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Nerves Calm But Hearts Ablaze

A zine on the Palestinian Right of Return

Punks Against Apartheid

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A zine on the Palestinian Right of Return
23/04/26

punksagainstapartheid.noblogs.org

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Contents

Preface – Spring 2026	6
Did you Know?	10
‘Return Shirt’ in the wild!	11
Symbolism	11
☒☒☒☒☒☒ // I call out to you (all)	14
Right of Return 101	15
From May 1948	16
Refugees After the War	18
Today	18
Return Plan 2023	19
HOW TO REVERSE ETHNIC CLEANSING	19
Where are the Jews?	21
KIBBUTZ AND MOSHAV	22
THE ROUTE OF RETURN HOME	23
AI-QASTAL EXAMPLE	24
GAZA RETURNS	24
THE COST OF REPATRIATION	26
FINAL COMMENTS	27
GUIDED READING LIST	29
BADIL, <i>Rights-Based Reconstruction: Decolonization and Reparations & Voices of Return: Documenting Israel’s Repression of the Great March of Return</i>	30

Return is in non-Palestinian spaces. Reading it is therefore a useful exercise in honing your bullshit-detector. Dressed up in a seemingly 'pro-Palestinian' premise critiquing 'extreme' Zionist positions and peppered with some actually truthful information about international law, it can be challenging to unpack its agenda; all the more reason to read it in groups & pick it apart together!

"Palestinian refugees remain firmly committed to their legitimate right to resist occupation and to uphold their fundamental rights, foremost among them the right of return...For people in the camps, the core demand remains rights before disarmament—the right to work, to own property, to live without checkpoints. You cannot ask a community to surrender its only means of self-protection while denying it every form of security."

Wesaam Sabaaneh, "Palestinian Camps in Lebanon: Disarmament, Rights, and Return"

XXXXXXXX XXXXXX XXXXXX XXXX
XXXXXXXX XX XX XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXX XX XXXXXXXXXXXX 2026

[hand-drawn sketch of Ghassan Kanafani]

"Everything in this world can be robbed and stolen, except one thing; this one thing is the love that emanates from a human being towards a solid commitment to a conviction or cause."

Ghassan Kanafani

[hand-drawn sketch of Naji al-Ali]

"The road to Palestine is neither far nor near; its distance is [simply] that of revolution."

Naji al-Ali

[hand-drawn sketch of Ahmed Kaabour]

"The [Palestinian] cause is not just political statements, battles, [armed] resistance...it is a cultural, intellectual, artistic, project...a commitment that is renewed generation after generation."

Ahmed Kaabour

"The lesson that the war criminals have never learned is the resilience of the Palestinian people. The innocent lives we have lost and our daily suffering beyond description are the price we have paid and are paying for a singular aim we have maintained for 76 years, which is The Right to Return Home. This lesson is incomprehensible to the war criminals, but this calling is the fuel to the survival of the Palestinians."

Salman Abu-Sitta, "Return is Still the Issue"

[image of a large graffito of the Handhala cartoon on a wall along with Palestinian political posters]

“Palestinians do not simply demand the recognition of their right to return, but also its implementation, its exercise, and its translation into reality. This is not merely a moral theoretical stance, but a lived and concrete one...”

“The issue of return is vital because it represents the essence of what it means to be a Palestinian. It is much more than a legal right or a property right or an individual and collective right (although it is also all these things). It remains the touchstone of shared Palestinian historical identity. It has shaped us completely. It is why we have stayed refugees for so long.”

Karma Nabulsi, in “Why Palestinians Have A Right to Return Home” & “No Peace without An End to Exile”

Preface – Spring 2026

So what motivated this new project? Despite a popular surge in support for Palestine, it seems that the Right of Return (🇵🇸 🇵🇸🇵🇸🇵🇸 or ‘haqq al-awda’) for millions of Palestinian refugees displaced from 1947 onwards remains poorly understood. Even the most ‘informed’ amongst us can unconsciously avoid the topic because it feels too ‘complicated’. And in any case, isn’t it less ‘urgent’ than dismantling the genocidal war machine *right now*? Especially from non-Palestinians, we sometimes hear: why waste time on something that isn’t up to us anyway?

But there is a big difference between grounded humility and dangerous ignorance, and a key technique by which Zionists ensure that Return is impossible is by enshrining this ignorance into ‘common sense’. As long as they can convince the

hundreds of Palestinian villages that were depopulated in 1947–49 and “an attempt to breathe life into” them. Readers may note that Khalidi’s estimate of ethnically cleansed villages differs from Abu-Sitta’s & even Makan’s. Scholarly estimates range between 400 and nearly 700 communities destroyed or depopulated in the Nakba and ensuing events, depending on various statistical/demographic considerations. In practice, the scale of the Nakba is genocidal *regardless* of which village metric is used.

Various, *Toward a Revolutionary Charter for Comprehensive Liberation*

This text is a ground-breaking recent intervention which critiques normalisation amongst Arab intellectuals and the turning away from full liberation (and ultimately, Return). Crucially, it critiques ‘apartheid-only’ frameworks that do not situate this segregation practice in a larger settler-colonial context of genocidal extermination. While such language may be useful for ‘diagnosis’, uncritically replicating and exclusively relying on the ‘South Africa’ model can be misleading and suggest ‘solutions’ which are not appropriate for the Palestinian context.

