

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Facing the Nakba

by Donna Nevel



FACING THE NAKBA, PHOTO COURTESY OF JEWISH VOICE FOR PEACE

From the editors: This piece is a combination of an article and annotated curriculum offered as a resource and model for flexible use by readers.

"I support compulsory transfer. I don't see anything immoral in it." (David Ben Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister)

"I agreed that it was essential to drive the inhabitants out." (Yitzhak Rabin, Israeli Prime Minister)

"Kill any Arab you encounter." (Mordechai Machlef, Haganah Officer, Future Chief of Staff of the Israeli Army, April 1948)

[Quotes from *The Nakba: Sixty-Nine Years of Dispossession and Apartheid*—IMEU (Institute for Middle East Understanding)]

The story of the Nakba—the expulsion and dispossession of approximately 750,000 Palestinians, and the destruction of more than 400 villages, by the Zionist movement and then Israel from 1947-1949—has been well-documented by Palestinian as well as Israeli and other international sources. However, not only in Israel but also in the United States and within the American Jewish community, the story of the Nakba is often disregarded or ignored, focusing, instead, on the creation of Israel as a safe haven for Jews, without acknowledging the dispossession of the Palestinian people that began prior to and with the founding of the State.

We created the "Facing the Nakba" (FTN) curriculum specifically to engage with U.S. Jews, as well as a general U.S. audience, about the foundational event of what the state of Israel calls the War of Independence and what Palestinians call the Nakba (Catastrophe).

Since 2002, the Israeli organization Zochrot ("Remembering" in Hebrew) has attempted to deepen Jewish Israelis' understanding of the events that took place in the period before, during, and after the creation of the State of Israel and "to promote acknowledgment and accountability for the ongoing injustices of the Nakba." After a group of New York City activists attended a moving presentation by a staff member of Zochrot who came to the United States, several of us continued to meet to discuss how we could bring some of this important work to U.S. Jewish communities.

Inspired by Zochrot's work and that of the Palestinian organization, BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, we—a group of five Jewish women, all of whom are educators in the United States—decided to come together to develop "Facing the Nakba" (FTN). Some of us had grown up learning about Israel as a "land without a people" and were immersed throughout our childhood and early adult lives in a Zionist narrative without ever having heard about the Nakba. As we began to challenge and explore our own views and become part of movements for justice in Palestine and

Israel, we recognized how critical learning about the Nakba was for our own political development and for understanding more about the consequences of Zionism on the Palestinian people. We also thought that this work would be meaningful for many activists and organizers within the organizations we were part of—Jewish groups committed to justice for Palestinians. We spent the next years creating curriculum that we hoped others in our communities would be able to draw upon to facilitate workshops and classes.

Through videos, slides, first-hand testimonies, historical documents, readings, discussions, and exercises, the FTN curriculum offers an historical lens for understanding the root causes of the call for justice for the Palestinian people. We believe that understanding the history that has led to today's reality is important not only for historical accuracy but for what it means for our own organizing and for the road to achieving justice.

We originally designed the FTN curriculum for Jewish groups and individuals interested in exploring and perhaps rethinking their positions on Israel and Palestine, many of which they learned, like some of us on the coordinating team, while growing up and studying in Jewish educational settings. In many cases, for those who are Jewish, it means unlearning and re-examining many of the stories we were told about Zionism and about the creation of Israel. But, soon after we created the resources, it became apparent that many who weren't Jewish but who had been raised in the United States were subject to the same gaps in education about Israel and Zionism and so it became clear to us that the curriculum and resources could be relevant for those outside Jewish communities as well.

The curriculum can also easily be adapted for more formal classroom use or for after-school workshops or other forms of community education. The variety of materials and exercises are designed to maximize many different forms and styles of participation, from adult education and synagogue classes to workshops in high schools and on college campuses.

