



## DIFFICULT DISTINCTIONS: Refugee Law, Humanitarian Practice, and Political Identification in Gaza

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The almost four-and-a-half million people who are formally registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and who are therefore eligible for the agency's educational, health, and (for hardship cases) rations services, serve as a reminder of the longevity of what is often referred to as the "Palestine problem."<sup>1</sup> Since 1948, when the former territory of British Mandate Palestine was divided by war into three distinct areas—the Egyptian-controlled Gaza Strip, the West Bank (quickly annexed to Jordan), and the newly established state of Israel—much of the former population of the country, along with their descendants, have been in exile: displaced from their homes and dispossessed from their lands.<sup>2</sup> How to resolve the status of Palestinian refugees has proven to be a major sticking point in negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as a source of political contestation within the Palestinian community.<sup>3</sup> As large as the group of registered refugees is, however, it does not account for all those Palestinians who suffered losses in what they remember as the *nakba* [catastrophe] of 1948. The UNRWA mandate, for instance, is limited to those who "lost both their homes and means of livelihood" and does not, therefore, cover the native population of the Gaza Strip, many of whom were dispossessed, but not displaced, by the 1948 war.

Gaza, home to one-and-a-half million people of whom two-thirds are refugees, is a place that is at once exceptional and paradigmatic—of the broader Palestinian condition and of refugee situations more generally. As such, it offers a particularly good site for investigating refugeedom, as well as its "partner" status, citizenship. Gaza is an anomalous space in that since 1948 it has not been the sovereign territory of

any state—a condition that has meant that its residents have not been citizens of any existing state. Egypt, which governed the territory until 1967, saw itself as a caretaker of a Palestinian space and never claimed sovereignty.<sup>4</sup> It is further distinguished by its demographics. The fact that refugees far outnumber the native inhabitants is only one of its unique features. Unlike many other refugee situations, in which refugees are “out of place” not only because they are away from home, but also because they have different nationalities, ethnicities, and/or material conditions from the native population, in Gaza the entire population is Palestinian.

Gaza’s transformation from a provincial district of Palestine under the British Mandate (1917–48)<sup>5</sup> to a new almost indefinable sort of territory (the Gaza Strip) also threw its population categories into confusion. During the British Mandate, Gaza City was a reasonably prosperous town, not Jerusalem or Jaffa, but a major trade port for the southern part of the country and the administrative capital of the region. In the course of the 1948 war, the approximately 80 thousand original inhabitants of the area were joined by nearly 250 thousand refugees. Whereas many Palestinian refugees went to neighboring countries like Lebanon, Syria, or Jordan, fleeing to Gaza or the West Bank constituted a temporal rather than geographic border crossing. It was after the fact, with the signing of armistice agreements, that a boundary line was marked between people’s home villages and their space of refuge. At the war’s end, the Egyptian army was in control of the small portion of the Gaza district that became the Gaza Strip; its borders were delimited in the 1949 armistice agreement between Egypt and Israel. The rest of the Gaza district, including the land of many native Gazans, came under Israeli control. To this day, the Gazan landscape remains dominated by refugee camps—there are eight major camps in the Strip—even as only half the refugees have ever lived in them.

Given the contraction of Gazan space, the enormous influx of people, and its isolation from its former hinterland, it is not surprising that the economy of the area was utterly devastated in 1948. There was almost no one in Gaza who was not in need of assistance in the aftermath of the war. And, yet, the aid regimes that were emerging at the same time—both the international refugee regime and the Palestine-specific assistance program—depended on making distinctions among people in terms that were patently inadequate to capture these conditions. Although identifying people as “refugees” (displaced and dispossessed) or “natives/citizens” (the “merely” dispossessed) did not say anything about their level of need, these were the terms that governed relief.

Beyond these distinctive features, the Gazan case illuminates the difficult decisions that are part of any humanitarian operation and indicates their long-lasting effects on the population. Some of these effects were evident to me when I was doing fieldwork

in Gaza in the late-1990s, particularly in the ongoing significance of “refugee” and “native” as categories of identification. I tried to explore strains in these relations in my conversations with people, with varying degrees of success.<sup>6</sup> Some people were reluctant to acknowledge any problem, insisting that “we received the refugees as brothers” or “all of us are Palestinians. There is no difference between a refugee and a citizen.” Others, however, were quite explicit about tensions. As one native Gazan commented: “When the boys of the camps were throwing stones (during the first intifada), they said that the boys of the city (i.e., nonrefugees) cover the stone with tissue before they throw it at the Israelis.” Even as Hanan wondered why refugees would judge harshly those who had aided them, her own view of refugees as “wretched” and from the “most backward class in Palestine” suggests a scorn that might explain some of the hostility.

It is important to note that, despite this claim to a preexisting difference, before 1948 these two groups did not exist as such. Palestinian society during the British Mandate was highly stratified, but these distinctions do not correspond with precision to the post-1948 categories “refugee” and “native.” Natives included both urbanites from Gaza City and villagers from places like Deir Belah and Jabalya. Refugees likewise came both from cities like Jaffa and small towns like Hammama and Yibna. Some were financially secure; others lived in more precarious conditions.<sup>7</sup> The largest majority among both groups was formerly dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods, whether working their own land or employed as farmworkers on others. It was the accidents of geography and war (and the subsequent humanitarian projects), rather than preexisting distinctions, that divided the population of the former Gaza District of Palestine into refugees and natives.<sup>8</sup>

As I have sought to better understand these distinctions among Palestinians in Gaza, it has become clear to me that they can not be explained simply by the difficulties of the nakba, or of life, in overcrowded Gaza but are also rooted in the early relief provided to Palestinian refugees, relief guided, albeit in a somewhat unusual manner, by the emerging post-WWII international humanitarian regime. Population distinctions have been central to the international regime and, as refugee law developed in the postwar era, citizenship was the normative condition against which the exceptional status of being a refugee was defined. To explore the emergence of these distinctions in Gaza, as well as their relation to the wider humanitarian endeavor, in this article I turn my attention to the first years after the massive Palestinian dispossession—the period before new legal and bureaucratic apparatuses were codified—and explore the first organized relief in Gaza, a project managed by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) from late 1948 to 1950 at the behest of the United Nations.

This liminal period, which was a crucial moment for both refugee law and Palestinians, provides an opportunity to examine how humanitarian practice, the relief projects that sought to provide assistance to those in need, participated in the development of distinguishing population categories.<sup>9</sup> It further shows how dependent this practice was on categorizations that were not always—and in the Gazan case not at all—adequate to the tasks of defining need. In this exploration, I make use of both archival records of this early relief work and ethnographic research I conducted in Gaza in 1998 and 1999. Both conversations held long after the fact and documents produced in the moment reflect the tremendous uncertainties and anxieties that accompanied this relief work.

Although neither AFSC volunteers nor the people they came to aid had the authority to determine humanitarian policy, their on-the-ground negotiations and interactions were crucial for shaping the refugee condition. Humanitarian practices were self-consciously narrow in their focus—intended to respond to immediate need, to avert full-blown crisis, rather than to define social policy—but their effects were often far reaching. The categorization of population for relief purposes, for instance, contributed to developments in political vocabulary and identification. Close investigation of the experiences of this period highlights the emergence not only of enduring distinctions within the Gazan population, but also of tentative enactments of political claims about rights, community, and citizenship that have had broad import for Palestinians.<sup>10</sup> In these enactments, the category of “refugee” proved to be important not only for managing relief, but also for the rearticulation of Palestinian political identity in the aftermath of dispossession.

### THE DEVELOPING POSTWAR REFUGEE REGIME

Palestinian exile occurred in a moment that witnessed a number of significant population displacements. Europe was still dealing with WWII displaced persons. Independence for India and Pakistan in 1947 was accompanied by one of the largest population movements in history. Fighting between nationalist and communist forces in China created significant refugee flows into Hong Kong. Although European refugees received the most attention, population instability was a global phenomenon, and potentially a global crisis. Hannah Arendt, writing at precisely this moment, believed that these conditions posed a fundamental challenge to the nation-state and to the idea of the “the Rights of Man.” These rights, she suggested, turned out to be so entangled in the rights of citizenship as to be “unenforceable—even in countries whose constitutions were based upon them—whenever people appeared who were no longer citizens of any sovereign state” (Arendt 1973:293). It was in part to contain the effects of this crisis, as well as to formalize mechanisms for providing assistance to these masses of people, that

postwar humanitarian apparatuses such as the 1951 International Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) were established.

In this development, beyond the identification of a “well-founded fear of persecution,” it was the departure from one’s home country that most defined refugee status.<sup>11</sup> As Michael Barnett argues in a study of the UNHCR, “Only a world of sovereign states that had categories of people called ‘citizens’ and were intent on regulating population flows could produce a legal category of ‘refugees’” (2001:251). Not only did the category “refugee” require its counterpart citizen to be a sensible account of loss, the elaboration of this category seemed to be a way to limit the dangers such people might pose to states. Limiting relief to people who had left their countries served “to limit [states’] obligations and honor their sovereignty, restricting the numbers that might ask for international assistance and prohibiting the international body from intruding on domestic affairs” (Barnett 2001:252).<sup>12</sup>

The years of the AFSC project in Gaza coincided with international efforts to develop a new general definition of a refugee. Before WWII, refugees—Armenian, Russian, and German (Jewish), for example—and the regimes designed to aid them had been defined by particular circumstances (Hathaway 1984; Skran 1995).<sup>13</sup> In its aftermath, efforts were made to provide a universal definition of a *refugee*, efforts that culminated in the 1951 Convention.<sup>14</sup> Despite the move from particular to general in refugee law, the Convention was far from universal. Faced with the threat of limitless obligations to accept displaced persons, the drafters developed clearly specified parameters for acquiring refugee status (persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group) and limited the Convention’s applicability to those who left their countries “as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951,” with individual signatories given the option of interpreting that clause to mean “events occurring in Europe” or “events occurring in Europe or elsewhere” (Takkenberg 1998:56).<sup>15</sup> It was not until the convention was amended in 1967 that temporal and geographic restrictions were removed.<sup>16</sup>