Dalia Scheindlin, *Neither Intractable nor Unique: A Practical Solution for Palestinian Right of Return*

This piece is *not a good resource for learning about the Right of Return as envisioned by Palestinians*. It is written by an avowed (‘left’) Zionist and is riddled with condescending colonial tropes about Palestinians ‘compromising’ with their colonisers. It dismisses ‘full Return’ out of hand because of an apparent ‘reluctant’ commitment to the Zionist state’s continued existence, and even worse argues that Palestinians should not weigh in on ‘internal Israeli matters’ like the *demographic supremacist character of the settler-colonial state*, as though they should not have opinions on the very means by which they were colonised! So we list it here *not* for its insight, but because it shows how flawed the discussion around

‘Arabs’) for this displacement out of the balance sheet of Palestinian refugees’ stolen property, arguing that they no longer owed a debt to Palestinians by the stroke of a pen.

Ahmad H. Sa’di, *Catastrophe, Memory and Identity: Al-Nakbah as a Component of Palestinian Identity*

This text offers a deep insight into the formation of Palestinian identity around the foundational event of the Nakba, and how that relates to conceptions of Return. It is an intimate portrait with lots of interviews and insightful comparative analysis of different subjective experiences.

BADIL, *Rights-Based Reconstruction: Decolonization and Reparations & Voices of Return: Documenting Israel’s Repression of the Great March of Return*

The first report argues that the Right of Return must be understood and implemented within a larger reparations framework to prevent its co-optation by neo-colonial elites. It is very thoughtful reading for anyone looking to think deeper about the Right of Return in a practical context.

The second gives first-hand accounts of the 2018–2019 Great March of Return from the Gaza concentration camp to the Zionist ‘border’ wall. As Abu-Sitta has written, from here, “[h]ome is within sight. *They can, quite literally, walk home.*” This attempt to ‘walk home’ was a key turning point for the people of Gaza after years of blockade, starvation, and isolation from the rest of the Palestinian nation. Many protestors were killed, and many more were maimed by deliberate sniper fire targeting their legs, requiring emergency amputations (see for example Alaa al-Dali of the Gaza Sunbirds).

Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*

A foundational text mapping out the mass genocidal event that was the Nakba. Khalidi described it as a “rescue” of the

world that colonisation is an irreversible, foregone conclusion (the ‘politics of denial’, per Nur Masalha), they can postpone the inevitable justice which the Palestinian nation will achieve.

There are two faulty assumptions here: firstly that Return is merely ‘abstract’, and secondly that it is a ‘negotiable’ aspect of baseline Palestinian demands. In reality, it remains **one of the primary criteria of decolonisation** as articulated by repeated generations; it is the ‘first and foremost principle’ of every major Palestinian faction’s founding document and indeed of Palestinian civil society itself. As eminent Palestinian cartographer Salman Abu-Sitta writes, “**the Right of Return is still the issue.**” And while the logistics are indeed a complex matter, the *principle* of Return—like all liberation—is simple, and based on real, immediate realities, no matter what the colonisers have told the world.

As it turns out, studying those immediate realities reveals just how shockingly realistic Return is. For as you will learn in this zine, **most of historic Palestine remains emptied of its original inhabitants, with 88% of ‘Israeli’ citizens living in 7% of Occupied Palestine.** The truth is that **Return is necessary, feasible, and just.**

Palestinians have painstakingly envisioned the implementation of the Right of Return since the mass-genocidal event of the 1947–49 ~~XXXX~~ (‘Nakba’ or ‘tragedy’), well before its repeated enshrinement in UN Resolutions and what passes for ‘International Law’ over the last 75+ years. Thus, turning this inalienable right into an unpleasant ‘distraction’ **makes non-Palestinians a liability to the liberation movement, and pits the present against the future** in a way that is completely alien to the Palestinian struggle. As the authors of *Toward a Revolutionary Charter for Comprehensive Liberation* note, ignoring the national goal of liberation (and therefore Return) is tantamount to prematurely writing the ‘obituary’ of active resistance. This effectively justifies complicit normal-

ising agendas, and makes useful idiots for the coloniser of us all.

So as you read, remember: Return is **not** an abstract fantasy. It is a complex web of historical, social, political, and legal precedents which have been kept alive by a ‘culture of Return’ in the vast Palestinian diaspora and the front line of Palestinian resistance: “the refugee camp, the village, the prison cell, the trench and the tunnel,” in the words of the Revolutionary Charter. Because of this lived reality, refugee camps—“custodians of return”, in the words of Wesam Sabaaneh, where streets and neighbourhoods are often named after pre-Nakba villages of origin—will serve as the first wave of mass departure points when the hour for the long march home has finally arrived. And that hour **will** come.