The "Facing the Nakba" curriculum is particularly relevant for those studying what is happening in the Middle East; U.S. foreign policy; Jewish history and Zionism; Palestinian history; the relationships between Islamophobia and Israel politics; settler colonialism; and/or indigenous struggles. It challenges narratives that are part of dominant discourse and ideology in the United States and requires a deeply critical, reflective process of learning and engagement.

As Jews living in the United States and working on this project to bring the FTN curriculum deep within our communities and to hold ourselves accountable for making the Nakba visible, we wanted to be sure at all times to honor and draw upon the extensive work on the Nakba that has been done by Palestinians, whose lives and communities have been directly impacted by the Nakba until this day. Therefore, our resources and materials are heavily drawn from first-hand accounts and histories shared by Palestinians. We also received critical feedback

from Palestinian educators and historians with whom we shared our curriculum as it was being developed.

In developing the curricula, FTN has worked for the past few years together with PARCEO, a participatory action research center that provides training and resources in partnership with community-based groups and institutions working for justice. (I am also part of the PARCEO team.) PARCEO has supported the development of the curriculum to be as accessible as possible for different kinds of learners and for those entering with multiple forms of knowledge and relationships to the material. PARCEO also created a detailed Facilitation Guide to provide tangible support for creating an inclusive, welcoming, and accountable learning environment that will enable a wide range of participants in different contexts to have the opportunity to engage deeply with the curricula.

The curriculum: an overview

The "Facing the Nakba" curriculum, which has seven sessions, begins with an exploration of participants' personal relationships to the Nakba and presents an historical overview of the events of 1947-1948. It includes testimonies through videos from Israeli Jews and from Palestinians who lived through the Nakba and addresses the question of how we interact with such personal testimonies. It considers how the Nakba impacts Palestinian life today, including in the Palestinian diaspora, and looks at issues related to Palestinian refugees, international law, and the right of return. Each of the sessions is ninety minutes to two hours in length.

The seven sessions include the following themes: Session 1: Introductory Session; Session 2: Encountering the Nakba; Session 3: the Nakba in History; Session 4: Testimony; Session 5: In the Archives; Session 6: The Right of Return; and Session 7: Art and Resistance.

The FTN website describes the seven sessions, their objectives, and methodology (excerpted to the right):



"Facing the Nakba" Curriculum	
1 Introduction	We welcome the group, introduce participants to the different sessions, set community agreements, and begin to explore the Nakba.
2 Encountering the Nakba	Participants think about their personal relationship to the Nakba, explore why so many of us don't know about the Nakba, and start to uncover where to look for that history through a slideshow and "found documents" activity using primary sources from 1948.
3 The Nakba in History	Through a slideshow and presentation of information, we present an historical overview of the Nakba: Palestinian life before the Nakba, the relationship between Jews and Palestinians, the impact of the Nakba in numbers, the UN Partition Plan, and the reasons Palestinians left their villages in 1947-48. Through group discussion, we ask, "How did we get here?" and develop a deeper understanding of historical context.
4 Testimonies	We see and listen to testimonies from Palestinians describing what life was like before and during 1948. We ask what "testimony" means, and examine how we feel when we hear people tell what happened during the Nakba. We may use academic texts, concepts, and empirical research to understand testimonies, but our focus is first and foremost on the personal experience and process.
5 In the Archives	This session includes close reading and small group discussions to offer time for participants to reflect on some of the information they have encountered in the previous sessions. Close readings and examinations will be of: the Israeli Declaration of Independence, Plan Dalet*, a testimony of a Palmach soldier, and the poems from two Palestinian poets, "I Belong There," by Mahmoud Darwish, and "There Was No Farewell," by Taha Muhammad Ali.
6 The Right of Return	Participants move from learning about the history of the Nakba to exploring the ongoing effects of the Nakba today and looking at who the Palestinian refugees are under international law and considering what would constitute a just resolution.
7 Art and Resistance	We reflect further on how the Nakba impacts Palestinian life now and begin to explore art as an act of cultural resistance in Palestine through various forms of Palestinian artwork and expression. We also reflect on the seven sessions as a whole and how we want to transform what we've learned into action.