Although aid to Palestinians was in large part governed by this international refugee regime, it is important to note that Palestinians have an awkward place within it. After protracted discussions about the importance of acknowledging special UN responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem, as well as concerns about extending the convention beyond European populations, the 1951 Convention “temporarily” excluded Palestinian refugees.<sup>17</sup> Given the restrictions built into the convention, Palestinian exclusion does not appear so exceptional but, rather, was an experience they shared with other non-European refugee populations.<sup>18</sup> They did not come under the authority or protection of the UNHCR but, instead, received aid from UNRWA,

which was established in 1950. To the extent that Palestinians receive legal protection, and it is a very limited extent, this protection is derived from UN Resolution 194<sup>19</sup> and its demand for a resolution of the refugee condition.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, there is no legal definition of a Palestinian refugee, just the working definition formalized by UNRWA in 1952 to determine eligibility for relief. The definition states that “a Palestine refugee is a person whose normal residence was Palestine for a minimum of two years preceding the outbreak of the conflict in 1948 and who, as a result of this conflict, has lost both his home and his means of livelihood” (UNRWA 1955).<sup>21</sup> This definition of eligibility for relief does not, and was not intended to, cover all those who were displaced from their homes and who might qualify for return. It did not, for instance, include those persons who either left the area of UNRWA operations or who were not in need.<sup>22</sup> Rather, it was an instrumental definition, intended to assist UNRWA in responding to the enormous humanitarian crisis among displaced Palestinians. In the absence of anything else though, it has de facto served to define Palestinian refugee status. The longevity of what might seem like a stopgap measure is a common feature of the Palestinian experience.<sup>23</sup>

The Gazan instance thus illuminates a more general capacity of legal regimes to order conditions that fall outside their direct control. Despite all the ways Palestine has been rendered exceptional to the broader international refugee regime, the terms of this regime—with its emphasis on making clear distinctions between refugees and citizens—profoundly shaped the Palestinian experience. Gaza’s population categories have been derived from legal definitions that do not quite apply in this territory (international refugee conventions), shaped by institutions that do not have jurisdiction over it (UNHCR), and influenced by long absent political forms (the sovereign state). That these instruments are not exactly applicable has had important consequences for the ways they have affected Gaza, but it has not been a relation of simple exclusion. My focus here is precisely on these consequences—on the ways that Gazans came to see themselves in the terms used by humanitarian practitioners and, in turn, on the ways that these practitioners were guided not just by the concrete needs of the situation but also by the demands of an emerging arena of international humanitarian law.

### THE AFSC IN GAZA

In Gaza, the first organized relief program was run by the AFSC, which was commissioned by the United Nations. The AFSC was founded in 1917 and in its first years it sent conscientious objectors to Europe to provide assistance to WWI refugees.<sup>24</sup> After the war, the organization continued to provide relief in Europe (in Russia, Poland, and Serbia). In 1948, the AFSC was in Palestine to investigate the possibility of assisting in mediation efforts between Jews and Palestinians. When the

United Nations recognized that a major relief project was required, it established the UN Relief for Palestine Refugees (UNRPR) to coordinate relief in the various places where Palestinians had sought refuge. The UNRPR was not an operational agency but, rather, recruited other groups to distribute supplies the United Nations would provide. The AFSC was asked to staff that effort in Gaza (the International Committee of the Red Cross and League of Red Cross Societies were brought in for other areas).

When the UNRPR was established, policymakers presumed that the conflict, and the concomitant refugee crisis, would be resolved relatively quickly. The fallacy of this belief became clear in short order, as all efforts to negotiate either a refugee return or a fundamental resolution to the state of suspended war that existed in the region were failing. Realizing that a somewhat longer term UN intervention would be needed (although no one anticipated just how long) the General Assembly created UNRWA at the end of 1949. This new agency, it should be noted, was also intended to be temporary. The UN resolution that established it indicated that “constructive measures should be undertaken at an early date with a view to the termination of international assistance for relief.”<sup>25</sup> The extremely short mandates granted to UNRWA—first one year, it was later authorized for several years at a time—reflects this status. As the agency was first trying to get organized, it repeatedly asked the AFSC to extend its work in Gaza. The Quakers accepted the first request, but eventually grew so frustrated with the failure to solve the refugee problem that it refused any further extension.<sup>26</sup> In May 1950, UNRWA took over responsibility for refugee relief, although it did employ some of the personnel who had worked with these other organizations.

In the years that followed the AFSC project, relief projects became more expansive. Building from initial Quaker efforts, UNRWA established schools, workshops, medical clinics, and social service centers. After the end of the war, and particularly after the 1952 revolution in Egypt that brought Nasser to power, the Egyptian government began providing more aid to Palestinians.<sup>27</sup> The government first organized “mercy trains” that brought goods donated by Egyptians to Gaza and later developed a broad array of services—including some ration provision, schooling, housing programs, and employment opportunities—that helped improve conditions in Gaza for the entire population. Although Gazans sometimes critique Egyptian rule for an absence of political freedom, they almost universally praise these humanitarian efforts.<sup>28</sup>

When refugees first came to Gaza, though, conditions were dire. People sought shelter wherever they could find it—in schools, mosques, and houses, in caves dug into the sand, and in abandoned army barracks. Not all refugees were able to find even this shelter, however, and many slept under trees or in the open on the beach. As a November 1948 report to the AFSC noted about conditions in Gaza City: “During

my visit on Sept. 12 the refugees had already been in a very difficult position. Now their difficulties have trebled. Every house is crowded with refugees, but many are still forced to live under open air.”<sup>29</sup> What little resources they had when they left their houses dwindled quickly, and conditions became rapidly more desperate: it was not just shelter but food that people lacked. It was in these circumstances that the AFSC began its relief project. Refugees had mixed feelings about receiving aid. When I was doing fieldwork in Gaza in 1998 and 1999, I often talked with people about these first years after the nakba. People described the tremendous difficulties they faced in the immediate aftermath of dispossession. They talked, as well, about the various efforts to provide aid to refugees and the relationship between these refugees and Gaza’s natives inhabitants. Not surprisingly, these conversations revealed a complex set of attitudes about aid and responsibility, both international and local.

For people who had been self-sufficient during the British Mandate, needing help was a degrading experience. Da’ud Ahmed, a now retired civil servant who was a boy in 1948, recalled to me the consternation he felt when he first received food aid: “Someone put a piece of cheese in my pocket, sweets in the other pocket, and bread on my head. At that time, I felt myself as a strange beggar. I was 12-years old and I was crying. . . . The people there brought food to us like beggars.”<sup>30</sup> Even when the Quakers began to organize the delivery of food aid and the relationship of distribution was transformed from a personal to a “procedural” one, the experience was still humiliating. As Da’ud said, “Can you imagine how a man who lived in a great city such as Yaffa and then came to live in a tent and had nothing would feel? . . . It was humiliation and misery of the most horrible kind. . . . We lost everything and we had never imagined we would experience such conditions.” It was this experience of humiliation that for many people marked their transition from citizens to refugees.

The first attempts to provide relief to the people pouring into Gaza began even as the war was ongoing. Gazan refugees, for instance, remember Egyptian soldiers giving haphazard assistance to people as they fled, walking mostly, from their villages: “The army was throwing onions and soap while it drove by. And the warplanes were flying above us. We had neither food nor drink. We ate dried dates and guava but it was not enough.” Once people reached Gaza, the Egyptian army attempted to organize the camps and to distribute flour and other basic resources. With the war still in progress and with the army’s own resources constrained, this assistance was nowhere near sufficient. Although the Quakers had mixed views about how successful the army’s efforts had been, when they began their project they did make use of some of the methods employed by the Egyptians, such as organizing aid delivery by village groupings and working with village leaders to facilitate that delivery.<sup>31</sup>



When the United Nations first asked for help the AFSC had been a bit hesitant. Running a complicated and potentially long-term relief project was a bit beyond the expertise of the organization. Agreeing to the request would, one Quaker official worried, “strain our resources of personnel and administrative capacity.”<sup>32</sup> It would also put the Quakers in the limelight, a position with which the organization was not entirely comfortable. Despite these concerns, the gravity of the crisis in Gaza led the AFSC to feel that it could not say no to the request of the United Nations. As another Quaker put it: “I think everyone . . . felt that the job was functionally too big for us and perhaps spiritually dangerous but there was nobody prepared to say that we should not do it.”<sup>33</sup> When they agreed to take on the job, the organization was very concerned about the relation of this relief to efforts to find a political solution. Among its “nineteen points”—the conditions under which it accepted the task—is the statement: “We would not be prepared to undertake this minimum service of relief unless we could be assured that a solution to the vital problem of resettlement is being vigorously sought by UN, and all others vitally concerned.”<sup>34</sup> The Quakers were never satisfied with UN efforts in this regard and expressed frustration about it throughout their time in Gaza. Their worry that by providing relief they might enable the situation to continue unresolved indicates an acute awareness of the possible political effects of humanitarian intervention, although they were not in a position to foresee what all these effects might be.

AFSC descriptions of distribution procedures and life in the camps make clear just how tenuous people’s lives were in these early years after 1948. Even as people were given shelter in tents, the life of a refugee was one of considerable deprivation and fear. They relied on aid for almost everything they needed to survive—food (of which there was never enough), clothing, and healthcare, and such reliance produced tremendous insecurity.<sup>35</sup> Recounting difficulties in maintaining orderly distributions in Deir El Balah a report indicated: “More than once distributions have had to be discontinued because the crowd has been so unruly it was impossible to continue . . . efforts to tell them that everybody will get his share in turn break down in the face of just plain hunger and a recollection of past uncertainties.”<sup>36</sup> The uncertainties of refugee lives were not only about food security but also about their future. Reports quote refugee statements such as: “this is the matter, we live not, we only wait” and “all I want is my life again. No place is better than one’s own village.”<sup>37</sup> What refugees wanted was not simply relief but resolution.

Ration delivery—food, clothing, blankets—was the first, and remained the primary, part of the Quaker relief project in Gaza, but they also provided medical care and schooling and developed more ‘works’ oriented projects such as carpentry shops and weaving enterprises. Eligibility for receipt of these services was determined by

the AFSC's mandate from the United Nations to aid refugees, and only refugees.<sup>38</sup> That such a limitation was a problem was immediately apparent to Quaker workers in the field. They saw their purpose as providing for people's basic needs while they were living in a "gap" of noncitizenship, with the presumption that conditions would change and their rights would be restored. In Gaza it was not only refugees but also the native inhabitants of Gaza who were living in this condition. They were also suffering to the same extent as refugees, having lost their land and their livelihoods, even if not their homes.

