

# Palestine

## *About the zine*

This zine is a community-engaged work regarding Palestine, in relation to the module 'Postcolonial Mediterranean & Displacement'. This project wants to highlight the history of the country along with its culture. To do so, I decided to start with what people already knew about this country: I conducted a survey, asking six friends of different gender, age and socio-cultural background, all living in Cork, to name a palestinian symbol, literary work and food. The aim of the zine is to stimulate curiosity in the readers, and at the same time, to inform them about Palestine through my research.



# Where is Palestine situated geographically?



Palestine is a country situated between Israel, Jordan and Egypt, which faces the Mediterranean sea.

The official territories of Palestine are limited to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, where five million people live. (wordometer- State of Palestine) The country is currently facing a genocide at the hands of Israeli forces, which aim to obtain the total control over the region and ethnically cleanse the Palestinian population.

## *But when did this conflict begin?*

To understand the modern tensions, it is necessary to look back at the beginning of the XXth century, when France and Great Britain had colonial interests in the Middle East.

At that time, the Ottoman Empire was governing most of the Arabian Peninsula, however, the power of the empire was declining, and it was believed that the empire would eventually collapse. In 1916, France and Britain, with the presence of Russia and Italy, created and signed the Sykes-Picot secret agreement, which divided and partitioned the territories of the Ottoman Empire into new colonies for the European countries, with Britain taking control over Iraq, Kuwait and southern Palestine.

The pact was kept secret because Great Britain had made discordant promises to different parties, such as Arabs, who helped them fight the Ottomans during the First World War, promising them independence, but also providing support to the idea of creating a Zionist-Jewish state in Palestine. In 1917, after the fall of the Russian monarchy and the establishment of the Bolsheviks, the secret pact was revealed to the world, causing Arabs to lose faith in the British promises.

In 1920 the San Remo conference was held, and the European powers still wished to control the middle-eastern territories. During the conference, using mandates (a formal authorization to govern over a territory) from the recently formed organization of League of Nations, Britain acquired the Palestinian region. Nonetheless, the British still promoted the project of Zionists to create their own country.

In 1947, following the end of the Second World War, the British government asked the U.N. for the creation of a special committee regarding the Palestinian question. UNSCOP (United Nations Committee on Palestine) declared that Jerusalem would have been under international control and Palestinian territories would be divided between the Arab state and the Jewish one. 56% of overall territories were reserved to the Zionist project, which led to a growing discontent between the Arabs states.

A war between Israel and the confining Arab nations broke out in 1948, after the British left the region. By the end of the war, Israeli forces had control of 77% of the territories and a part of Jerusalem. Numerous Palestinian were forced to flee their own country, while their villages were being violently destroyed.

On June 5th 1967, the Six-day war began. Jordan, Syria and Egypt fought against Israel, which, by the end of the conflict, conquered the Palestinian territories (Gaza Strip and West Bank), east Jerusalem, Sinai Peninsula and Golan heights. The U.N. recommended Israel to respect these territories' sovereignty, however the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories is still ongoing. This war led to a second major displacement of Palestinian population, with 300,000 people leaving their country.



## *The Nakba*

Nakba is an Arabic word which means 'catastrophe', and is used to talk about the ethnic cleansing that took place after the British left the Palestinian region. Israeli soldiers began to violently displace Palestinian population from their homes and villages; approximately 75% of the population was made a refugee by the Israeli army. Nakba is commemorated every year on the 15th of May. [imeu.org/resources/resources/quick-facts-the-palestinian-nakba-catastrophe/142](http://imeu.org/resources/resources/quick-facts-the-palestinian-nakba-catastrophe/142)

This excerpt from *Hunters in a Narrow Street* by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra tells the story of a man who lives in New Jerusalem and slowly assists at the destruction of his village by the Israeli forces. The novella is a reflection of a personal experience, as the author himself was living in Palestine in 1948. The story expresses the fear and loss of losing a home and a lover, transmitting the trauma of Nakba.

"Some eighteen months before, we had moved into our recently built house on the Katamon hill in New Jerusalem. The house was the fulfilment of my father's dream, and the result of a lifetime of toil and saving. [...] Next door to us lived the Shahins in a house twice as big as Ours [...]"

Some nights later we were woken up by a succession of violent explosions that rocked our house. Jewish terrorists had been killing the British for several years, blowing up government offices, army barracks, officers' clubs. Now they had started on the Arabs. United Nations had recommended splitting Palestine in two, and the terrorists were determined to achieve the bloody dichotomy. Barrels of TNT were set off in market squares, killing about fifty people at a time, and now it was the beautiful white and rose stone houses of the Arabs they were after. [...]"