Beyond a short outline of the shirt’s **symbolism (pp. 8–9)**, **Right of Return 101 (12–14)**, and a **guided reading list (pp. 24–26)**, most of this zine is an abridged reproduction of **Abu-Sitta’s Return Plan 2023 (pp. 15–22)**. Originally from the now-destroyed village of al-Ma’in, Abu-Sitta became the founder and president of the Palestine Land Society in London, designing several atlases of historic Palestine and writing extensively on the Right of Return. The Palestine Land Society and the Palestine Reconstruction Architects Association (PRAA) actively work on Return-oriented planning; their refusal to wait for permission to envision a future decolonised Palestine should inspire all of us. We encourage you to go to **plands.org** to read more.

Reading Abu-Sitta’s plan in 2026 means that the section on Gaza—where the majority of the population derives from 247 pre-Nakba villages—takes on a new, terrible weight. But Abu-Sitta’s continued determination since reminds us that while the task of rebuilding once Gaza (and all of Palestine) is free may seem daunting, **it will happen**.

Before moving on, we feel compelled to say the obvious: Abu-Sitta’s plan is merely one amongst many. Furthermore,

GUIDED READING LIST

This zine is not a comprehensive review of the Right of Return. We have provide this annotated syllabus if you wish to learn even more!

*NB: while we like many authors listed, inclusion on this list does **not** equal unconditional endorsement of individuals, affiliated groups, or their ideas. Use critical thinking and take what is useful from each source. Remember al-Kindi’s advice: “We should not be ashamed to acknowledge the truth from whatever source it comes to us.”*

Nur Masalha, *The Politics of Denial: Israel and the Palestinian Refugee Problem*

This is a classic text on the history & future of Palestinian refugees and the Zionist Entity’s ‘politics of denial’ which have blocked the Right of Return for generations. It is a key starting point which everyone should read if they wish to deepen their commitment to Palestine solidarity.

Gail J. Boling, *The Palestinian Refugees and the Individual Right of Return: An International Law Analysis (BADIL)*

An analysis of the international legal precedent for the Right of Return. Although international law approaches are rightfully criticised for their complicity with colonialism, it is still important to understand this complex field of law and its real-world impacts, and this is a great start.

Yehuda Shenhav, *The Jews of Iraq, Zionist Ideology, and the Property of the Palestinian Refugees of 1948: An Anomaly of National Accounting*

This lesser-known piece shows the early post-Nakba Zionist state did not ‘resolve’ its Palestinian refugee ‘problem’ until the 1950s, even briefly entertaining some diminished ‘partial return’. Ultimately, Zionists became actively involved in the displacement of Jews from Iraq (and later other countries), and in a bizarre bait-and-switch, ‘charged’ the Iraqi government (as

Who is afraid of truth? Only the guilty, the criminal. Palestine shall be free from the river to the sea. Make this your unshakeable duty. Thank you.

*[abstract spatial graph in a ‘tree map’ style, showing how much of Palestine is populated/empty in percentages: RETURN IS POSSIBLE – THE STATUS OF 536 PALESTINIAN VILLAGES DEPOPULATED BY ISRAEL – In 1948, the UN General Assembly declared that the Palestinian “refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date.” Today, Israel systematically denies Palestinians their right to return, yet the sites of their original homes remain largely empty. 77% of former Palestinian towns and villages in Israel have never been built over. – 77% NEVER BUILT OVER – 23% BUILT OVER

{rest of image too complex to describe here}

Depopulated towns/villages organised by British Mandate districts. The size of each is relative to population in 1948. ‘Never built over’ refers to the original built-up area of the village. Precise location of some communities in Beersheba district unknown, but assumed not to be built over as region is sparsely populated. – VP DATA SKETCH – SOURCES: bit.ly/vp-return – V1 May 2017 – fb.me/visualizingpalestine – @visualizingpal (Twitter)]*

Check out more resources at <https://visualizingpalestine.org>, or check out <https://today.visualizingpalestine.org> for an interactive experience.

For more info on the history of Abu-Sitta’s own village in the Nakba, see <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/r>

just because return is possible (and we insist that it is!), that does not mean it *will* or *must* occur in the exact way described by Abu-Sitta, who is after all a civilian and not a representative mouthpiece for the Palestinian resistance. You should **not** pin your belief in Return on every single rhetorical flourish in his presentation. The point is simply **to provide you with tools to puncture through the colonial lie that the Right of Return is some kind of ‘pipe dream’**. In this sense, we believe that thrust of Abu-Sitta’s argument is, in its broad outlines, indisputable.

A final word: we have always been clear about how we see our mutual aid efforts. Raising money for those who need it the most is **neither inherently radical nor inherently liberatory**. And yet, **it remains a critical component of any solidarity movement**, as our friends & comrades in Palestine have repeatedly emphasised. All of you, holding this zine (just as much as us writing it) have a responsibility therefore to not begin and end our politics with fundraising, even as we continue to support Palestinian life financially. We must **transcend the pseudo-consumer act of donating money for a cause**, and turn it into a critical step in an ever-expanding political project. Use this shirt & zine to educate yourself and start conversations in order to move people not only towards more liberatory ‘ideas’, but more liberatory **actions**.

