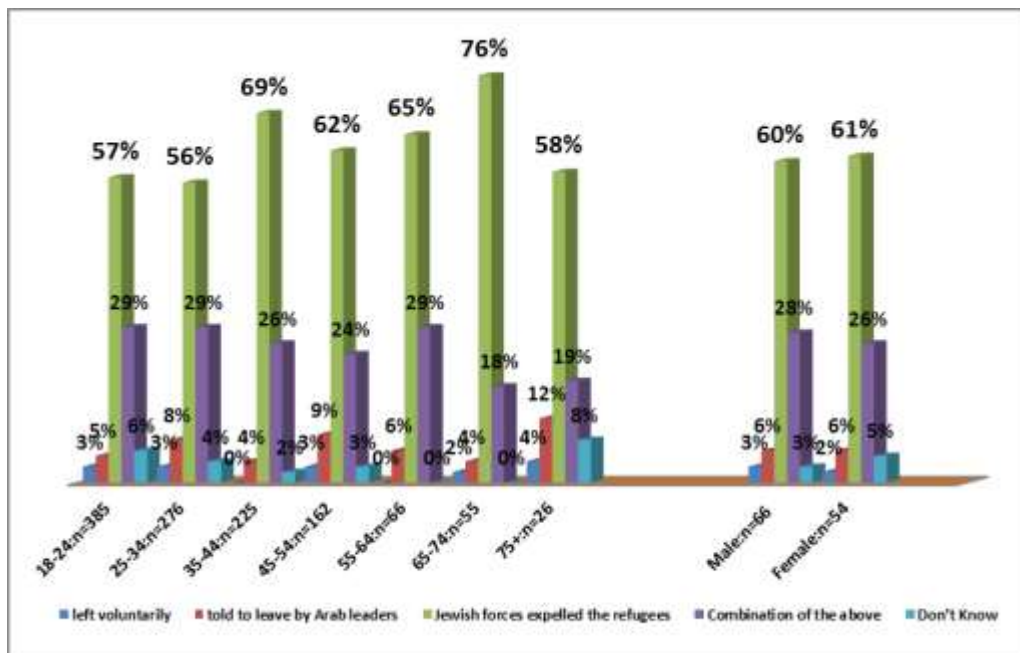
of a histogram, and modify that chart appearance all with few mouse clicks (Henn et al., 2005)

A total of 1200 Palestinian refugees aged between 18 and 75 years volunteered to participate in this study. Participant consent for participation was indicated by the return of the survey.

## Findings and Discussion

The main finding in this study is that the majority of Palestinian refugees currently living in the West Bank believe Jewish forces to be responsible for the expulsion of Palestinians from Palestine in 1948. This perspective is consistent across all age groups, generation of expulsion, and for both genders (sees Figure 1).

**Figure: 1 Party responsible for the creation of the PR problem in 1948, 2013**



**n= 1196**

In terms of gender, Figure 1 shows a clear majority of both female (61%) and male (60%) participants believed that 'Jewish forces' led the expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland and were therefore responsible for the creation of the refugee problem in 1948.

This view was also strong across all participant age groups, ranging from 76% of refugees aged 65-74 down to 56% of refugees aged 25-34 years old.

In terms of alternative beliefs as to why Palestinians left their homeland in 1948, 12% of participants aged 75+, 8% of first generation participants, and 6% of both males and females believed the main reason was that they were told to leave by Arab leaders. In addition, 8% of 75+ year-olds, and 5% of female participants were of the view that Palestinians left voluntarily. Lastly, 29% of both 18-24-year-olds and 55-64-year-olds, and 28% of males believed it was a combination of all three factors which led Palestinians to leave their homeland. Hence, the data in Figure 1 shows that irrespective of gender and age, participants primarily blamed Jewish forces for the exodus of Palestinian from Palestine in 1948.

These results reflect those presented in earlier studies. For instance, Yahya's (1999) study of Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza found 45% of respondents believed Jewish forces *alone* were responsible for the Palestinian exodus. In addition, his study found participants also blamed the British Mandate and Arab leaders or armies for not defending Palestine. As Pappé (2007) notes, Britain avoided an intervention as early as October 1947, and in some ways contributed to the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians by providing Jewish leaders with information about Palestinian villages. In fact, the Palestinian refugee narrative continues to assert that British assistance allowed the Jewish army to achieve its mission to colonise Palestine by uprooting the indigenous people (Yahya, 1999). The Mandate prevented Palestinian resistance against settlement operations and reduced their mobility; whereas Jewish settlers were free to move around and acquire weapons and training, and thus create a military force capable of waging a war on the native population (Hassassian, 1990). The main result also supports the views espoused by Palestinian scholars (Kananna, 2000). For instance, Khalidi (1998) posits Arab inhabitants tried to defend their land right up to March 1948 as Zionist forces intensified their tactics and subjected Palestine to a series of operations known as "Plan Dalet": the Master Plan for the Conquest of Palestine (Khalidi, 1998).