The dramatic impact of refugees and of the aid given them on local conditions is made particularly clear in an economic report on the Strip produced in July 1949. The influence of aid money on the overall economy was tremendous. Outlining the money in circulation in Gaza, the report gives a figure from April 1948 through November 1949 of 1,500,000 £P—of which 820,000 £P was relief money. The next largest source of money for the economy—just to highlight how dire things were—was 507,000 £P being spent from savings. Wages in the area had dropped precipitously because of the influx of refugees. As the report concludes:

For everybody in the Gaza Strip except a small body of property owners, the immigration of the refugees was a calamity because wages have been driven down *below* the subsistence level by competition from refugees receiving rations. The people at the bottom of the income pyramid, in real danger of starvation, are at present not the refugees at all but resident workers who receive only the going wage and cannot qualify for Quaker rations.<sup>39</sup>

Given these conditions, the recollection of a Quaker worker of a group of Gazans who "didn't have enough food, except for the largesse they got from the refugees" seems entirely plausible.<sup>40</sup> At the very moment that the category of "refugee" was being developed and mobilized as a means of providing aid and protection to people in need, it proved in Gaza to be both difficult to maintain and in fact entirely inadequate as a means of determining such need. Because the Quakers' commission from the United Nations was to provide aid for refugees, much of the debate about how to deal with natives' needs turned around the question: "Who is a refugee?" Or, as seemed more a propos to the Gazan context: "Who is not a refugee?"

### WHO IS NOT A REFUGEE?

In the years since WWII a highly elaborated international refugee regime—consisting of law and practice, institutions and agencies—has come into being. This regime has been subject to considerable critique, by both practitioners (Hyndman 2000; Kennedy 2004; Terry 2002) and observers (Malkki 1995; Rieff 2002), in part

for its failure (or better said, refusal) to address the political dimensions of refugee crises. This question of politics is one of the endemic challenges of humanitarian relief and law. Its nonpolitical stance is often what makes humanitarianism possible—permitting access to populations in need of aid, convincing countries to sign on to refugee conventions—but it also gives humanitarianism a sometimes cruelly narrow focus, able to keep people alive but entirely incapable of changing the conditions that have put them at such great risk.

This stance has had important consequences, not only for the resolution of refugee crises but also for the consolidation of the figure and subject of the refugee (Daniel and Knudsen 1995; Malkki 1996). Refugees, it has been noted by many, seem the quintessential embodiment of what Agamben calls “bare life” (Agamben 1995, 1998; Pandolfi 2003): granted assistance to the extent, and only to the extent, that they appear as apolitical subjects. Although, as Miriam Ticktin argues, this “restricted humanity” (2006) also produces its own political forms (see also Fassin 2005). As humanitarianism has been reconfigured in the post–Cold War period, its relationship to state sovereignty has become more complicated (Redfield 2005). Proponents of the “new” humanitarianism, for instance, have claimed a right of intervention across these previously inviolate boundaries (Chandler 2001; Holzgrefe and Keohane 2003; Rieff 1999). Just as significantly, though, efforts to keep people from moving across borders—with the effect frequently of rendering them “internally displaced,” but not refugees—have also introduced new forms of humanitarian practice such as “preventative protection” and the creation of “safe havens” inside countries at war (Hyndman 2000:17–18).<sup>41</sup>

When the AFSC was working in Gaza, discussions about the new postwar refugee definition were underway, but it must be remembered that neither the general nor the Palestinian specific refugee definition had been codified. In the absence of a clear framework to define their work—whether universal (such as the 1951 convention would provide for other cases) or particular (such as the 1926 League of Nations Arrangements had for Armenian and Russian refugees)<sup>42</sup>—practitioners had to improvise. Faced with immense need and limited resources, relief workers had to develop their own mechanisms for managing delivery and determining eligibility, mechanisms that often went against their own view of their mission.<sup>43</sup>

While in the legal domain the distinction between the categories refugee and citizen may seem clear and sharp, for Quaker aid workers on the ground, it was not obvious who should count as a refugee. As one AFSC worker put it:

It is becoming increasingly difficult to make a legitimate distinction on the basis of food need as between the refugees and the inhabitants of the area. Since the area produces very little food apart from oranges and a few vegetables, and since the bulk of normal economic life in the area is becoming progressively more

stagnant, and the local food situation is progressively deteriorating . . . when refugees receive a relatively steady and adequate diet, while the local population sees its own diet progressively restricted, an important source of conflict is added.<sup>44</sup>

Based on these observations, AFSC officials concluded that “*all* Arabs with their homes in Palestine were destitute and proper subjects for public assistance. . . . The category “refugee” is not only difficult to apply, but is quite unjust.”<sup>45</sup> Reiterating this position in a July report to Philadelphia headquarters, the chief of mission stated: “We now feel the necessity of broadening our definition of the term refugee to include a considerable number of people who still live in their own houses but have been completely deprived of any source of livelihood due to the fact that their land is in the hands of the Jews.”<sup>46</sup>

As long as the United Nations did not allow them to expand their definition to include these dispossessed people, and it did not, the AFSC was constrained by what it viewed as an inadequate account of who qualified as a “proper subject” of assistance. This refusal to expand the eligibility for aid—which was in essence a refusal to do away with the categories refugee and citizen as a guiding principle of relief—was, I argue, fundamentally connected to the emerging humanitarian regime. To be sure, the United Nations had budget constraints and concerns about setting precedents that would make it difficult to contain its aid programs, but without an international refugee regime—with its respect for state sovereignty—that depended precisely on making a distinction between those who were at home and under the protection of their governments and those who were uprooted from their states, it may not have continued to “steadfastly [resist] persistent and persuasive efforts to have it become responsible for the care and feeding of citizens of the various countries who are merely needy or destitute as a result of the war in Palestine.”<sup>47</sup> In the domain of population distinctions, that is, relief to Palestinians seems to have been ordered by emergent legal regimes from which Palestinians were to be formally excluded.

Although the AFSC did not share the same outlook as the United Nations, because it was working under contract to this body it was compelled to operate within this framework. Despite the fact that one of its “nineteen points” was that it would work to “preserve life and health and provide shelter for those whose destitution arises from the present troubles, without any discrimination except that of human need,”<sup>48</sup> the organization was compelled precisely to discriminate based on “kind” not “need.” In fact, even as the AFSC pressed for a change at the level of UN policy, it was often a strict enforcer of the distinction in planning its own work. Decisions about what projects to undertake were made by category of person to be helped. That the AFSC

found itself acting in ways that often seemed to contradict its own principles further highlights the radiating effects of the emerging international refugee regime.

The need for a sanitation project in Jabalya, for example, provoked a typical sort of decision. The Quakers decided that because Jabalya was “an established village, it was not felt that it should be the particular responsibility of the Quakers to see this accomplished, nor should any funds come from [the United Nations]. Through some rather painful meetings with mukhtars, the District Officers [Egyptian officials], and a Quaker representative, money is being collected by the village to at least partially care for the situation.”<sup>49</sup> As the Quakers understood the limits of their intervention in the lives of natives, they could be involved in elaborating a sanitation plan, and in pressuring Gazans to undertake and fund this plan, but could not offer financial assistance themselves. As this case makes clear, then, even as natives were not included in the refugee service domain, they had their own complicated relations with refugee-service providers.<sup>50</sup>

The question of eligibility was not put to rest during the AFSC’s time in Gaza. Even when UNRWA took over, it reminded the larger UN body of the inadequacy of its aid. In 1955, the UNRWA director prepared a report for the General Assembly on “other claimants for relief,” which detailed the conditions of Gaza’s natives. The report noted that of 95,000 natives, 70,000 were registered with the Egyptian authorities as being in need of assistance, stating: “Nearly the whole population is therefore in need as result of the establishment of the demarcation line and of the impossibility of moving goods and persons across it legally” (UNRWA 1955:10). Despite this strong statement, the General Assembly did not extend the mandate.<sup>51</sup> UNRWA practice, therefore, was also bound by a policy that its own leadership ultimately found inadequate.

### **RIGHTS TO RELIEF**

As this section will explore, the sense of relief as a right became central to how Palestinian refugees understood their receipt of this aid. It was also crucial to humanitarian practice, which had to sort out eligibility in essentially these terms. Like other aspects of Palestinian refugee experience, though, relief was not exactly a codified legal right. Given these ambiguities, for service providers in Gaza, the process of defining who was a “proper subject of assistance,” and the difficulties therein, was only one step in a relief process that was fraught with difficulty, and moral quandaries, at almost every turn.<sup>52</sup> As suggested above, these quandaries were in part a consequence of Gaza’s particular location within a broader humanitarian context. Although Quaker relief workers were dissatisfied with the limitations of their mandate, the success of their relief project—for which they had only the limited resources provided for “refugees”—demanded that they enforce those limitations, that they carefully police



**FIGURE 1.** Ration cards were a central part of the AFSC relief distribution system. Eligibility for rations was determined by UN criteria that mandated that only “refugees” and not “natives” could receive UN aid. This distinction among the population has had enduring effects on political identity in Gaza. *Source:* AFSC Archives, 1948–50.

the boundaries of this category. Crucial to this policing was careful documentation and record management, as it was the registration of population, and the rations lists created from that registration, that gave particular persons “rights” to relief (see Figure 1).

Ration cards were central components of the distribution of supplies and their accuracy was perceived as vital.<sup>53</sup> Developing accurate refugee rolls was a problem that plagued the AFSC, and that remained a challenge for UNRWA for many years.<sup>54</sup> One significant problem was the persistence of fraud in the lists. This fraud was of

several sorts: the registration of native Gazans as refugees, the inflation of family size, the retention of the deceased on the lists, and the related multiple registration of births. As a Quaker report on the refugee camp in Maghazi noted in February 1949: “The death of a small child is easily concealed. . . . And no refugee is anxious to report a death in another’s family—he does not know how soon he will be anxious to conceal one in his own household.”<sup>55</sup> When UNRWA took over the relief project, it reported the same sort of practice: “To increase or to prevent decreases in their ration issue, they eagerly report births, sometimes by passing a new-born baby from family to family, and reluctantly report deaths, resorting often to surreptitious burial to avoid giving up a ration card” (UNRWA 1952:3).