Before you despair of the task before you, trust in what Palestinian resistance writers have taught us: to advance **‘nerves calm but hearts ablaze’**, to borrow a phrase from Ghassan Kanafani’s prescient 1971 essay ‘The Specter of a Palestinian State’. That is, we must allow our anger at injustice to propel us forward, *while we keep a clear head* about the traps of colonial pseudo-‘solutions’ to the Palestinian cause’s most fundamental demands, which are born from a lack of faith in the reality & inevitability of Return (like the so-called ‘Palestinian Authority’ & Gaza Board of Peace). The real work for us all is in maintaining that *clarity of vision* which allows

for unity of action. **Hold fast to the vision of Return as we move, together, ablaze, towards liberation.**

Did you Know?

[image courtesy of the Palestinian History Tapestry at palestinianhistorytapestry.org, depicting an excerpt of UN GA Resolution 194 (III). Palestine Paragraph 11. Resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours 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 in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible. A/RES/194 (III) 11 December 1948]

Resolution 194 of the UN General Assembly on the Right of Return has been affirmed by the UN **more than 130 times**. International law and a myriad of UN conventions also support the Right of Return:

- International Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, articles 5 and 6
- Articles 2(1) & 12(4) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- Articles on Nationality of Natural Persons in Relation to the Succession of States: 14(2), 15, 16
- Articles 45, 46(1), 49 of the Hague Regulation
- UN GA Resolution 2535 & 3236
- Fourth Geneva Convention, articles 4, 147, 17(II)
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, articles 8 and 13(2)

The cost can be offset by the revenue that Israel collected from Palestinian property for 75 years. The United Nations says so. Resolution 70/86 on Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues (2015) requires Israel to keep record of revenues of utilizing their property.

More than that. A recent estimate of the present value of material Palestinian property seized by Israel, prepared by Economics Prof Atef Kubrusi of McMaster University, and submitted to Adam Smith Institute is a whopping **350 billion USD**. It is the biggest robbery in history.

This does not include the compensation for non material losses such as loss of nationality, exile and family dispersion, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and other crimes, which have been paid in WWII cases.

There will be good news for the American taxpayer. When return is complete, the taxpayer will be relieved from paying 3.8 billion dollars annually to Israel.

UNRWA should be able with its predominantly Palestinian staff to supervise the repatriation for the Palestinians.

FINAL COMMENTS

But all this needs the implementation of one cardinal principle. This principle is essential, just, non-negotiable and inevitable. That is **the abolishment of Zionism and its components: war crimes, dispossession, occupation, Apartheid, racism and discrimination**. People, all people of any creed, should live in peace and in harmony, without killing, occupation, dispossession or claims of supremacy. In spite of all the overwhelming power against defenseless Palestinian people, it has not succeeded over seven decades to break their will or to diminish their spirit.

But you, every one of us, has a duty. At your own home, teach your children that Palestine is and will always be their home. At the world stage, spread the truth about Palestine.

Bank — 188 Remaining after Jordan — 169 Remaining after Syria — 56 Total refugees repatriated >2000 — 401 Total repatriated and leftover — 457

Jordan —

All Registered Refugees — 1,931 Remaining after Gaza Strip — 1,415 Remaining after Lebanon — 1,245 Remaining after West Bank — 686 Remaining after Jordan — 175 Remaining after Syria — 172 Total refugees repatriated >2000 — 1,759 Total repatriated and leftover — 1,931

Total —

All Registered Refugees — 4,618 Remaining after Gaza Strip — 2,852 Remaining after Lebanon — 2,134 Remaining after West Bank — 1,141 Remaining after Jordan — 530 Remaining after Syria — 403 Total refugees repatriated >2000 — 4,215 Total repatriated and leftover — 4,618]*

Well, we did this exercise. We grouped them in 9 convoys. They could travel north in buses or in their cars. The journey will take 45 minutes to one hour. In one day or two, they will be gone. And two million Palestinians from 247 villages can return home. At last. After waiting 75 years. Justice will be made at last.

The most dramatic is of course the return of Gaza refugees, followed by those in Jordan. The rest is easy. Allowing for the reconstruction of destroyed villages, the full repatriation and resettlement could take 4 to 6 years.

THE COST OF REPATRIATION

I am an engineer and a planner. I must ask: how much does it cost to rebuild the destroyed villages? Not much really. We need to build two million dwelling units and their infrastructure. We have enough engineers and labour to do that. We built much bigger projects in the Gulf. Where do we get the money from?

- The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, articles 7 and 8
- *And even more...*

Of course, international law has **always** been linked to genocidal violence, and it is doubtful whether the ‘rules-based order’ of Euro-colonial fantasy has ever existed. Worse, framing Palestine as only a ‘human rights’ issue risks invalidating legitimate resistance to Occupation. But while we do not situate ourselves within ‘legal struggle’, it is still important to grasp how deeply Return ‘passes through’ international law in the story of the post-World War 2 order.

Movements like Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAAIL) and al-Haq (the 1st Palestinian human rights group) are also instructive for their few successes and many failures; we should keep these in mind as we follow the laudable (if limited) work of projects like the Hind Rajab Foundation today.

‘Return Shirt’ in the wild!