When I looked out, I cried in horror. The Shahins' house was a great heap of masonry, faintly perceptible through the black night. We ran downstairs and out into the howling wind. What could we do? In a few minutes other people came. We started turning the stones over to see if there was any life trapped underneath. 'God, keep Leila alive, keep Leila alive,' I was saying to myself, and like a madman I skipped about the rubble and the great stones and the iron girders in vain hope. Then I felt something soft hit my hand. I dug it up. It was a hand torn off the wrist. It was Leila's hand, with the engagement ring buckled round the third finger. I sat down and cried."

# Literature

The second part of this zine focuses on the small survey I conducted. This first section will be focusing on **Palestinian literature**, addressing its evolution throughout the years, followed by a **selection of poems** that represent the literary tendencies described.

*“Are you familiar with authors writing about Palestine? Do you know any Palestinian authors? Could you name them?”*

Nearly all of my interviewees were familiar with authors writing about Palestine, but just a few of them were able to name Palestinian authors or literary works. Public figures, like Francesca Albanese and her work as special rapporteur of the occupied territories, are known by the general public, however, works from people living their daily lives in those same territories are not as known. It is extremely important to hear Palestinian citizens' voices as well, because they deal with aspects of Palestinian identity that foreigners cannot feel and understand, since they hand down stories of older generations and tell about unspeakable grief.

Over the years Palestinian literature has embraced all different genres, from short stories to novels, up to poetry and prose.

Three generations of writers can be distinguished starting from 1930.

From the 1930s to the 1950s there was a first generation of writers that focused mostly on poetry, adopting classical rhymes schemes and structure. Starting from the 1950s, Palestinian writers started to use the free verse, maintaining the musicality typical of Palestinian poetry. The first generation featured poets like Ibrahim Tuqan, who was a nationalist living in Palestine before the end of the British mandate and witnessed the violence perpetrated by British and Zionist forces. Themes of sacrifice and devotion are the core essence of these texts, which also provoke feelings of loss and nostalgia.



*What my interviewee said about this poem:*  
“A text about nostalgia, the dream of owning  
your own free house”

*IBRAHIM TUQAN - MY HOMELAND*

[...]

When will I see you? When will I see you?

Secure and prosperous

Victorious and honoured

Will I see you in your eminence

Reaching the stars, reaching the stars?

My homeland, my homeland

My homeland, my homeland

Our youth will not tire, until your independence

Or they will die, or they will die

We will drink from the cup of death and never be to our  
enemies

*translated by Issa J. Boullata*

The second generation, from the 1960s to the 1990s, included in the poetic discourse the struggles of the daily lives and trauma that Palestinian people suffered throughout the years of mass displacement from their territories. Mahmoud Darwish, one of the most renowned Palestinian poets, belonged to this generation. His poetry let the outside world discover a real and untold Palestine, more authentically.

## *Mahmoud Darwish*

*Mahmoud Darwish was recognized by my interviewees, however not this poem.*

*Here is what they said about it:*

*“A sense of devotion towards his country”*

*“I like this poem better than the other two because of the style in which is written, which seems more sentimental”*

*MAHMOUD DARWISH- ON THIS EARTH*

*[...]*

On this earth what makes life worth living:  
on this earth stands the mistress of the earth

mother of beginnings

mother of endings

it used to be known as Palestine

it became known as Palestine

my lady:

I deserve, because you're my lady

I deserve life.

*Translated by Karim Abuawad*

The third generation, from  
1993 up until now, carry the  
sorrow of their community  
but prefer a more  
experimental and  
philosophical approach  
towards their country.

*About this poem was said:*

*“Poverty”*

*“Coming back as something that it doesn't  
exist, because refugees most of the times  
don't have anything left”*

*“This poem gives the impression of  
listening to a lecture, something is being  
told to you and is factual. However, I also  
feel that there is resignation in this poem.  
I don't see any hope of a better future.”*

*ASHRAF FAYADH- BEING A REFUGEE*

Being a Refugee means standing at the end of the line  
to get a fraction of a country.  
standing is something your grandfather did, without knowing  
the reason.

and the fraction is you.

Country: a card you put in your wallet with your money.

Money: pieces of paper with pictures of leaders.

Pictures: they stand in for you until your return.

Return: a mythical creature that appears in your grandfather's  
stories.

Here ended the first lesson.

The lesson is conveyed to you so that you can learn the  
second

lesson, which is

‘what do you signify?’

*Translated by Mona Kareem and Jonathan Wright*

# *Symbols*

The next section concentrates on Palestinian symbols and their history, deeply rooted -most of the times- in colonial history and fight against the oppressor.



*“If I say Palestine, what’s the first symbol that comes to your mind?”*

This topic was the easiest to discuss with my interviewees due to the interaction with social media posts, where numerous different symbols are shown and illustrated every day. A symbol that almost everyone mentioned was the watermelon, which represents the Palestinian flag and country.