Quaker volunteers were sympathetic to the pressures that might lead people to underreport deaths, but they nonetheless sought to discover the truth whenever possible. Former relief workers recall some of the methods they used. In an oral history conducted under the auspices of the AFSC archives, Paul Johnson explained that “at one point some brilliant character discovered that when someone died if you offered his family a winding sheet, a shroud, when he came in to collect the shroud you could work one number quickly.”<sup>56</sup> The pressures that the AFSC felt to have accurate lists—pressures that were directly connected to limited resources—compelled them to make use of control methods that raised difficult moral questions. Although Johnson insisted that “that isn’t trickery,” he did note that “there were people who were terribly upset and were so sympathetic with the refugees that it was difficult for them to admit the circumstances were forceful and something had to be done.”<sup>57</sup>

Although individual subterfuge may have elicited sympathy, the Quakers were more frustrated by fraud on the part of *mukhtars* (village leaders). Mukhtars had considerable responsibility for registering families, and Gazans remember how they sometimes registered people for money. Abu Hassan, a retired school principal, told me that a mukhtar “used to tell the family of 7 members that he would register them as 8 if they gave him 7 pounds, or he would make them 9 for 10 pounds. . . . Some native Gazans registered their names as refugees by giving the mukhtar something. . . . Some of them receive rations from UNRWA until today.” Quakers in the field noted this same practice. As one commented: “They [mukhtars] will sell their signatures on virtually every occasion, shaking the refugees down if a complaint is to be submitted with their confirmation, if the mukhtar is to confirm the membership of a certain family in his village, confirming a certain number of children, etc, etc. What is sold for truth can equally be sold for falsehood, and that is frequently the practice it appears.”<sup>58</sup> Through this process of sorting out the “honest” from the “dishonest,” what came to identify a person as deserving of assistance was whether that person was in a category eligible for relief. One effect of these efforts, then, was that natives who made their ways

onto the relief lists came to appear as the “undeserving poor,” a judgment that seems divorced from the Quaker awareness that these people were in as much genuine need as refugees.

As time went on, factors other than immediate need contributed to reluctance to be removed from the refugee rolls. Palestinians quickly came to see this aid, not as charity, but as a right: a reflection of international responsibility for their conditions. Quakers noted this sense of entitlement right from the beginning, and Gazans I knew certainly felt it. As a letter to AFSC headquarters in Philadelphia from the Gaza unit put it:

Since it is very difficult for refugees here to communicate with the outside world, we feel we have an obligation to convey what we can of their opinions and thinking at the present time. They feel strongly that the United Nations are responsible for their plight, and therefore have the total responsibility to feed, house, clothe, and repatriate them. . . . Accordingly the relief we bring them appears to them to be their right, and in no way an act of humanitarian charity on the part of the United Nations.<sup>59</sup>

Relief services came to serve as “evidence” both of dispossession and of international responsibility for it. It is in part for this reason that even as time passed and some refugees began to earn income and become self-sufficient in the eyes of UNRWA, people remained reluctant to be removed from the rolls. As the 1956 report noted: “The Agency’s ration card was regarded by refugees as their only evidence of refugee status” (UNRWA 1956:3). Receiving aid seemed the only way to formally claim dispossession and, perhaps, even to claim the right to Palestine.

Palestinians were not wrong to see significance in their relief status. Being defined as a refugee not only gave a person access to a variety of services from which those whose losses were different were excluded, it also offered a recognition of this loss itself, which natives were denied. Given the lack of a legal definition of a Palestinian refugee—one that could guarantee, or at least confirm, their rights—it was humanitarian relief through which loss was recognized. Even as Quakers and UNRWA officials documented the tremendous need among natives, it was only refugees whose dispossession was given international standing by their work (though given the total lack of resolution such standing has proven to be of limited value).

However sensible local efforts to remain on the rolls may have been, the AFSC and then UNRWA were under tremendous pressure to bring the numbers down. In October 1949, the United Nations asked for an immediate reduction of the lists by 20,000 names. This demand further highlighted for the Quakers one of the difficulties inherent in their work—how to balance between the need for efficient and effective



aid delivery and the importance of providing that aid in the Quaker way—a way that emphasized individual relations between aid provider and recipient. To try and reduce the rolls in this Quaker way “through careful individual investigation of every case”<sup>60</sup> would take years—and would mean in the meantime that new “legitimate” names could not be added to the lists. To reduce the rolls in an efficient manner required both making use of informants to identify false names and withholding food to villages whose mukhtars were recalcitrant about correcting the lists.<sup>61</sup> Some mukhtars were jailed by Egyptian authorities until they could be compelled to cooperate. Many of the Quakers working in Gaza felt quite strongly that “using food as a weapon” in this way was entirely contrary to Quaker principles.<sup>62</sup> For these people, the very real need for more accurate accounting created an equally real crisis of conscience:

Should we, as Friends, be asked to continue in this programme when we feel we are compromising Quaker principles? On the other hand, the Service Committee has taken on this obligation to the United Nations, to feed these masses of people, and we as individuals have come as AFSC representatives. Therefore, though we cannot reach the individual, should we not carry out to the best of our ability this relief programme, with whatever tools we are given, for as long as the need still exists?<sup>63</sup>

This was not a conflict that could be satisfactorily resolved. Unable to walk away from the crisis, the Quakers had to proceed in an un-Quaker manner.

The staff report on the successful reduction of rations recipients to around 210,000 from 245,000 reflected this uneasy method. Commenting on the withholding of rations, the report noted: “In using such measures it was recognized that honest refugees were made to suffer along with the dishonest ones.” Reflecting on the use of informants, it stated: “While the AFSC worker attempted to insure himself that real refugees were not removed from the lists, this undoubtedly happened in some instances where time and staff did not permit adequate investigation.” Despite these problems, the report concluded: “the above mass methods of reducing lists were necessary, though undesirable from many points of view.”<sup>64</sup> This process was troubling to AFSC volunteers, and highlighted persistent difficulties in being both Quaker and a relief worker. For the population of Gaza, it further contributed to tensions among the different parts of that population.

### **PEOPLE IN RELIEF: TENSION, CONFLICT, COOPERATION**

Although humanitarian work needed to keep different sections of the Gazan population distinct, conditions on the ground had sometimes contradictory effects on such relations. Refugees sometimes came to the aid of natives by giving them (or

selling them) some of their rations. As one person told me, “refugees lived on rations” and natives “shared the rations of refugees who lived with them.” Natives opened their houses (or rented them) to refugees, and helped them get settled as best they could. As one woman remembered: “All women participated in receiving refugees and in helping them by putting them in schools, mosques, and empty places—until we had the Quaker organization.”<sup>65</sup> A refugee echoed this sentiment, saying: “when we came here, those from Gaza hosted and helped us as much as they could.” These memories of mutual assistance are matched by other memories of a more tense reception. Im Amir, a refugee from Yibna, remembered moving around a great deal within Gaza searching for a place to stay: “The people of Gaza did not tolerate us, and kicked us out. . . . They wanted money for renting houses, and we had no money.” These different memories of relations between refugees and natives are certainly colored by the experience of 50 years together in Gaza, but they also reflect the complexity of social relations at the time.<sup>66</sup>

AFSC volunteers commented frequently on both the assistance provided by the local population and the burden that the influx of refugees necessarily represented. As I noted above, the fact that refugees receiving rations had a diet that was increasingly better than that of natives created an “important source of conflict” between the groups. That refugees were “naturally resented”<sup>67</sup> by natives is noted throughout the archival record, although so is the fact that Gazans extended themselves to assist these refugees when possible. The difficult conditions in Gaza both demanded and stretched to the breaking point existing practices of mutual aid, frequently thought of in terms of *zakat* (charity).<sup>68</sup> According to a report on conditions in the Gaza City area: “There has been cooperation, decent in spirit but limited by necessity, on the part of local officials and plain citizens. A woman’s group, under the direction of the mayor’s wife . . . has furnished volunteers.” The same report also noted: “Besides their own great and everpressing misery, the refugees are creating problems, both current and future, for the permanent population.”<sup>69</sup> Among these problems was the fact that “lack of fuel has driven refugees to denuding the land of every burnable thing, especially trees and shrubs.”<sup>70</sup> In an effort to stop or at least slow down this destruction, Gazans sometimes resorted to withholding what assistance they had been giving refugees: “This drove a nearby landowner to shut off camp water taps until refugees promised not to cut anymore from his trees.”

Even as AFSC officials worried about the impact of refugees on natives, they also worried about the negative effects of being a refugee on refugees themselves. Reports from the field regularly commented on the low morale in Gaza: “As the refugees in the Gaza strip entered a second winter of miserable living conditions with no relief in sight, the deterioration of morale, evidenced by an increased feeling of

discouragement and disillusionment, has continued.”<sup>71</sup> These worries continued under UNRWA: “A refugee who has lost, or has never acquired, the habit of self-reliance and self-supporting work will be a useless burden on the community, whether he is later to be repatriated or resettled” (UNRWA 1956:6). By the later years of the administration, the immediate threat of starvation or exposure was much diminished, but the threat of idleness remained: “One of the tragic aspects of the life of a refugee is that he often has nothing to do. This is true of many Palestinian refugees and is particularly true in the Gaza strip, where 300,000 people are concentrated in a small area of largely unproductive desert land. . . . Although a man may not be aware of it, the debilitating effects of ten years without regular work is considerable” (UNRWA 1958:19).<sup>72</sup>

Although unemployment was also high among native Gazans, they saw themselves as at lesser risk for moral deterioration than refugees who lived on rations. As Salim Rashid, a native Gazan, said to me: “From my point of view, and I say it to everybody, it would have been better if there was no agency. Prophet Mohammed said ‘the high hand is better than the low hand.’ What does this mean? It means that the one who gives is better than the one who takes.”<sup>73</sup> Another Gazan contrasted the dignity of Palestinians before 1948 with their conditions after receiving UNRWA aid: “After UNRWA started to distribute rations, the Palestinian started to take; he started begging. And the morals were destroyed.” As much as an expression of concern, these comments have to be understood as part of a discourse of differentiation, wherein Gazans sought to distinguish themselves from refugees.

This kind of discourse was by no means one sided. If natives thought refugees might be morally deficient, refugees often pointed to their educational and professional successes to suggest that they might be “better” than Gazans. As one refugee remarked to me: “The Gazans mocked us until we became educated and proved that we the refugees are better than the Gazans in education and craftsmanship.”<sup>74</sup> As the Quakers monitored their school program, they noted with some surprise that refugee children sometimes outperformed Gazans. In one school in which both groups were in classes together, “the refugee boys in the regular classes have higher average records than do the local boys, and the high ranking student in the four secondary grades is a refugee.”<sup>75</sup> As educational opportunities in Gaza expanded, mostly dramatically under Nasser, the opportunities for refugees to improve their conditions also increased. As one Gazan native put it: “In my house I have water and electricity, but he is living in a shack, so he says to himself ‘why don’t I go to Saudi Arabia and earn money?’ Of course he studied and worked. They appreciated education more than we did.”<sup>76</sup> As people struggled, both for survival and for their future, they quite understandably sought ways of improving their positions. Given the difficulties in affecting either the political

conditions or the service environment in which they lived, these efforts were often directed against people who were as vulnerable as themselves. As the examples of refugees sharing food with Gazans and Gazans housing refugees highlights, though, these conditions also provided new grounds for cooperation.