[images of front and sleeve of return shirt in green & long sleeve black & white]

Check out <https://punksagainstapartheid.noblogs.org/return> for purchase details!

Long sleeve edition coming Fall 2026!

Symbolism

[image of the circular PUNKS AGAINST APARTHEID logo around a circle (A), with a key in the negative space at the bottom of the (A) which fades into a kufiyyeh pattern, and the Arabic words كفاية , كفاية , كفاية below]

The logo features our collective's name and the well-known circle (A) symbol depicting our horizontalist, anti-authoritarian principles. On the lower half of the circle (A), the design shifts into a كوفية ('kufiyyeh' or 'kefiyyeh') pattern.

There are many variants of the traditional peasant kufiyyeh regionally. The most common version, which became a prominent anti-colonial/nationalist symbol after the 1936 revolt against increased Zionist migration & colonial encroachment, features an olive-leaf, fish-net, and trade-route pattern representing the traditional Palestinian trades. At the bottom of the circle (A), there is a silhouette of a key. Keys to the original houses from which Palestinians were expelled in the 1947-49 نكبة (Nakba, or 'tragedy') have come to symbolise the Right of Return, as they have been passed through families for generations. Olive branches again evoke a deep connection to the land. The Arabic words تحرير, عودة, نصر mean 'liberation, return, victory' respectively. This slogan was inspired by a 1978 poster drawn by Ahmad Hegazi (see above).

Naji al-Ali was born in the northern Palestinian village of al-Shajara, located between Tiberias and Nazareth (now part of Ilaniya) in 1936. After the Nakba expelled over 750,000 Palestinians from their homes, his family fled to Lebanon and settled in the Ain al-Hilwa refugee camp near Sidon. He became a beloved cartoonist by the 1960s, before being tragically assassinated in 1987, with evidence strongly pointing to the Mossad.

[maps & photos of al-Ali's hometown of al-Shajara + links:
www.palestineremembered.com // www.palquest.org // palopenmaps.org // https://www.zochrot.org/villages/village_details
]

[image: 80,000 to 100,000 Palestinian families rely on the olive harvest

100,000 tonnes is the estimated olive production per year (2022)

20,000 tonnes is the estimated olive oil production per year (2022)]

excludes three Palestinian cities, Beer Sheba, Majdal and Isdud. Here you have it. 150,000 settlers in the land of two million Palestinians, crammed in Gaza strip. The number of all these settlers is comparable to one refugee camp in Rafah (133k). **What travesty of justice! What travesty indeed.**

Imagine that those few settlers decided to leave, to go to Tel Aviv or head to al Lydd airport. Imagine that they saw the huge wrong done to 2 million Palestinians and they decided to clear the way for them to return to their homes in 247 villages. Imagine this. Is it difficult to do or easy?

*[chart depicting refugee population by thousands in various countries in 2008:

Refugee Population in thous 2008:

West Bank –
 All Registered Refugees – 754 Remaining after Gaza Strip –
 610 Remaining after Lebanon – 551 Remaining after West
 Bank – 153 Remaining after Jordan – 94 Remaining after
 Syria – 93 Total refugees repatriated >2000 – 661 Total
 repatriated and leftover – 754

Gaza Strip –
 All Registered Refugees – 1,060 Remaining after Gaza Strip –
 73 Remaining after Lebanon – 72 Remaining after West Bank
 – 60 Remaining after Jordan – 40 Remaining after Syria – 40
 Total refugees repatriated >2000 – 1,020 Total repatriated and
 leftover – 1,060

Lebanon –
 All Registered Refugees – 417 Remaining after Gaza Strip –
 352 Remaining after Lebanon – 58 Remaining after West
 Bank – 54 Remaining after Jordan – 52 Remaining after Syria
 – 43 Total refugees repatriated >2000 – 374 Total repatriated
 and leftover – 417

Syria –
 All Registered Refugees – 457 Remaining after Gaza Strip –
 401 Remaining after Lebanon – 208 Remaining after West

as a tax exempt charity dedicated to improve the environment. The refugees would return to destroyed villages. Palestinians have to rebuild their houses again. Let us start with one village Al-Qastal Jerusalem district.

AI-QASTAL EXAMPLE

Here we have the opposite case. One village located in many camps. We find the village people in these camps. A young Palestinian architect finds his village and his grandfathers house. He draws plans for the construction of Al-Qastal. He is rebuilding his grandfathers house. He is Yazan Nasrallah.

[return map]

GAZA RETURNS

Gaza, Gaza, the defiant, the Stalingrad of Palestine. The long term Concentration Camp, the home of permanent uprisings, not immortalized in movies.

These young people were determined to return, even though they were shot, killed and maimed. They wish to break free from the concentration camp. It has a density of 7000 persons/km² to their homes which are almost empty at 7 person/km².

They want to break free and return home for 75 years. **Let us imagine the “imaginable”.**

[map w/ following text:



A total of 212 Small Localities (kibbutz) were selected within the southern district containing a population of 150,320 (2019).

These localities has a population less than 700 people each.

Small localities represent the majority of localities types in the southern district (more than 95% of total number).]