*"Plan Dalet" or "Plan D" was the name given by the Zionist High Command to the general plan for launching successive offensives in April/early May 1948 in various parts of Palestine. These offensives, which entailed the destruction of the Palestinian Arab community and the expulsion and pauperization of the bulk of Palestine Arabs, were calculated to achieve the military *fait accompli* upon which the State of Israel was to be based." (*Plan Dalet: Master Plan for the Conquest of Palestine*, " by Walid Khalidi, Journal of Palestine)

Examples from the Sessions

Each session includes readings, exercises, testimonies, and time for reflection and analysis. In session one, which offers an introduction to the course and to the material, participants explore their own assumptions and knowledge base coming into the course.

In one of the early exercises, the facilitator asks for a show of hands from those who heard the following statements when they first learned about the establishment of the state of Israel:

"How many of you heard that ..."

1. "When the first Jews arrived here, Palestine was empty. A land without a people for a people without a land."
2. "Arabs came to Palestine to take advantage of the economy the Jewish settlers were developing."
3. "The Partition Plan was approved in 1947 because the world recognized that a Jewish state had to be established. The Jews accepted the Partition Plan, but the Arabs rejected it, which is why the war broke out. That's why they, not us, are responsible for its results."
4. "The Arabs who left their villages in 1947/-48 chose to do so at the behest of the Arab armies expecting to return after an Arab victory."
5. "The 1948 War of Independence was a war for survival. It was a war of the few against the many. Although we won, later events proved that we must continue to live by the sword."
6. "Jews and Palestinians have both been living on this land from time immemorial. Thus Israel has an equal claim and Palestinians must share the territory."
7. "The creation of Israel was another example of colonialism."
8. "World guilt about the Holocaust is why there is an Israel."
9. "Creation of Israel required the displacement of thousands of Palestinians."
10. "The creation of a national home for the Jewish people is based on international agreement in which Britain was charged with establishing a 'national home for the Jewish people' in Palestine."
11. "Palestinian refugees and their descendants are still in camps because Arab states have insisted it remains that way."

Participants then break into groups to begin to think more deeply about some of the following questions: • What was the story you heard when you began hearing a narrative (whenever that was in your life) of what happened in 1948 and the establishment of the State of Israel?

- Who told it to you?
- Had you heard different stories?
- Has this story changed for you? When? Why?

These questions and discussions serve to locate the participants' own starting points, histories, and understandings of the issue as they begin to engage with, and be challenged by, new material and historical evidence.

Following that exercise and to frame the sessions that follow, facilitators show a short video that illustrates the ongoing nature of the displacement of Palestinians from their homes and, to prepare for the next session, which offers a slide show of the history of the Nakba, participants are asked to read "The Dispossessed" by Saleem Haddad, and an excerpt from "Strangers in the House: Coming of Age in Occupied Palestine" by Raja Shehadeh.

The slide show in session two—on Encountering the Nakba—includes powerful visuals with extensive notes (excerpted below) included for the facilitators with each slide. These slides explain what the Nakba is; how Palestinian life has been erased; how Jewish localities took over Palestinian ones; and the ongoing process by which Palestinians lost their homes and land at the hands of the Israeli government.



"REMEMBERING OUR VILLAGE" BY BASHIR SINWAR, 1985

Encountering the Nakba

Slide 1: What is the Nakba? "Nakba" is an Arabic word that means "great disaster" or "catastrophe." On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly approved a plan to partition Mandate Palestine between Jews and Palestinian Arabs to follow the end of the British Mandate on May 14, 1948.

Approximately 750,000 Palestinians were ejected or fled from some 450 villages inside the areas that became the State of Israel. The war's end found less than half of the Palestinians in their original homes—fewer than 150,000 in Israel, some 400,000 in the West Bank, and 60,000 in the Gaza Strip, with many more constituting a new diaspora. • Palestinians commemorate the Nakba on May 15, the day after the anniversary of Israel's Independence Day.