Notably, the above findings reveal the general Palestinian refugee narrative that the cause of the expulsion was due to Jewish forces is sustained among the *younger generations* (i.e. 18- to 44-year-olds) of Palestinian refugees. This is suggestive of an ongoing collective memory among refugees that expressly contradicts the assertion by David Ben Gurion, the first Israeli Prime Minister, that; "*The old will die and the young will forget*" (Nabulsi, 2006).

The analysis of the survey results provided above demonstrate relative consistency in the Palestinian narrative for both genders and across four generations of refugees on the issue of blame and responsibility for *Al Nakba*. The narrative shared among the generations comprise an important element of their lived experience and perspective of right of return . The experiences of refugee-hood and the view held by most refugees that the occupier caused the exodus means the image of Palestine pre-1948 and the formation of a new identity after the exodus are consolidated in one narrative among refugees. This narrative visualises returning to the homeland as the right solution to address the suffering caused the expulsion.

There are two key reasons why the generations continue to preserve the historical claims of blame and responsibility, and right of return. The first reason relates to the ongoing occupation of Palestinian land, which remains a constant reminder of denial of homeland. As a result, generations have developed a collective desire to have their beliefs about blame and responsibility for the 1948 exodus acknowledged, and to return to their homeland. The underlying assumption here is that recognition of blame and responsibility is fundamental to achieving a just resolution. The second reason is that right of return is both a territorial claim expressed through the Palestinian struggle for homeland and a symbolic claim embedded in the blame and responsibility narrative. Right of return has been and continues to be a point of unification for Palestinian refugees. However, the Palestinian refugee perspective of right of return “may be” *shaped* by direct memory of the *expulsion* or by the narrative of the expulsion passed down through the generations. Certainly, older generations have consciously and actively attempted to pass on the narrative of blame and responsibility and its implications for the right of return to younger generations to preserve a commitment to a Palestinian homeland. Hence, the narrative carries a moral obligation for younger generations in particular to preserve the right of return and to liberate Palestine.

It may have emerged that the younger generations held different views of blame and responsibility for the exodus compared to the older generations as they are so far removed from the event. Although *Al Nakba* remains an ongoing historical concern for all Palestinian refugees, one might reasonably assume that the traumatic impact of *Al Nakba* is felt much more strongly by older generation refugees compared to their younger counterparts. The survey results show however that all four generations of Palestinian refugees assign primary blame and responsibility for *Al Nakba* to the Zionist movement. What can be concluded from these results is that other factors apart from “close proximity” to the exodus (i.e., the experiences of first and second generation refugees in particular) may continue to confirm the

blame and responsibility narrative passed down through the generations. Consideration of the ‘other factors’ being alluded to will undoubtedly include the inhumane living conditions and loss of a sense of belonging to one’s homeland that Palestinian refugees feel irrespective of gender and generation of occupation.

To clarify, the difficult living conditions experienced over many generations as a result of ongoing occupation could serve as a strong reminder of the exodus and reinforce the views regarding blame and responsibility within the Palestinian refugee narrative. This view is explored by Kunz (1981: 46) who argues that ‘refugees rarely remain consumed about their homes (right of return) and past (blame and responsibility) unless they are irrevocably broken by trials in the host countries’. Here, I agree with Kunz. All generations of Palestinian refugees are permanently subjected to harsh living conditions under occupation. This is combined with strict preventative measures that do not allow a return to their homeland. Mohatt et al. (2014) described how the historical trauma may be given a *narrative representation* in the way it connects histories of group-experienced traumatic events to present day experiences and contexts, including the contemporary health of a group or community. A person need only visit any one of the refugee camps to witness the conditions and thus understand how the oppression and the displacement of refugees sustain the *Al Nakba* narrative. For me, as a third generation refugee, *Al Nakba* is an ongoing narrative that tells of the destruction of Palestine and the displacement of my parents and grandparents, and thousands of other Palestinians. I have never seen my village, but through the stories of my parents and other elderly people from the refugee camp, I have come to know its landscape, borders, lifestyle and people.

## Conclusion

The main finding to emerge from the recent survey of Palestinian refugees living in the West Bank is that they primarily blame Zionists for the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948. This particular view was evidenced across age groups, generation of expulsion, and gender. This suggests that sixty-nine years after the expulsion, the central claim in the Palestinian refugee narrative continues to be that they endured deliberate expulsion from their homeland. Moreover, results provide further challenge the validity on ongoing claims by Zionists that Palestinians left Palestine voluntarily or under instruction from Arab leaders. The issue of blame for *Al Nakba* and its ramifications for Palestinians remains a central element in refugee narratives passed on from generation to generation. The main conclusion drawn from the

findings presented in this article is that blame directed towards the Zionist forces of 1948 remains active across the generations of Palestinian refugees despite many years of displacement.

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