Those settlers live in 212 tiny settlements. Their total population is 150,000 in all southern district, 12,500km². the land where Gaza refugees came from. This number of population

[image of Handhala-PAA logo]

The  ('Handhala') appeared in Ali's work for the first time in 1969. Named after a bitter fruit that grows in dry areas of Palestine  or 'handhal') with deep roots that grow back when cut, the figure quickly took on a life of its own in Arab pop-culture. From 1973, al-Ali began drawing him with his back turned, saying that the 10 year old (the same age al-Ali was in the Nakba) would not age or turn around until he returned. His hands are defiantly clasped, rejecting outside interference in Palestinian affairs.

[image depicting successive loss of Palestinian land in stages: 1917, 1946, 1947 UN Partition Plan, War of 1948, War of 1967, 1967–2017]

Lastly, next to the Handhala is the historic map of Palestine before Zionist colonisation. This 'full' map of historic Palestine (and not the shrunken, perforated cantons of Palestinian pseudo-sovereignty that exist today) is a key unifying vision for diverse Palestinian factions, whatever tactical/political differences they may have in achieving that vision. As mentioned in the preface, see Salman Abu-Sitta's large-format atlas series (Atlas of Palestine 1871–77 and 1917–66) for meticulously-researched work depicting cartographic details not visible on the miniature, symbolic scale. Still, the map of Palestine 'as symbol' reminds us of a time (and a future) when Palestine was and *will* be free, *from the river to the sea*.

[image of the Handhala with the phrase: PALESTINE: I WANT TO GROW UP, NOT BLOW UP]

[two cartoons by Naji al-Ali. top one depicts a mother crying with her tears becoming a key-hole & a key tied to a lock of hair, while a small Handhala figure stands in the foreground and on the right there is a map of Palestine with a kufiyyeh pattern over-

laid. the second cartoon shows a family huddled in a tent being watched by an IOF soldier, with Arabic words translated below.]

Sign: "Ein Al-Hilwa Refugee Camp"

Tent: "However many homes youth may come to know, [the truest] longing will always be for the first one."

XXXXXXXX // I call out to you (all)

XXXXXXXX ('Ounadikum', or 'I call on you [all]') is a famous song by Ahmed Kaabour, a Lebanese musician who was a stalwart defender of the Palestinian cause who recently passed away (XXXX). (XXXX) Based on a piece by the Palestinian poet Tawfiq Ziad, the lyrics are strongly associated with the Nakba, evoking a kind of 'Handhala'. After his death, his brother Naser said, "Ahmed never visited Palestine, and yet he never left it." As a tribute to his life-long vision of interconnected struggle between Lebanon & Palestine, we have included the lyrics here in his honour. Note that unlike many literal translations available online, we have chosen a more poetic translation to capture the intended spirit. * [images of Ahmed Kaabour singing]*

XXXXXXXX
 XXX XXX XXXXXXXX
 XXXXXX XXXXX XXX XXXXXXXX
 XXXXXX XXXXXXXX
 XXXXXXXX XXXX XXXX
 XXXXXX XXXXXX XXXXXXXX
 XXXXXXXX XXXX XXXX
 (2x) XXXXXX XX XXXXXXXX
 XXXXXXXX (2x)
 XXXX XX XXX XX XXXX
 XXX XXXXX XXXXXXXX
 XXXXX XXXXX XXXXXXXX
 XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX XXXX

*[charts showing percentages of land used by population centres, military, open land, vacant land, etc. in 1994 & 2020: Land Use, Km2, % of Total:

	1994 —
Pop. Centres — 1,150 — 5%	Spaces in Centres — 640 — 3%
Military — 5,860 — 27%	Open, Protected — 5,090 — 24%
	Vacant — 8,760 — 41% Total — 21,500 — 100%
	2020 —
Pop. Centres — 1,800 — 8%	Spaces in Centres — 710 — 3%
Military — 5,860 — 27%	Open, Protected — 5,090 — 24%
	Vacant — 8,040 — 37% Total — 21,500 — 100%]*

88% of the land is reserved for the military, WMD, the Kibbutz, and others!

THE ROUTE OF RETURN HOME

[return map]

We start with Al Buss Camp in Lebanon. This map shows the original villages of refugees in this camp. It also shows you have travel only 25 km to reach Palestine and only 5 km to reach your first village in Palestine.

Same with Yarmouk in Syria.

[return map]

Same with Muzdar Camp in Jordan.

[return map]

Same with Duheisheh Camp in the West Bank.

[return map]

We can empty Al Nuseirat Camp in Gaza the same way.

[return map]

When they arrive they find only the debris of their houses buried under JNF [Jewish National Fund] planted trees, so called JNF parks. JNF is classified, not as a war criminal, but

dotted. Canton 1 is in three parts to allow Palestinian villages to circulate.

We can see that BUA [‘built-up area’] generally covers Jewish areas and partly spills over to Palestinian areas. In this specially crowded area, about **two dozen** depopulated villages out of 560 (4%) are over-built by new construction, [with] the highest concentration of Jews in Israel.