In this slide, for example, we see a 1943 photo of the tents and buildings in an early Zionist settlement, Kvutzat Yavne. The intention of the founders was to make the area near ancient Yavne the site of a religious kibbutz and a yeshiva. What we don't see in the photo is the nearby Arab village of Yibna. The country is typically portrayed as one that was clean, empty – a land without people for a people without a land – while, in fact, a substantial Palestinian society existed here living a rich life. You can see Yibna in the map below, part of a 1941 map of Palestine. In the late nineteenth century, a visitor described Yibna as a large village partly built of stone and situated on a hill. In 1944/45 there were 5,420 villagers living in Yibna and 1,500 nomads living on its outskirts. The map on the top left, prepared by the "Religious Kibbutz Fund" (1946), shows other Jewish localities in the Yavne area. Between 1948 and 1955, five other Jewish villages were founded on Yibna's land. The photo on the bottom left is from 1991 and it shows what remains of Yibna's mosque

Slide 2: Much of Israel bears traces of the Nakba, even if people aren't aware of them. These pictures testify to the ways in which Palestinian life has been overwritten and erased.

This slide shows a postcard of vacationers on the beach at Achziv Park; those ruins in the background are the remains of the village of AlZeeb. AlZeeb was captured by the Haganah's Carmel Brigade prior to the engagement of armies from other Arab countries in the 1948 War on May 14, 1948, as part of the same operation that resulted in the capture of the city of Akka (now Acre).

Slide 3: According to then Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan: "Jewish localities were established in place of Arab villages. You don't even know the names of those Arab villages, and I don't blame you, because those geography texts no longer exist. Not only the books are gone; the Arab villages are gone: Nahalal in place of Ma'lul; Kibbutz Gvat in place of Jibta; Kibbutz Sarid in place of Huneifis; Kfar Yehoshua in place of Tal Al-Shuman. Wherever Jews built, they built on land where

What is the Nakba?

"Nakba" is an Arabic word meaning "great disaster" or "catastrophe" (نكبة). It refers to the destruction of most Palestinian localities that existed in the area that became the state of Israel, and the expulsion of most of their Palestinian residents, from November 1947 to July 1949.

Top right: Kvutzat Yavne in 1943. Top left: A map from 1946 prepared by the "Religious Kibbutz Fund," showing Jewish localities in the Yavne area. Below: A 1991 photo of the remains of the mosque in Yibna, a Palestinian locality destroyed in the Nakba. Next to it is a portion of a 1941 map of Palestine showing the locality.

SLIDE 1: WHAT IS THE NAKBA?

Encountering the Nakba

How does one encounter the Nakba?
There are places where one encounters the Nakba even without being aware of it.

Postcard: Vacationers on the beach at Achziv Park; remains of the village of al-Zeeb in the background. (Photographer: Werner Braun, Jerusalem).

SLIDE 2: ENCOUNTERING THE NAKBA

"Jewish localities were established in place of Arab villages. You don't even know the names of those Arab villages, and I don't blame you, because those geography texts no longer exist. Not only the books are gone; the Arab villages are also gone: Nahalal in place of Ma'lul; Kibbutz Gvat in place of Jibta; Kibbutz Sarid in place of Huneifis; Kfar Yehoshua in place of Tal Al-Shuman. Wherever Jews built, they built on land where Arabs once lived."

(Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan, 4.4.1969, from an article in Ha'aretz).

Most Israeli Jews don't know the names of the Palestinian villages because they were changed or erased completely when the state was established.

SLIDE 3: MINISTER OF DEFENSE MOSHE DAYAN QUOTE

Arabs once lived.” (In fact, the maps and texts do exist in various archives and collections, though often hidden from public view.)

Palestinian place names were often echoed in the new names Israel gave the localities (for example: Baysan – Beit Shean; Yaffa – Yafo; Bir alSaba – Beersheva; Yajur – Yagur; Ayn Hawd – Ein Hod). People in Jerusalem still call some neighborhoods by their Arab names despite the fact they had been renamed into Hebrew. For example: Talbieh (“Komemiyut” in Hebrew); Katamon (“Gonen”); al-Maliha (“Manahat”). Most Israelis don’t know that they’re calling these neighborhoods by their Palestinian names.