As the complicated relations between refugees and natives suggest, an outcome of the limited UN relief mandate was not only that it did not encompass all “proper subjects” for aid, but also that it helped produce and sustain new sociological and regulatory categories within the population, which—especially with time—acquired significant symbolic charge. The “natural” resentment of refugees by natives that the Quakers noted was, at least in part, produced by their own practices. Quakers clearly felt that the distinctions they were forced to make among the population were unfair—unhumanitarian in their view. Given how overwhelming conditions on the ground were, though, it is not surprising that they were more cognizant of the ways that humanitarian work might impede political resolution than of the ways its distinctions helped produce political identifications. As the following section explores, the social resentments, cooperation, and contestations that emerged from the intersection of humanitarian relief and difficult conditions also proved important for the elaboration of political values and modes of civic identification.

### WHAT IS A CITIZEN?

One of humanitarianism’s significant consequences in Gaza—with the division of the population along the lines of refugees and natives—was the emergence of new claims about rights and articulations of community values. Indeed, if for policymakers at the time, “the chief factor in the determination of the concept of a refugee in the proper sense of the term [was] citizenship,”<sup>77</sup> it might equally be said that for Gazans, and Palestinians more generally, a key factor in the concept of a “citizen” came to be refugeedom. What I explore here is less the legal status of Palestinian citizenship or its formulation by organized political movements, and more the life of this concept among ordinary people living in extraordinary circumstances. I want to suggest that familiar ideas about Palestinian citizenship have roots not only in the actions of political movements and articulations of intellectuals but also in people’s responses to conditions of displacement and relief. Indeed, humanitarianism provides a lens through which one can see enactments of still inchoate ideas. Although these early years after the nakba have often been seen (by Palestinians and others) as a moment in-between politics (a time of mourning and anguish over the loss of Palestine, but before the capacity to organize against this loss had been regained), investigation of this period in Gaza reveals tentative articulations of ideas that would later prove important for Palestinian politics. Further, humanitarianism—with refugee and citizen its key

terms—helped ensure that the language of citizenship remained part of Palestinian vocabulary, even in this difficult time.

As difficult as codifying refugee status proved to be in Gaza, though, defining *citizenship* has been almost more challenging. Since the end of the British Mandate—and the loss of the Palestinian citizenship that this state had conferred—the category of a “Palestinian citizen” has had no legal standing.<sup>78</sup> There have been, to be sure, some efforts in this direction. The first, in the immediate aftermath of 1948, was the never really functional establishment of the All-Palestine Government, which declared Palestine an independent country (Shlaim 1990).<sup>79</sup> In the latter years of the Egyptian Administration, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was founded to serve as a representative for the Palestinian people, and given nominal (although not actual) authority in Gaza.<sup>80</sup> In recent years, the creation of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) as part of the Oslo Accords seemed at one point to be a step toward actual Palestinian independence and legal citizenship. As conditions in the territories become worse, however, and the PNA ever less viable as an entity, it is difficult to imagine when and how this will happen.

Given the continued absence of a Palestinian state and the deep uncertainty about the political future of Palestinian territories and population, Palestinian citizenship necessarily remains a changing and contested category. Looking at Cambodian refugees in the United States, Aihwa Ong argues that we should consider citizenship not only as a “bundle of rights—a legal condition” (2003:79) but as a “social process of mediated production of values concerning freedom, autonomy, and security” (2003:xvii).<sup>81</sup> From this perspective, citizenship has as much to do with the enactment and management of social relations as with codified relations with the state.<sup>82</sup> This suggestion is very helpful for considering Palestine’s uncertain condition, in which policies of the various countries in which Palestinian refugees have lived (Kassim 2000; Massad 2001), the emergence of independent Palestinian political movements (Sayigh 1997; Schulz and Hammer 2003), the daily experience of life under Israeli occupation (Jean-Klein 2001; Tamari 1991), and, more recently, the establishment of statelike institutions in Palestinian territories (Jad et al. 2000; Milton-Edwards 2000) have all contributed to ideas about Palestinian citizenship.

Palestinian political vocabulary has, over the years, included a variety of key terms—terms that have, in turn, ascribed prominence at the forefront of the struggle to different segments of the Palestinian population. Given that much of the population is in exile, it is not surprising that geographic location has been of considerable importance in this dynamic. Indeed, the distinction of inside and outside has mattered a great deal, although what particular territory is called “inside” has changed over time. Before 1967 it referred to the part of Palestine that had become Israel; after, it

expanded to include the West Bank and Gaza. To be inside has also been differently valued, first, as Edward Said noted, “someone you might easily be suspicious of [for living with Israel]” and later “privileged [as] ‘already there’ ” (1985:51). At times there have been political contestations across this divide—as Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza who led the first intifada resented the takeover of political leadership by PLO “returnees” after Oslo; or as refugees living outside objected to the PNA seeming to ignore their demand to return home.<sup>83</sup> In the aftermath of 1948, Gaza remained “inside” in important ways: it was after all part of the territory of Palestine. At the same time, the majority of its new population was now “outside” their proper place in this territory. This mismatch in place and population highlights both the loss of the “stability of geography” (Said 1985:19) that has been so central to the Palestinian experience and the multiplicity of forces at work in shaping political valuations.

In the absence of a state, to be a Palestinian citizen has meant to be a member in the national community—a community defined as existing in struggle.<sup>84</sup> What constitutes proper participation in this struggle—and what therefore are seen as the values of citizenship—has, not surprisingly, been contested.<sup>85</sup> The question of which Palestinians, located where, are best placed to speak for Palestine has also been connected to challenges about how they should speak and act—what sorts of claims should be made, what methods adopted for achieving their aims. Political values like *sumud* (steadfastness), armed struggle (exemplified by the *fiḍa’iyyin*), nonviolent resistance (a significant tactic of the first intifada), and more recently *martyrdom* (a term applied to both suicide bombers and civilians killed by Israel), have each played an important role in Palestinian politics. I do not trace this long and complex history here but, rather, consider the first enactments of post-nakba citizenship values, paying particular attention to the role of humanitarianism, and humanitarian distinctions, in this process. In identifying people as natives or refugees—as being “of” or “out of” place—Quaker relief practices unwittingly participated in locating people in an emerging political geography and in shaping new political values connected to this geography.

In Gaza the challenge was not only to determine what citizenship could be, but who should be considered a citizen. In the categorical terms of humanitarianism, Gaza’s citizens were those who were excluded from the category of refugee, and Gaza’s natives were indeed referred to—by both Quakers and refugees—as citizens (*muwataniin*). Although to some degree this label was a default term, it did also invoke a particular notion of membership, not principally in a nation-state, but in a more local, civic space. This sense of citizenship indexed a particular kind of belonging to which not everyone could lay claim. When native Gazans were called “citizens” (by themselves, refugees, or Quakers), their different investment in the locality and its civic life was

acknowledged. This appellation, furthermore, referenced a corresponding set of civic obligations—such as the obligation to assist the refugees coming into the area.

Humanitarian practice, though, also contributed to ideas about citizenship that included the entire population. At the national level, everyone in Gaza was appropriately included in the category of a potential Palestinian citizen, and in this arena refugees sometimes occupied a privileged location. Indeed, as important as was civic citizenship, the idea of national citizenship remained paramount, in both the humanitarian field and in Gazan sensibilities. Rogers Brubaker notes that: “Debates about citizenship, in the age of the nation-state, are debates about nationhood—about what it means, and what it ought to mean, to belong to a nation-state” (1998:132).<sup>86</sup> And, yet, being a native or a refugee—with distinct statuses and relations to the place of Gaza—did have considerable impact on how people fit in this category. Refugees and nonrefugees alike shared a strong ongoing attachment to Palestine. Refugees were focused on their desire to return to their homes. Gazan natives were equally interested in the return of their lost lands, but the fact of living in their houses did make a difference. In moving to the national level, local community is not entirely left behind, however. Claims about national membership—about participation in a political community—are often enacted through struggles over local belonging. In asserting their status as Palestinian citizens, refugees effectively claimed a place in Gaza’s social and political landscape.

If we think about citizenship as an expression of rights and obligations, the ways that these attributes did not easily map onto the population become immediately clear. To understand Gazan struggles over Palestinian citizenship, it is important to remember that in the Palestinian context the idea of “citizenship” represented a claim to the rights and obligations that are generally associated with this term, rather than a condition of formally having such rights.<sup>87</sup> Hannah Arendt, exploring the challenge that refugees and stateless persons posed to the nation-state with its citizen-subject, argued that even more fundamental than the particular rights of citizenship is the “right to have rights,” to have “a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective” (1973:296).

In the Gazan context it was to refugees that this right most directly applied. As we have seen, refugees had the “right” to relief, to the benefits of UNRWA services—and to the political claims that (against the agency’s own wishes) derived from that status. Gaza’s natives had no such access. Natives, who were no longer citizens but who did not qualify for refugee status, seem to lie outside the domain of any category that might offer them such protection. One Gazan, describing their anomalous condition, told me that when natives lost their land “they became neither citizens nor refugees.” This political aspect of native exclusion from the “humanitarian space”<sup>88</sup>—leaving them

without a place from which to claim rights—was ultimately more significant than their lack of access to UN rations.<sup>89</sup> It was in part, although not only, because of the significance of refugee status in making rights claims that the figure of the refugee has come to occupy such a large role in the Palestinian political imaginary.

Although refugees had more immediate access to “rights,” both natives and refugees could be said to have national obligations. Not surprisingly, this was a terrain on which conflict between these groups was sometimes enacted. In the first years after 1948, Palestinian political culture was highly fragmented and conceptualizations of citizenship were still inchoate. As we have seen, existing ethical and social values were equally in disarray. In the difficult conditions in which Palestinians were living, values that would later be held up as mechanisms for unifying the population in struggle were often means through which people distinguished themselves from each other. The tentative articulations of citizenship that emerged in Gaza in this period were very much shaped by conflicts and conditions on the ground, which as we have seen were themselves shaped by the relief practices that dominated life in Gaza at that point.