The symbol was used for the first time after the 1967 war, after Israel banned any public exhibit of the Palestinian flag. In 1980, an art gallery was closed by Israeli soldiers because the colors of the Palestinian flag were used in the paintings. To protest this act of repression, people started to show the symbol of watermelon in public, at the risk of being arrested. In 1993 the Oslo Accords granted the liberty of showing the Palestinian flag. In spite of the accords, when the nationalist government took control of Israel, Ben-Gvir -national security minister- banned the flag from public spaces. As a result, Zazim, an Arab-Israeli association, displayed the image of watermelon with the sign ‘ This is not a Palestinian flag’ on taxis that operated in Tel-aviv to protest the ban.

## *Keffiyeh*

When talking about Palestinian resistance, another renowned symbol is the keffiyeh. Keffiyeh are squared scarfs with a black- and white patterns. The patterns symbolize the fishnets, a connection to the mediterranean, and the olive trees leaves, which signify perseverance. It was worn by villagers to cover their faces and heads by the sun and the sand of the desert. The head garment gained a political meaning during the Arab revolts of the 1930s against the British occupation, to hide their identity from the English forces. Following the protests, the British banned the keffiyeh and Palestinian people, in response, collectively started to wear the scarf. The keffiyeh gained further significance during the period of time going from 1967 to 1993, when it was replacing the banned Palestinian flag. Nowadays keffiyeh is used during protests by Pro-Pal activists, using it as a symbol of solidarity towards the Palestinian population.





## ***Palestinian Food***

The last section of this zine focuses on Palestinian food and its origins, along with a reflection about the current famine that is happening in the Country.

*“Do you eat any Palestinian food, or are you able to name me a Palestinian food? If so, which food is it?”*

Many interviewees answered this question with ‘Falafel’, giving it the record as most well-known Palestinian food. Falafel are small deep-fried patties or balls, made out of chickpeas or fava beans, mixed with fresh herbs and spices. Falafels were invented in Egypt by Christian who couldn’t eat meat during certain holidays. Later, the recipe became popular in confining countries as well, including Palestine, where the recipe favoured chickpeas. Falafel is considered a popular street food in Palestine, and is often eaten inside a sandwich (Raviv, Yael. “Falafel: A National Icon.” 2003 )



Another famous Palestinian dish is Hummus. Hummus comes from the arabic word for chickpeas ' حُمُّص ' , and is a puree of chickpeas mixed with tahini sauce ( smashed sesame seeds), lemon juice and garlic. Hummus is generally served as a part of meze - an appetizer- , or with falafel, yet in different countries outside the Middle East, hummus has become a dipping sauce, with many people dipping vegetables and crackers in the paste.

A typical Palestinian beverage is Arabic coffee. Arabic coffee, also called Qahwa, is a type of coffee that originated in Yemen and is present nowadays in several countries in the Near East. The drink is offered to guests as a sign of hospitality and is served in finjan, which are decorated cups. The peculiarity of this coffee lies within the fact that it is often taken without any sugar, but with a sprinkle of spices instead, generally cardamom.



## *Arabic Coffee*

Talking about food is essential when talking about Palestine and Palestinian people, due to the continuing famine that Israel has created in the territories. Over 10,000 people have died because of the famine, and Palestinian people are currently depending on food supplies coming from humanitarian organizations and other nations

An extract from the online article “Devouring our dream”: Palestinian Writer on Starvation, Survival, and daily life in Gaza by Akram Al-sourani, a Palestinian writer living in Gaza.

*“Let me confess: I miss grilled chicken breast, the embrace of a lamb chop or rib, kissing the golden skin of a stuffed roast chicken. I miss the wink of a grilled fish under a sprinkle of parsley, crashing a wedding, dancing at my neighbor’s son’s celebration —he died before grief could claim him. I miss a family feast of falafel and fries, a graduation party for my friend’s child who’s still buried under the rubble. [...]*

*Gaza’s memory won’t fade; it clings like smoke. It’s not just painful, it’s permanent. “*

Food is not just a biological meaning of survival for the body and mind; food is memory, celebration, community and identity. And this nation has been deprived of all these aspects.

# *REFLECTING ABOUT PALESTINE*

Palestine is one of the Mediterranean countries that is often forgotten when thinking of this geographical area. Palestine has been gradually marginalized in favour of a speech that recognizes the neighbour power of Israel, but while the world turned its back on Palestine, the diaspora keeps on remembering the motherland and hearing her call. It is reflected in the symbols, like earlier mentioned, in the keffiyeh: the olive oil leaves and the fishnets, a clear reminder of how Palestinian culture belongs to the Mediterranean tradition. Olive oil, one of the key ingredients to every Mediterranean dish, is often associated with Italy or Greece, but not many know that this tree was first cultivated by people in the Levant area. (“The Origins of the Olive Tree Revealed”. Scientific American.)

Thanks to the diaspora who keeps on writing about their homeland and giving us personal insights and information on the culture and events which took place, we are able to see and feel Palestine. This project wants to connect with Palestinian culture and, most importantly, highlight that despite the promises of a ceasefire, the famine and mass destruction of territories is still ongoing, along with the violent acts of the Israeli forces towards the Palestinian citizens.

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