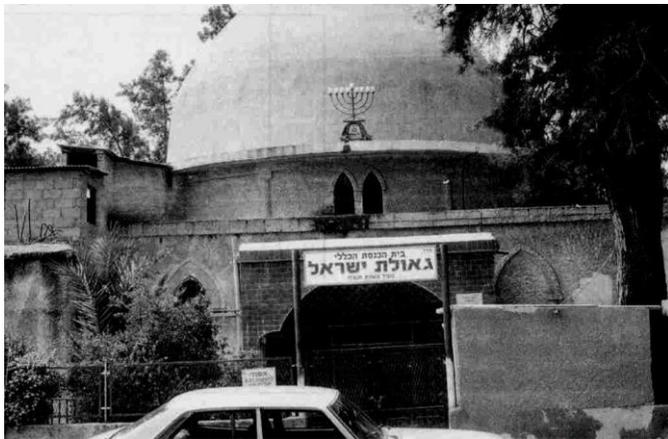
Slide 4: In these next few slides, you can see the physical replacement of the old Palestinian villages and cities with the new.

Slide 4 shows: Saffuriyya – Zipori, Slide 5. AlMusrara – Morasha, Slide 6. Ayn Karim – Ein Karem, Slide 7. Al-Lydd – Lod

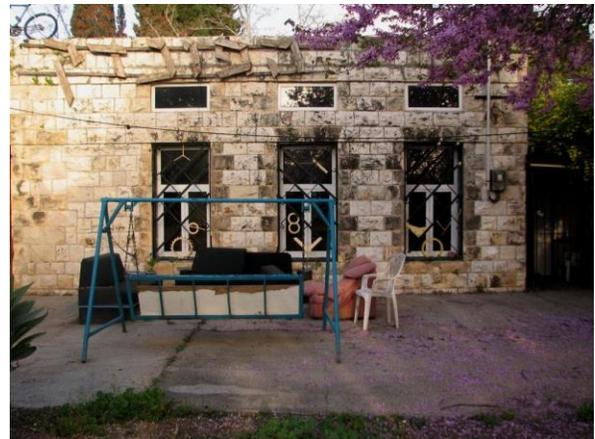


SLIDE 4: SAFFURIYYA

After the slide show, ten images are displayed as part of a Museum Gallery with a series of notes and reflection questions printed below each picture. The pictures show structures and places that were Palestinian and are now Israeli and Jewish, giving the participants an opportunity to tangibly see and get a feel for what the dispossession has actually looked like and what the impact of it has been. Participants walk through the gallery with a series of questions to explore about the meaning of the images they are encountering.



A MOSQUE IN THE VILLAGE OF WADI HUNAYN. TODAY IT IS A SYNAGOGUE NEAR NES ZIONA (1987. PHOTO: RA’FI SAFIYA).



SCHOOL IN THE VILLAGE OF KUWAYKAT. TODAY IT IS THE YOUTH CLUB OF KIBBUTZ BEIT HAEMEK.



ALMAJDAL’S MAIN MOSQUE, WHERE TODAY THERE ARE GALLERIES AND ASHQELON’S MUNICIPAL MUSEUM.



THE ABU KHEEL FAMILY HOME OF THE VILLAGE OF SHAYKH MUWANNIS. TODAY IT IS THE TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY FACULTY CLUB AND A BANQUET HALL.

Throughout this and other sessions, we create the space and time for taking in and reflecting upon the materials and images being presented. For example, in session 3, *The Nakba in History*, there are several slides showing the History of the Nakba. The facilitator notes for the session address how to create that time for reflection and analysis:

Depending on the size of the group, you may want to make space for ongoing discussion during the slideshow. This section presents a number of topics dealing with 1948 that we usually don't learn about or know—about life before 1948, about the Nakba, and what happened afterwards. The slides and printouts aren't intended to provide a complete, comprehensive historical account of the period, but are intended to shed light on a number of potentially unknown aspects of the Nakba. Participants are invited to view all the information critically, including what is presented here, and everyone is invited to delve into it more deeply.