Humanitarian distinctions came to have political significance within the Palestinian community, as people sought to claim a space for themselves in the post-nakba landscape. Having been dispossessed of much of their property, with the local economy entirely disrupted, native Gazans had little to cling to as a means of preserving their dignity. That they remained in their homes was one of the few things that distinguished them from the masses of people who had poured into Gaza. Among these Gazans, there were incipient expressions of ideas that would later become an explicit facet of Palestinian citizenship—the notion of steadfastness (*sumud*), the value of staying put. This was not a formal articulation of *sumud*—a term elaborated after 1967 to describe Palestinians living under Israeli rule—but, rather, an ad hoc response to difficult circumstances.<sup>90</sup> The early stirrings of this value that were evident in Gaza immediately after 1948 suggest that even before the language of *sumud* entered the Palestinian vocabulary, staying put was identified as an obligation of citizenship.<sup>91</sup> In Gaza, these inchoate ideas were in part a means through which natives sought to differentiate themselves from, and claim superiority to, refugees. At the same time—also foreshadowing later developments in the politics of *sumud*, when it came to be criticized as an excuse for bourgeois inaction (Tamari 1991)—refugees challenged these claims.

Refugees I knew in Gaza described how natives sometimes accused them of being traitors for having left their land and used the term refugee as an insult, “saying ‘you refugee, you left your village.’” Refugees responded with their own accusations. As Abu Khalil, a refugee living in Rafah camp, told me:



They used to say that we sold our land and came to ruin theirs. They accused us of being spies. But they are the ones who sold the land. . . . They used to say to the donkey, “your face is like the refugee’s.” The relation was good in the first weeks. We were guests. They thought that we would stay for a limited short period, but when they realized the situation, tension increased and they started differentiating between a citizen [*muwatan*] and a refugee [*muhajir*].”

If natives sometimes argued that refugees had been “bad” citizens by leaving their homes, the counterclaim in Abu Khalil’s remark was that staying put had no value if it was not accompanied by “good” politics.<sup>92</sup> Given a context in which their claims to fulfilling the obligations of citizenship had to rest on action, it is not surprising that, in the years since 1948, Gaza’s refugees have developed a reputation for political activism and that many significant Palestinian political movements have emerged from Gaza.<sup>93</sup> Just as the *sumud* of the 1970s and early 1980s was later overshadowed by active resistance in the *intifada* (1987–93), these accusations and counteraccusations constitute competing claims not only about who counted as a good Palestinian citizen but also what the values of that citizenship should be. In contrast to later discussions among the Palestinian leadership about these ideas, these early contestations in Gaza were embedded more in struggles for survival than in political ideologies.

Even as natives and refugees sometimes challenged each other across the difference of displacement, other, in some ways competing, ideas about citizenship also began to play out. In this process, the figure of the refugee came in many ways to be seen as the embodiment of Palestinian possibility. The subject who would be a citizen of the future Palestinian state has often been conceived of in the present as a refugee. Fawaz Turki argues that it was the transformation of the refugee from an “oppressed wanderer”—“who wander around the refugee camps, the Arab capitals and around the world, disinherited of homeland and an ability to share their humanity with others” (1974:7)—to a fighter (*fida’i*) that enabled the exile to be a political figure. The establishment of *fida’iyyin* was indeed important, but, as I have explored here, experiences in Gaza in the early years after the *nakba* suggest both that the self-consciously nonpolitical practice of humanitarianism played a role in this development and that the refugee should not be seen as simply a prepolitical figure of exile.

The emergence of the figure of the refugee as crucial to the idea of the citizen was directly connected to the details of humanitarian practice. It was in part through these practices that the “worn dog-eared Palestine passport issued in British Mandate days by a government that no longer legally exists” (UNRWA 1952:3) was supplanted as “evidence of nationality” by the ration card, a document that became, UNRWA officials commented, “so much a part of the life and economy of refugees that it is not

unusual for it to be used as a tangible asset upon the strength of which substantial sums can be borrowed” (UNRWA 1954:15). If being recognized as a refugee was also what recognized people as dispossessed, it is not surprising that refugee identification—as complicated as it was—would be politically important.

As Quakers noted throughout the course of their relief project, even in these “years of hunger” (Abu Naml 1979) Gazan refugees expressed themselves politically (even if they had little opportunity to act effectively on this expression). We have seen that they identified relief as a right, challenging their relegation to the humanitarian corner. As one Quaker reported back from an exploratory trip to Gaza: “The refugee’s role is not always passive. As we were driving through one swarm of refugees in the town of Khan Yunis in our UN Observer, white-flagged jeep our Arab guide heard one of the tattered old ladies in the crowd say, ‘We don’t want your flag; let your pockets speak.’”<sup>94</sup> Further, as organized political life began to reemerge, and Gazans pressed the Egyptians for an opportunity to take up the fight for their homes, refugees occupied an important place. When refugees in Gaza did become *fida’iyyin*, their knowledge of their home villages acquired a tactical significance in the national struggle as people were often sent on missions to their former homes.<sup>95</sup> Although this participation in struggle did not end tension between natives and refugees—tension which, after all, was in part rooted in humanitarian practice—it did underscore how important refugeedom was to emerging practices of Palestinian citizenship.

The challenges of citizenship in Gaza were evident in the travel documents that the Egyptian Administration eventually and reluctantly issued for Gazans. These papers were necessary for international travel because their British Mandate-era passports were no longer valid and no non-Arab country had ever recognized the documents issued by the All-Palestine Government. To counteract the possibility that these Egyptian documents (even if they were not passports) might further the legal dissolution of Palestinian national identity, they identified the bearer as a Palestinian national, and a refugee.<sup>96</sup> Not surprisingly, some native Gazans objected to this demand that they travel as refugees. It was a stigma they did not want, especially as they did not receive the benefits of this status. Despite these objections, the demand that citizenship documents mark a collective nationality mandated this shared identity.<sup>97</sup> In the Gazan context, the citizen had also to be a refugee, with all the contradictions that implies.<sup>98</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Although humanitarian principles—with their commitment to assist people in need without regard for political distinctions—seem at odds with the kinds of value judgments that are inherent to citizenship discourses, the Palestinian experience highlights how interconnected they can be. In Gaza the effects of humanitarianism were

complicated, at once contributing to tensions among the population and affecting the development of a political vocabulary that has been important for everyone. Even as considerable current debate about humanitarianism centers on the question of how engaged with politics this enterprise should seek to be—whether or not, for instance, humanitarianism should “aspire to restructure underlying social relations” (Barnett 2005:724)—the history I have explored here suggests that it may be impossible for humanitarianism to avoid such broad effects. Humanitarian operations are frequently compelled to make distinctions among people that seem antithetical to their core principles, with significant and often long-term implications for those populations. Further, however narrowly these organizations may seek to focus their interventions, humanitarian practice—the work of providing for people’s needs—inevitably impacts the wider social order.

For Palestinians in the aftermath of displacement, what it meant—and would mean—to be a citizen or a refugee (or even a native) was clearly in flux. The requirements of relief ensured that these would be the dominant categories through which international organizations and workers viewed the population of Gaza. Conditions on the ground, including those produced by these organizations, meant that these distinctions were also meaningful for the population itself. The complexity of these categories in Gaza is also a reminder of the often awkward relation between legal regimes and relief projects—between human rights and humanitarianism. The development of a regime of refugee protection has required the careful and clear delineation of who is a refugee. Humanitarian aid projects are then governed by these categories which may not—and in Gaza clearly did not—reflect either conditions of need or loss on the ground. The inadequacy of these distinctions to the tasks they seek to fulfill is clear, as is their effectiveness in shaping people’s lives in sometimes unexpected ways.<sup>99</sup> The difficult political, social, and economic conditions in which Palestinians have lived for more than 50 years has ensured that these categories have continued to be fraught.

This exploration of early humanitarian efforts in Gaza further shows how multivalent the category of refugee can be. In the Palestinian case, even as it does not capture the full extent of Palestinian loss, and is thus not a fully adequate category through which to make political claims, it has also offered the only formal recognition of this loss, and therefore has in practice been tremendously important for Palestinian politics and for claims made to the “international community” for Palestinian rights.<sup>100</sup> Within the Palestinian community, it is not only the large percentage of the population who are refugees but also the tremendous importance that the idea of refugeedom has played in Palestinian political vocabulary that has made the question of how, now, to “solve” the refugee problem so vexed.<sup>101</sup> That it has not been so easy to turn “refugees

into citizens” (as one book Arzt 1997) that proposed a regional resettlement plan was entitled), is a result not just of what is often called Palestinian “intransigence” but also of the complex role the “refugee” has played in Palestinian experience.

Although for Palestinians the first claim embedded in the refugee category was for a right to go home, they have never, in fact, been permitted to return. This history has made the Palestinian case a paradigmatic instance of displacement and refugeedom. While in the early postwar period the distinction between refugee and citizen was paramount in international humanitarianism (and remains important), new problems and henceforth new mechanisms of distinguishing among people in need have now emerged. Since the 1990s, the category of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) has become a subject of considerable debate and concern. (Cohen 2006; Hyndman 2000). Not having crossed a border, such persons did not traditionally fit in the UNHCR mandate and they did not constitute a formal category. Decisions to extend UNHCR aid to two groups of such people—in Yugoslavia and northern Iraq—while not ending debate about jurisdiction, ensured that this category would henceforth have a place in the humanitarian field (Barnett 2001; Phoung 2005). The complex and radiating effects of inclusion in, and exclusion from, particular regimes and categories evident in the Palestinian instance provides a lens through which to consider current trends in refugee recognition.

Even as new categories of need are being acknowledged, we are also witnessing greater restrictions on qualifying for protections (one effect of aiding people as IDPs can, in fact, be to keep them from the protections provided by refugee status). The September 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington seem to have accelerated a process that was already underway to further restrict entrance into Europe and the United States (Hyndman 2005). This environment affects not only refugee status but also citizenship. As codified by both the 1996 immigration reforms and the Patriot Act, people living in the United States who lack formal citizenship are being more firmly excluded from the benefits of substantive citizenship. Although this lack of formal legal protection can leave people in very precarious positions, able to rely only on compassion for assistance (Ticktin 2006), the Palestinian case indicates that, sometimes at least, people may be able to use such precarious conditions as a starting point for more expansive claims.<sup>102</sup> Not only refugees but also other kinds of victims as well have claimed relief (of various kinds) as a right and used that claim to make broader demands for recognition (Fortun 2001; Ong 2003; Petryna 2002).