[map of HAIFA CANTON]

This comprises Haifa and colonies between Haifa and Acre. This canton is different but simpler. It is different in that has an equivalent number of Palestinians and Jews. The record In Haifa shows that [a] mixed population can live harmoniously.

In Haifa canton, mixed population could remain as they were before 1948 and now. The population of Al Tira village, south of Haifa, now annexed to Haifa has the choice to accept annexation to Haifa or to remain independent as they were.

KIBBUTZ AND MOSHAV

This leaves us with concentrations of rural kibbutz. There are five blocks. Block 1 on the coastal plain...has an area of 178 km2 and a Jewish population of 372,253 Jews and only 15,220 Palestinians. Block 2 is upper Marj Ibn Amer, which has an area of 119 km2 and Jewish population 51,671. Block 3 is lower Marj Ibn Amer with an area of 104 km2 and a Jewish population of 50,475. Block 4 is an area of 123 km2 with a Jewish population 15,723, and Block 5 is an area of 59 km2 with a Jewish population 6,757.

I am sure you have not been told about this population distribution before. **You certainly have not been told about Israel’s confirmation of it**, 25 years ago. It was investigated by Israel’s multi-expert survey conducted in 1995, entitled **Israel 2020**.

XXXXXXXX (2x)
XXXX XX XX XX
XX XXX XXXXX
XXXX XXXX XXXXXXX
XX XXX XXXXXXX
XXXXXXXX (2x)


I call out to you
I clasp onto your hands
and I kiss the earth beneath your soles
and I say, I’m prepared to die for your sake
and I shall give you the light of my eyes
and I shall give you the warmth of my heart
for the calamities I live
are inseparable from your calamities (x2)
I call out to you (x2)
I have never let myself be humiliated in my homeland
nor did I ever cower in fear
I stood [tall] in the face of my oppressors
orphaned, unclothed, barefooted
I call out to you (x2)
No matter the [bloody] cost, I have never given up
Nor have I ever backed down from [proclaiming] my cause
and I have preserved the green grass
growing on the graves of my ancestors
I call out to you (x2)

Right of Return 101

Condensed excerpt from **Makan’s** historical Glossary & 10-page explainer, “**The Right of Return and the Future of Palestinian Liberation**” at <https://makan.org.uk>

The inception of the Palestinian refugee question strikes at the very foundation of the establishment of the Israeli state and

the culmination of the Zionist project. It reveals the very logic of this project and the mass dislocation it required. After the end of WWII, in 1947, the newly-created United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution calling for the partitioning of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state.

[Right of Return explanatory image:  haqq al-awda, noun. The principle affirming that Palestinian refugees and their descendants, who were displaced or expelled from their homes during the establishment of the state of Israel, have a right to return to their land and property.]

Partition was the UN's attempt at an international compromise intended to resolve the future of Palestine, however it was not considered a just path forward by the Palestinians nor the Arab states in the region. To the contrary, it was seen as the legitimation of colonialism. Significant tensions had developed during the British mandate period as the indigenous Palestinian population protested Britain's support for Zionist Jewish settlement in their land, which they perceived as paving the path for an exclusively Jewish state that would result in their dispossession.

The Zionist leadership accepted the partition plan, which fulfilled their dream of creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine, seeing it as the first step in the further conquest of historic Palestine. But the indigenous Palestinians refused the notion of partition, believing in their right to self-determination in the entirety of their land. The refusal of the international community to grant Palestinians this right, coupled with expansive Jewish settlement throughout Palestine in the preceding years, ultimately sparked what is known as the "1948 War", the most transformative moment in Palestinian history.

From May 1948

For Palestinians...what happened between 1947 and 1949 was crucially not an accident or an incidental outcome of war,

From the above it is clear there is no demographic problem in the return of refugees.

Where are the Jews?

Jews live in 924 localities with a total population of 5,509,778 (year 2020) within the armistice line of 1949. The distribution of those localities is revealing. Only 14 of those localities have a population of over 100,000 and 12 have a population between 50 and 100,000, and 29 localities between 20 and 50,000.

That means that 87% of Jews live in 55 localities: 5% of the total number of localities. The area they occupy is 1400km² or 6% of Israel's area.

[map depicting population concentration in different cantons]

It is interesting to observe that this area where the majority of Jews live now is almost the same area they lived in during the British Mandate. The remaining settlements are very small. The original purpose of these small settlements was actually to hold and set roots in the refugees' land to prevent their return.

Therefore, the conclusion is this: it is possible to implement the return of the refugees without major displacement of the occupants of their land.

The Jewish majority concentration can be identified in three cantons: Tel Aviv, Haifa and West Jerusalem. Jerusalem canton needs special political, historical, and demographic treatment.

[map of CENTRAL CANTON]

[The central canton] is exclusively Jewish, can be divided into three sub-cantons, all are on Jewish land shown blue. The first one C11 is Tel Aviv canton, and C12 Rishon Le Zion, and C13 Herzliya canton. To ensure physical continuity between these three cantons, some parts of Palestinian village land are added onto these cantons, shown in black. Cities are shown in brown. Palestinian land with new Jewish population over 30,000 are shown

We plan for the future. That is what we do. We do not dream of the Right of Return. We plan for it. Let us start planning the return of the refugees.