The facilitator notes suggest dividing participants into four groups and assigning each group one of the following categories: Palestine before the Nakba, Partition and lead-up to violence, Palestinian communities destroyed, Preventing return. Each group receives corresponding packets to help them develop narratives that explain what took place in their section: Palestine before the Nakba, Partition and lead-up to violence, Palestinian communities destroyed, Preventing return.

In the session that follows--Session 4 on Testimony--focusing on the power of testimonies, four different texts are located in four different "stations" placed around the room. The group divides into small groups and goes from station to station. In this session, the facilitator is encouraged to raise discussion of the power dynamics of testimony—how people may hear testimonies based on their own (pre)conceptions of who the teller is—including those voices that have been either marginalized or silenced.

During Session 5, *In the Archives*, participants devote time to looking closely at primary texts and documents to think about what they can and cannot tell us about the Nakba. That leads to a discussion in Session 6, *The Right of Return*, on what Palestinian life has been like since the Nakba, and particularly the experiences of Palestinian refugees. As we enter into this session, participants will be asked to think about this question: "What enduring effects on Palestinian communities do you imagine have taken place since the Nakba?"

As participants begin to think more deeply about the impact of being dislocated from one's home and land, the session moves to an understanding of the experiences of Palestinian refugees and the call for the "Right of Return." The use of video is particularly meaningful here to offer a visual perspective of those who lived through the Nakba and what that means for them today. Videos are shown from two refugee camps and another video is of Nakba survivors.

A facilitator note helps to introduce the right of return based on who the participants are:

Participants may still be experiencing discomfort or uncertainty about the Right of Return. If this is the case, use this optional framing to present the next activity to the group: We've now taken in a lot of information as we enter into discussion of the Right of Return. Right now we're examining what it feels like for Palestinians to think about the Right of Return. Though you may have to suspend some of your personal beliefs, we are inviting you to engage in this activity to explore questions of how the Right of Return might be actualized, and why it might feel important to Palestinians who are currently living in refugee camps or the diaspora because of the Nakba.

To continue to address the ways in which the Nakba impacts current realities and Palestinian life today, the final session of the curriculum, *Art and Resistance*, has as its focus creative resistance, which is so central to the Palestinian movement for justice. "Stations" are set up showing examples of creative resistance, including a series of posters from the Palestine Poster Project. Participants are encouraged to read through the material and consider guiding questions at the "stations" they visit. For example, questions include, among others: "How does this piece reflect on memory, loss, staying, forgetting? Where have you seen, heard, experienced myths collapsing through art? In what ways can art and storytelling erase, make visible, or change narratives and memory?"

As the curriculum draws to a close, using visuals from all the sessions and some guiding questions, the final session ends with a period of reflection about the overall experience. This offers an opportunity for participants to share their thoughts, hopes, and reflections on what they've learned and on how they might think about current realities moving forward. Also, recognizing that there are likely still many questions and a range of different thoughts, this process is framed as having been the beginning of a learning process, not the end.

Facilitator Guide

Those using the *Facing the Nakba* curriculum might have a strong Jewish or Zionist education or come with little prior knowledge. Others may come with prior knowledge or with a fuller understanding of the Nakba. The facilitator guide is designed to support the teaching and learning of participants with different sets of knowledge and experience.