The Palestinian instance, with its unique apparatuses and institutions, thus provides important insight into more general understandings of refugeedom and citizenship. This case illuminates—not a space apart from politics—but a liminal state of political formation. Just as population categories were operative, although

not codified, political practice was evident, although tenuous. Even as the absence of citizenship as a “legal condition” has had deleterious and often devastating impact on the lives of Gazans (and all Palestinians), the inchoate ideas about citizenship I have explored here have also been important in forging community and shaping political action. Further, even as legal and practical definitions of refugees in humanitarianism have often sought to excise a discussion of rights, and of justice, from this domain, Palestinian experience illuminates the ways that the idea of the refugee can also operate politically (if not always effectively). This quintessential category of a supposedly apolitical humanitarianism appears, on close inspection, to have been crucial to the re-formation of Palestinian political identity in the wake of displacement.<sup>103</sup>

### ABSTRACT

*In this article, I explore the intersection of humanitarian practice and refugee law in shaping categories of “refugee” and “citizen” in Gaza in the first years after 1948. I examine how humanitarian practice produced enduring distinctions within the Gazan population and provided a space in which ideas about Palestinian citizenship began to take shape. A key argument is that humanitarianism, despite commitments to political neutrality, often has profound and enduring political effects. In this case, humanitarian distinctions contributed to making the “refugee” a central figure in the Palestinian political landscape. I also consider how humanitarianism in Palestine was guided by the larger, emerging postwar refugee regime, even as Palestinians were formally excluded from some of its mechanisms.*

**Keywords:** refugees, citizenship, humanitarianism, law, Palestine

### NOTES

*Acknowledgments.* Funding for research included in this article was provided by the Social Science Research Council, Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the Council for American Overseas Research Centers, and the Palestinian American Research Center; I am grateful to all these organizations for their support. I would also like to thank Jack Sutters at the American Friends Service Committee Archives for his assistance. Earlier versions of this article were presented at: Columbia University, University of Pennsylvania, CUNY–Grad Center, New York University, as well as at the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association and American Historical Association. I thank those audiences, and most especially the discussants, for their thoughtful comments. I also thank three anonymous reviewers and the editors of *Cultural Anthropology* for their insights and suggestions.

1. The UNRWA website provides a great deal of information about Palestinian refugees (<http://www.un.org/unrwa/index.html>). Approximately 750 thousand Palestinians became refugees in 1948.
2. The 1948 war was itself the culmination of years of conflict over the future of Palestine. With the issuance of the Balfour declaration in 1917, when the British government expressed its support for the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine, the stage was set for struggle over control of this territory. The years of the British Mandate (1922–48) were marked by increasing tensions between the native inhabitants of the country and the incoming Jewish settlers. In 1947, the British government gave up on managing this conflict and turned the problem over to the United Nations, which voted to partition the country into two states—one Jewish, one Arab. Rejecting the legitimacy of this dispensation, Palestinians (who owned the vast majority of the

land in the country) and neighboring Arab countries fought unsuccessfully to keep Palestine Arab. Displaced Palestinians went to Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt, as well as to the parts of the British Mandate Palestine that became the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Over 400 Palestinian villages inside what became Israel were destroyed.

3. One of the complaints that many Palestinians living outside the territories had about the now-defunct Oslo Accords was that it provided no mechanism for resolving their condition. Many Palestinians argue that only the fulfillment of their right to return to their homes would be a satisfactory resolution. Others suggest that if offered adequate compensation many refugees would prefer to settle in the places where they now live. Israel argues that to allow these refugees to return would undermine the Jewish character of the state.
4. Israel, which occupied Gaza in 1967, never annexed it, even as it expropriated land and moved settlers into the area. In 1994, as part of the Oslo Accords, much of this territory came under the control of the Palestinian National Authority (an authority that can be at most described as a protostate). When Israel evacuated the Jewish settler population and the soldiers who protected them in 2005, the PNA took control of the entirety of the Strip. Whether Gaza will form the nucleus of an independent Palestinian State remains very uncertain.
5. British military rule in Palestine began in 1917. The British Mandate formally began in 1922.
6. These conversations took place in the course of research I was conducting on government and bureaucracy in Gaza during the British Mandate and Egyptian Administration (1948–67). Unless otherwise cited, all quotes from Gazans (natives and refugees) are from interviews I tape recorded in the course of this research.
7. Many formerly prosperous refugees became destitute after 1948. According to an early UNRWA report: “Many sad cases exist amongst those refugees who owned considerable property and other worldly goods under their former living conditions. . . . There is much evidence that the majority of such refugees have reached, or are reaching, the end of their resources” (UNRWA 1950).
8. These distinctions also do not correspond in a simple way to current income, class, or cultural differences. In addition to the sociological effects of differentiation, the continued administrative importance of divisions in the population has recently been underscored by an UNRWA announcement that it would begin providing rations to refugee civil servants who were not being paid when funds to the elected Hamas government were cut off. Even as “other government employees recently demonstrated outside the UNRWA offices, demanding they be included in its basic needs programs” UNRWA stated that “only refugees will be covered” (*Ha’aretz*, June 7, 2006). Nonrefugees were to receive assistance from the World Food Program. It should be noted that on some occasions UNRWA has participated in providing emergency aid to nonrefugees. This assistance, and an extension of rations to small numbers of the Gaza poor: 837 in 1980, for example (UNRWA 1980), did not change UNRWA’s definition of a refugee.
9. That humanitarian intervention participates in making subjects has been much discussed (Agamben 1995; Malkki 1995; Pandolfi 2003).
10. The mechanisms that Quakers developed for managing these distinctions and for delivering relief were largely adopted by UNRWA when it took over in Gaza, indicating that this project had a technical legacy as well.
11. The 1951 Convention on the status of refugees defines a *refugee* as someone who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”
12. The fundamental “right” of the refugee as outlined by 1951 Convention was the right not to be repatriated to the country where they faced persecution (*nonrefoulement*). No particular country, however, had an obligation to admit and grant asylum to refugees. The right of nonrepatriation highlights one distinction of the Palestinian case, as in this instance what people seek is precisely the right to return.
13. The breakup of the Russian Empire produced more than a million refugees (see Gatrell 1999 for detailed discussion of this refugee experience). In 1922 the new Soviet government “denationalized the vast majority of the refugees, rendering them stateless and invalidating

- their travel documents” (Skran 1995:102). The Turkish attack on its Armenian population, in which it has been estimated that half the Ottoman Armenian population died, created another significant refugee population. Both these groups were defined as refugees by 1926 League of Nations Arrangements. The inadequacy of the international response to potential Jewish refugees from Nazi aggression is well known.
14. G. Daniel Cohen has explored administrative and legal apparatuses that developed in Europe in the aftermath of WWII to deal with the massive populations of displaced persons. He describes both how Jewish Holocaust survivors were perceived as “paradigmatic victims entitled to specific migratory and ‘resettlement’ claims” (in press) and that the emphasis on resettlement was itself a result of refugee refusals (Jewish and otherwise) to accept the idea of returning to their former homes.
  15. Jennifer Hyndman argues that the Convention was “Eurocentric” reflecting “the particular ideological debates of postwar European politics, particularly the perceived threats of communism and another Holocaust” (2000:8).
  16. Palestinian refugees were excluded from the convention not only by this geography clause, but by clause 1D, which states: “This convention shall not apply to persons who are at present receiving from organs of agencies of the United Nations other than the UNHCR protection or assistance. When such protection or assistance has ceased for any reason, without the position of such persons being definitely settled in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly of the United Nations, these persons shall *ipso facto* be entitled to the benefits of this Convention.” Lex Takkenberg notes that this clause might be better considered a “suspensive” rather than an “exclusion” clause (1998:93). It should be further underscored that this exclusion is not the principal cause of the difficulties Palestinians have faced. Indeed, the problem of the narrow eligibility for aid that I explore here is a product of this broader refugee regime, and an instance in which Palestinians were governed by it. Further, with its emphasis on resettlement—on protecting people from being sent home to dangerous conditions—the Convention might not adequately address the main Palestinian demand in the aftermath of displacement: to go home.
  17. According to the terms of the Convention, if Palestinians were to stop receiving assistance from another UN body (in this case UNRWA) they would come under UNHCR authority. Takkenberg explores the debates in detail, noting that the Arab states in particular were concerned that the special status of Palestinian refugees—and the particular responsibility for their condition by the United Nations—be formally acknowledged and that they not be “relegated to a position of minor importance” (1998:66). According to Takkenberg, “the main concern in this respect was that the prospect of returning to their homes would be negatively affected if they were included in the mandate of UNHCR” (1998:66). He also notes that both the Americans and the French, at different points, expressed concern about the potential financial repercussions of including a non-European population within the Convention.
  18. Again and again in the drafting process, states argued for the importance of limiting the Convention’s applicability. Even as there were already significant refugee populations outside of Europe, these were not the focus of the Convention. The United States argued specifically that it should not include “the very numerous Kashmiri and Indian refugees” (Bem 2004:613). Chinese refugees in Hong Kong and Macao were likewise not included, and with very little discussion of this case. The Chinese did not press the issue and the United States suggested that “it would be unrealistic for the Conference to attempt to legislate for the Far East” (Bem 2004:621). Bem notes that the Indian delegation, surprisingly, supported the proposed definition by the United States and that the Chinese delegation also did not object to the Chinese exclusion. These seemingly strange nonobjections highlight the complicated politics that surrounded these discussions. Bem argues that the Indians supported the U.S. definition because Pakistan was backing an alternate British proposal. He also suggests that the Chinese—represented in the talks by Taiwan—did not press for Chinese refugees to be included because that might have the result of Communist China being recognized as the legitimate China. Whether the primary reason for the limiting clauses was material (Walker 2003) or ideological (Hathaway 1991; Hyndman 2000), the effect was the same.
  19. Paragraph 11 of the Resolution affirms that: “The refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors 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” (UN1948b). The exact nature of the protections to be derived from this paragraph are matters of considerable political contestation. Although the Israeli position has argued for compensation rather than return, for Palestinians the support for their return appears as the heart of the Resolution.
20. Takkenberg notes that when Palestinians were temporarily excluded—*deferred inclusion* was the term suggested by the French—from the Convention and UNHCR jurisdiction, there was little attention to the nonequivalence of UNRWA and the UNHCR as agencies (1998:67). Takkenberg does not explicitly address the causes of this lack of attention, but it may in part have derived from an assumption that the Palestinian problem would be resolved shortly and that therefore the difference would not have long-term repercussions.
  21. As Takkenberg notes, “the phrase ‘whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948’ at present refers to former ‘mandate citizenship’” (1998:78).
  22. To determine need “a system of income scales was introduced . . . which established the criteria for deciding when refugees became self-supporting and this ceased to be eligible for relief” (Takkenberg 1998:75). A further form of exclusion concerns the women refugees who marry nonrefugees. Not only are the children of such marriages not considered refugees (whereas the children of male refugees married to nonrefugee women are), but these women also become ineligible for most UNRWA benefits (Cervenak 1994).
  23. Part of the reason for these long-term temporary conditions has been a general unwillingness to acknowledge the failure of efforts to resolve the underlying conflict. The UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), for instance, which was established to assist in the implementation of UN Resolution 194 and to aid in concluding the conflict, has never been abolished, despite what seems like total lack of success. It continues to submit annual reports to the General Assembly. In recent years, these reports simply “observe that it has nothing new to report since its submission of [the last] report” (see, e.g., UNCCP 2004). In more recent years, continued reference to the Oslo Accords and the Road Map as guiding principles for negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, even when circumstances on the ground seem to have rendered them irrelevant is another example of this phenomenon.
  24. Although the AFSC frequently engaged in relief provision, it understood its purpose to be broader. The Quakers hoped through their work to further their peace and justice agenda. Tensions between the demands of relief and these larger principles were a persistent feature of the Gaza project, and AFSC work elsewhere. I explore these tensions, and the light they shed on humanitarianism more generally, in detail elsewhere (Feldman n.d.).
  25. UIN 1949.
  26. The AFSC later returned to work on an education project in Gaza in the 1970s. Quakers also have an active presence in the West Bank (with a school in Ramallah) and have been involved in activism to promote a solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict for a long time.
  27. The defeat of Egypt in the 1948 war contributed directly to the ouster of King Farouq. It should also be noted that, from the outset, Egyptian policies in Gaza were influenced not simply by concern for the population but also by the rivalry between Egypt and Jordan as well as internal Egyptian concerns (Gerges 2001).
  28. Changes in Egyptian practice in Gaza were connected to changing attitudes about the population and about the character of their rule there. As I detail elsewhere, Egypt initially governed Gaza in a humanitarian style, reflecting its discomfort about its position there, as well as some distrust of the population. Later, because of both the practical demands of rule and a greater willingness to imagine policies for Gaza, government shifted to a more bureaucratic style. For the Egyptians, humanitarian work provided a concrete mechanism to make it easier to govern Gaza. See Feldman in press.
  29. American Friends Service Committee Archives (AFSC), Philadelphia, PA, #84 FS Sect Palestine, Memo on visit to Gaza, Arne Barkhuus, November 15, 1948.
  30. The names of all interviewees have been changed.
  31. AFSC, #93 FS Sect Palestine, Report on Gaza Trip from Gillespie Evans to Stanton Griffis, December 26, 1948.
  32. AFSC, #174 FS Sect Palestine 1948: *Administration Nineteen Points*.