Where are the Palestinian refugees today? Here they are. We know everything about them. **They can return because most of their lands are still empty.** Let me show you how.

We can identify the following regions because they have similar characteristics:

1. Galilee region
2. Coastal region between Haifa and Jaffa
3. Central region containing Tel Aviv and Jewish concentration
4. South 1 which is Gaza district
5. South 2 which is Beer Sheba district. Both South 1,2 constitute Southern District.

There are 246 Palestinian village lands which have no Jews today and 272 village lands which have few Jews, less than 5000 Jews. These village lands are shown in green. Beer Sheba district is practically empty save for repopulated Palestinian cities. Jewish land during the Mandate is shown in blue and is today fully populated. Cities (whether mixed or not) are shown in brown. Unlike villages, Israel[’s] destruction of cities was limited to old quarters.

The Palestinian village lands which have more than 30,000 Jews [...] [have Jewish] majority over the returnees. They are few and are naturally adjacent to Jewish areas. So if we now repopulate Palestinian villages by the return of the refugees we do not find any appreciable problem. In Galilee, the Little Triangle and Beer Sheba, there is already a sizable Palestinian people, ready to welcome their kith and kin.

CONCLUSION: return is feasible and of course valid.

but part of an active and forceful campaign to ensure the establishment of a Jewish state in historic Palestine. The settler colonial project that had begun in earnest at the turn of the twentieth century required the removal of the indigenous Palestinian inhabitants of the land if a Jewish majority was to be secured.

[Explanatory images — Phase one: November 1947 — May 1948: Fighting began almost immediately after the partition resolution was passed. Initially, this took the form of violence between Jewish settlers and Palestinians under British rule. Around 300,000 Palestinians were made refugees as armed Zionist militias carried out a campaign of ethnic cleansing, with mass expulsions and massacres.

Phase two: From May 1948: As British forces withdrew from Palestine, the Zionist leadership formally declared the establishment of the State of Israel. This declaration of independence prompted seven Arab armies to declare war on the newly-formed Israel, although in most cases the declaration was merely rhetorical and did not entail any significant military action against Israel.]

- Another 450,000 Palestinians were dispossessed and fled their homes.
- In total, at least 750,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from their homes over the course of the 1948 war, marking the birth of the Palestinian refugee crisis.
- Somewhere between 400 and 600 Palestinian towns, cities, and villages were destroyed and depopulated.
- Perhaps the largest single expulsion of the war involved 50,000 Palestinians being forcibly displaced from Lydd and Ramleh.
- Palestinians refer to this historical moment as the Nakba, or the “Catastrophe”.

Refugees After the War

What happened to the Palestinian refugees after the war, and where they went, is important to understanding where they are located today and the kinds of conditions they face.

The expulsions meant that there was a mass, multi-directional movement of Palestinians. They not only fled to other parts of historic Palestine, such as the Gaza Strip, Bethlehem, Nablus and Jaffa; they also fled to surrounding countries, such as Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and even Iraq.

[map of the region with pins showing regional refugee camps in surrounding countries]

Today

Having continued to have their right of return denied, Palestinian refugees live in a state of uncertainty, insecurity and vulnerability...their ongoing displacement [being] a necessary prerequisite for the maintenance and expansion of the Israeli state and its Jewish supremacist society. Palestinian refugees face a range of serious challenges even at the level of subsistence, depending on where they are. And essential services such as schools, clinics and social support are also under threat as UNRWA has struggled financially for a few years, particularly since the first Trump administration.

In order to quickly respond to the needs of these refugees in their various locations, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East [UNRWA] was established December 1949...as a relief and development body tasked with taking care of the needs of the Palestinian refugee community, including the provision of healthcare and education services, until a just solution for the refugees could be reached...[T]here are around 60 official UNRWA camps today, with varying conditions and levels of development.

A considerable number of Palestinian refugees continue to live in poor, over populated and under resourced camps in neighbouring states, namely Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. In their host countries, they are often denied civil rights, with limited access to basic services, education or employment opportunities, apart from those provided by UNRWA.

According to UNRWA, Palestinian refugees are defined as “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict.”

Per UNRWA, [only] those 700,000 refugees [from the Nakba] or the descendants of Palestinian males who meet this definition are eligible for registration of refugee status.

“...despite the Zionist mantras that ‘the old will die and the young will forget,’ in fact, Palestine continues to live on in all of us...[through] the memories of our grandparents.”

Noura Erakat, “The Inalienable Right”

Return Plan 2023

Excerpts from presentation by Salman Abu-Sitta, 23/09/23 with minor adjustments for clarity/readability in a zine format.

See the full presentation at <https://plands.org/en/articles-speeches/>

HOW TO REVERSE ETHNIC CLEANSING

[detailed map of Palestine showing various return routes for refugees. Text: NOTES: The shown figures are for only the UNRWA Registered Refugees at 2021. Total Registered Refugees in 2021 is 6,520,000. Other Refugees are: Unregistered Refugees est. 2,000,000. Internal Refugees (1948) est. 300,000. Total Refugees: 9,020,000. Two thirds of the Palestinian People.]