Given that the curricula may offer a new perspective for many encountering it and perhaps one that creates internal struggle, the facilitator guide is an essential part of ensuring a pedagogic process that enables deep learning, exploration, and meaningful reflection. As described in the guide,

The material offers firsthand accounts that may be in conflict with what some of us have previously heard about

the Nakba. We encourage critical thinking and reflection to enable participants to interact with the materials in different ways. To facilitate this process, we have created facilitator notes that 1) address possible issues/scenarios that may arise and 2) share some of our thoughts about the process of facilitation. Facing the Nakba curriculum was designed using a popular education or Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework—a pedagogy that recognizes that in this process we are all teachers and learners. Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a framework for engaging in research and organizing for social justice that is rooted in a community’s own knowledge, wisdom, and experience. PAR recognizes that those most impacted by systemic injustice are in the best position to understand and analyze their needs and challenges and to organize for social change. This framework is helpful for Facing the Nakba facilitation, because it allows for participatory and experiential engagement with the material and with each other during the workshop sessions.

Accordingly, each session in this curriculum intentionally builds from participants’ previous knowledge, concerns, and experience as they engage with the material and participate in discussions. Taking into consideration that participants will come to the learning process from very different entry points, the intention, then, is to build from those different backgrounds and experiences and previous education as we challenge ourselves to re-learn, to re-examine, to reflect, and to come to new understandings of the history and current day reality.

The facilitator guide includes a few guiding principles that are helpful to keep in mind when facilitating within this framework:

Foster an environment to build healthy, respectful relationships by developing clear goals and establishing the group’s purpose together. Recognize who is in the room and remain conscious of issues of power, dynamics, different forms of expression so that all types of participation are valued equally. Guide the process while not dominating conversation. Work to ensure that all participants, including themselves, are integrated as genuinely as possible into the group. Balance the various dynamics and engage as both a teacher and a learner.

Recognizing that for many who have been educated to believe that Israel was “a land without a people for a people without a land,” this learning process is intended to open up spaces for new understandings and exploration of a history that has too often been ignored or distorted.

The curriculum and process engaged in by those participating are reflective, intentional, and participatory. Each session includes a range of questions to foster deeper thinking and reflection. The sessions are also created to be as accessible as possible to a range of communities.

Recognizing that for many who have been educated to believe that Israel was “a land without a people for a people without a land,” this learning process is intended to open up spaces for new understandings and exploration of a history that has too often been ignored or distorted. The use and highlighting of stories and testimonies through video and other readings are particularly valuable as part of this process. While these resources are readily available, they have most often not been included in Jewish educational curricula or in courses about Zionism and the creation of Israel.

Addressing Challenges

As the curriculum has been, and will be, used in different contexts, some issues have arisen requiring thought and reflection about the best way to respond and interact with participants. I will describe a couple of the scenarios that have arisen and ones we anticipate as well as some of our thoughts about how to best address them.

In one case, at a pilot course we facilitated in conjunction with the Columbia University’s Alliance for Historical Dialogue and Accountability, a member of the class who defined herself as a liberal Zionist challenged the material, particularly in the beginning sessions, with “This is wrong.” It was clear she was steeped in Zionist history and considered herself an expert. The students for this pilot course were hand-picked to reflect a number of different political perspectives, and we recognized that the students with the strongest Zionist education had the most difficulty taking in new information that conflicted with the narrative with which they were familiar. We took all this into account as we continued to further develop the curriculum and facilitator guide.

In another course with Jewish pro-Palestine activists, participants who were quite open to the historical material expressed many conflicted feelings when it came to the discussion of the implementation of the Palestinian right of return and what was actually possible. During the initial discussion, everyone was clear that they supported the Palestinian right of return. But when we began the last part of the discussion—practicalities of return—the discussion shifted. Participants continued to support the right of return in principle, but were acutely aware of the seemingly insurmountable psychological/emotional obstacles to it from Israeli Jews. This grew out of their own experiences speaking to members of U.S. Jewish communities and experiencing the resistance even at the mention of the right of return. At the same time, because they are all long-time activists, they were also aware of how change that has seemed impossible can and does happen. We didn’t have the chance to talk at that moment about how the groundwork for these changes took decades of activist work or how what seemed like a sudden tectonic shift wasn’t really so sudden.

