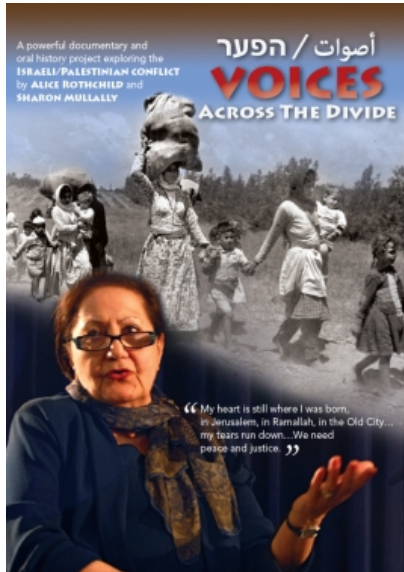


The Catastrophe Behind Israeli Independence

Recently, many American Zionists have been celebrating the 67th anniversary of Israeli independence. What they have neglected is that this is also the anniversary of the Nakba, the great “catastrophe” that overwhelmed native Palestinians in 1947-48..

Zionists originated in late 19th century Europe, when many nationalist movements were struggling to throw off the political domination of fading empires – Russia, Austro-Hungary, the Ottoman Turks. Nationalists of the



day argued that each ethnic “people” shared a common blood and a common land, where they should be exclusively dominant. This unfortunate way of thinking later inspired the fascist and racist European movements of the 20th century. The early Zionists, however, saw exclusive nationalism as a solution to persistent discrimination: if Jews were always treated poorly in other people’s countries, they should get a country of their own.

But Palestine already had a population of Arabs and others, ruled after WWI by Great Britain. Palestinians welcomed the early Jewish settlers, but soon realized that the Zionists aimed to take over. Many Zionist leaders believed that would require reducing the Palestinian share of the population (to less than 20% according to David Ben Gurion, the first Israeli leader.)

By 1947, Great Britain asked the UN to administer the territory. Though Jewish settlers were only one third of the population and owned only 7% of the land, the UN voted to partition the territory into a Jewish state covering 56% of the land, with a bare majority of Jews, and a Palestinian state that would be overwhelmingly Palestinian.

The Palestinians rejected the partition plan because it violated the UN principle that the people in a territory should select their own form of government. The Zionists accepted the plan as a first step toward gaining all of Palestine. They began immediately to use their armed groups to intimidate, and sometimes massacre, Palestinian villagers to make them leave their homes. After May 14, 1948, the new State of Israel continued the campaign, defeating armed forces from neighboring Arab states that tried to protect the Palestinians. By the end of the fighting, Israel had increased its territory, destroyed 531 Palestinian villages and displaced over 700,000 refugees, who have never been permitted to return to their homes or been compensated for their loss. The refugee population and its offspring today number over 5 million. After the 1967 war, initiated by Israel, all of historic Palestine is under Israeli control and the life of Palestinians, whether in Israel or under occupation, is grim.

Zionists celebrate annually the consolidation of their control over Palestine. But for members of Jewish Voice for Peace, who uphold Jewish principles of justice, this is another sad anniversary of the Nakba, with no indication that Israelis are ready to settle the valid grievances of the Palestinians and no acknowledgement by our own government that the US is complicit in the ongoing injustices of occupation, discrimination and uncompensated ethnic cleansing.

On Sunday, May 17, at 11 a.m., Alice Rothchild, physician and film maker, will present her video, *Voices Across the Divide*, at Whitney Center, on Leeder Hill Road in Hamden. Hear three generations of Palestinian refugees tell their story. Just back from a trip to war-torn Gaza, Dr. Rothchild can also update the story of the continuing Palestinian catastrophe.

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