A number of other scenarios are described in the facilitator guide to help with these and other challenging situations that arise. In one example, one of the participants is not talking or participating in outwardly recognizable ways. This person may generally be quiet, or

is more quiet and withdrawn in relation to the sessions and particular group dynamics. In another example, a Jewish participant is overwhelmed with guilt and keeps bringing it back to her own processing and how hard it is to read that this was done by Jewish people in defense of the Jewish state. In each of these cases, we wanted to think about how to make it possible for those grappling with the material to not feel stuck, but, rather, to be able to grow from the process and meaningfully generate deeper thinking and analysis.

In the case of a person challenging the facts, part of our goal is to encourage people to open themselves to this new material and to try to engage with it as genuinely as possible. An empathic, sensitive facilitator can help create a process and environment in which participants will feel able to learn, struggle, and challenge themselves within a framework of accountability and openness to new material and to the issues being addressed. As articulated in the facilitator guide:

Encourage participants to look critically at our own understanding of the historical accounts and consider whether there are voices or perspectives that have been left out. If so, we can then reflect on how these testimonies might help us build a more inclusive understanding of both present and historical relationships in Palestine and Israel. Encourage participants to think about what action they want to take with the new knowledge they have, rather than remaining in state of guilt or feeling overwhelmed.

Further, being open to envisioning what is possible is a necessary part of the pedagogic process. In the discussion about the right of return, for example, this envisioning is rooted in the rights of those who have been forced out of their homes and land. It also involves challenging and exploring notions of who makes change and how change is made.

The facilitator guide also includes recommended tracks depending on who the participants are, their backgrounds, histories, and prior education. Since there are seven sessions, the tracks also provide the opportunity for those with less time to engage in particular exercises, activities, and readings that are most relevant. The guide includes recommendations for high school students, college courses, those who are organizers for justice, and groups identifying as “progressive Zionists.”

The project also created an extensive library to make it possible to read and research additional issues and areas of interest. The library includes readings and videos on the right of return; destruction of villages, partition plans; personal histories and testimonies; primary sources, and materials about the ongoing Nakba, among many others. That library is on the Facing the Nakba website.

Commitment to PAR is infused throughout the curriculum—encouraging not only an examination of history from the perspective of those who were directly

impacted by injustice, but also facilitating a collaborative process of engagement and learning together, rooted in people’s own histories, in each of the sessions. As part of the learning process, the importance of research coming from communities themselves is also centered as critical to developing an understanding and analysis of the Nakba rooted in lived realities.

Conclusion

The Facing the Nakba curriculum tells the story of the Nakba and of the dispossession of the Palestinian people from their homes and land. We wanted to create an accountable, accessible curriculum for educators, organizers, and communities to draw upon in their classrooms and educational settings.

This curriculum speaks to our conviction that making visible the injustices of the Nakba, both past and ongoing, is necessary to achieving justice. Not incidentally, it speaks also to current organizing, including the Palestinians’ call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS), which has as one of its commitments the right of return for Palestinian refugees. And it also speaks to the implications and relationship of the Nakba and the call for Palestinian rights to other struggles for social justice within the United States and globally.

While the Nakba is fundamental to understanding the experiences and lived realities of Palestinians before, during, and since the creation of Israel, it has been suppressed and ignored in Israel’s narrative of national emergence. And that one-sided Israeli narrative is what is echoed by many Jewish communities and others within the United States. We hope that the FTN curriculum will enable participants to engage openly and deeply in a learning process that promotes honest reflection, analysis, and action toward justice.

The full curriculum and facilitator guide can be found at <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/facing-the-nakba/>

In addition to the author, the Facing the Nakba coordinating committee members include Julia Kessler, Marilyn Kleinberg Neimark, Nava Et Shalom, and Rabbi Alissa Wise. The author draws upon the FTN curricula and materials, which were developed and co-written by the coordinating committee (listed above) with the support of two of PARCEO’s coordinators, Nina Mehta and Krysta Williams.

Finally, many people read and gave critical feedback on the FTN curriculum in the process of its development. A special thank-you to Nadia Saah and Jamil Dakwar.



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