33. AFSC, #93 FS Sect Palestine, Letter from Colin Bell to Elmore Jackson, November 18, 1948.
34. AFSC, #174 FS Sect Palestine, Minutes of Foreign Service Executive Committee, November 17, 1948.
35. A report on food rations delivered indicates that in February 1949 refugees received a daily ration amounting to 1411 calories. The plan was to increase that to 2021 calories per day, but a supply shortage meant that, in March at least, rations were cut to 944 calories. This shortage seems to have been short-lived. There are no records of the calorie intake of the native population during this same period (AFSC #83 FS Sect Palestine, Memo on Diet of Refugees in Gaza Area, March 5, 1949).
36. AFSC, #103 FS Sect Palestine, Background material on Deir El Balah, February 20, 1949.
37. AFSC #36 FS Sect Palestine, Background material on Magazy, February 16, 1949.
38. The UN resolution that established the UNRPR was, as the name indicates, explicitly concerned with “the problem of relief of Palestine refugees.” This resolution asked for voluntary donations from member countries to provide the \$29,500,000 thought necessary to provide this relief (UN 1948a).
39. AFSC, #55 FS Sect Palestine, “An Economic Note on the Gaza Strip,” by James Baster, draft, July 12, 1949.
40. Alwin Holtz, AFSC Oral History Interview #604, September 19, 1992.
41. Hyndman describes the relatively recent emergence of “preventative protection,” the provision of assistance to people within their own countries. She connects this assistance—often much needed—to an interest on the part of wealthy countries to keep potential refugees away from their borders (2000:17–28).
42. Claudena Skran notes that “the 1926 Arrangement defines refugee status on the basis of country of origin or ethnic group” (1995:109). An Armenian refugee, for example, is defined as “any person of Armenian origin formerly a subject of the Ottoman Empire who does not enjoy or who no longer enjoys the protection of the Government of the Turkish Republic and who has not acquired another nationality” (1995:109). The 1928 Arrangements established a high commissioner to oversee refugee protection.
43. For an exploration of Palestinian refugee identity in Lebanon, which also includes a brief discussion of the AFSC project in Gaza, see Peteet 2005.
44. AFSC, #40 FS Sect Palestine, Memo from Howard Wriggins, March 18, 1949.
45. AFSC, #75 FS Sect Palestine, memo from Howard Wriggins to Colin Bell, May 15, 1949.
46. AFSC, #72 FS Sect Palestine, Monthly Report from Emmett Gullely to AFSC, July 18, 1949.
47. UNWRA 1950.
48. AFSC, #174, “Nineteen Points.”
49. AFSC, #106 FS Sect Palestine, Monthly Sanitation Report, July 1949. It was also Quaker practice and policy, for instance, “to hire refugees only, unless we cannot find a refugee suitable for a given job” (AFSC, #81 FS Sect Palestine, Minutes Camp Leaders Meeting, December 13, 1949).
50. The exclusion of native Gazans was also not total. The desire to break down the strictly maintained “relief” boundary is reflected in an oral history conducted by the AFSC in 1992 with a former volunteer. Describing his work in Gaza, Alwin Holtz recalled that the Quakers had “invented a village” for people to be refugees from as a way of providing aid to some natives: “We created the village . . . and registered about 15,000 people. . . . It was the right thing to do. It was against the rules but it was the right thing to do, and nobody knew we were doing it” (Holtz, Oral History #604). It is hard to imagine how such a ploy could have been possible—given the importance the organization attached to accuracy in records, and the ways it crossed-check its records against those of, for instance, the previous British Mandate government. This recollection does, though, clearly indicate the degree of discomfort that Quakers in the field felt about these restrictions.
51. The 1959 Annual Report noted on this matter that “the Assembly has not regarded UNRWA as the appropriate vehicle for assistance to these groups, and the Agency, in the absence of a specific directive, has been unable to extend its services to these other claimants. This year, however, fresh and pressing appeals have been made in favour of extending Agency aid, in particular rations . . . the need is essentially for rations, since the majority of the claimants are already provided with other services by the host Governments” (UNRWA 1959:5).

52. For more on these ethical dilemmas, see Feldman n.d.
53. Refugee registration cards were issued by family units. As described a few years later by the Egyptian Department for Refugee and Social Affairs, "On the card is written: full name, family name, original home, the center from which the family gets rations, and the number of family members" (Israel State Archives [ISA], Jerusalem, RG 115, Box 2024, file 14, Report of Department for Refugee and Social Affairs, 1953).
54. To determine an accurate count of refugee numbers, the AFSC made use of British Mandate government population figures. These numbers—developed in part to manage WWII rationing—were able to tell the Quakers roughly how many people lived in each village and, therefore, enabled them to determine when the numbers were greatly inflated. They could not, however, tell them which particular people should be on the lists.
55. AFSC, #36 FS Sect Palestine, "Background Material on Magazy," February 16, 1949.
56. Paul Johnson, AFSC Oral History Interview #601, September 19, 1992.
57. Paul Johnson, AFSC Oral History Interview #601, September 19, 1992.
58. AFSC, #41 FS Sect Palestine, letter from Howard Wriggins to Colin Bell, February 18, 1949.
59. AFSC, #53 FS Sect Palestine, letter from AFSC Gaza Unit to C. Pickett, AFSC Headquarters, October 12, 1949. UNRWA reports note similar attitudes: "The United Nations, in particular certain of the great Powers, are considered by the refugee to be entirely responsible for both his past and present misfortunes, and for his future fate. They say that they have lost faith in United Nations action since, after more than thirty months, the General Assembly resolution recommending their return home, although not revoked, has never been implemented and no progress has been made towards compensation" (UNWRA 1951).
60. AFSC, #24 FS Sect Palestine, letter from Charlie Reed to Philadelphia AFSC office, October 15, 1949.
61. In an effort to make sure that dead people were removed from the rolls, the Quakers also provided shrouds for burials, thus creating an incentive to notify authorities of the death (AFSC, Oral History #601, Paul Johnson, September 19, 1992).
62. AFSC, #128 FS Sect Palestine, letter from Donald Stevenson to Bronson Clark, October 24, 1949.
63. AFSC, #80 FS Sect Palestine, "Concerns Expressed at campleaders Meeting and at Staff Meeting, October 13 and 14, 1949.
64. AFSC, #83 FS Sect Palestine, "Measures Employed by the American Friends Service Committee to Reduce the Number of Rations Issued Refugees in the Gaza Strip," December 1949.
65. Another person recalled similarly: "We used to go to the sea—a big ship would come carrying girls and women from Jaffa. A man would go into the sea carrying a rope, and would swim and swim until he reached the ship. Then he would tie the rope to the ship and 200 or 300 people would pull and pull until they dragged the ship in, carrying the women and children."
66. This mix of aid and resentment is not unique to Gaza. See, for instance, Duncan 2005.
67. AFSC, #117 FS Sect Palestine, Background material on Gaza City area, January 28, 1949.
68. For more detailed discussion of the transformations in the ethic of care produced by the upheavals on displacement and dispossession see Feldman n.d. In recent years, Hamas has developed new institutionalized mechanisms for the delivery of "care" and their kindergartens, educational centers, and mosques have been important resources for Gazans.
69. Background material on Gaza City area.
70. AFSC, #63 FSC Sect Palestine, "Background Material on Rafah," February 1, 1949.
71. AFSC, #67 FS Sect Palestine, "Operational Report of AFSC Palestine Refugee Unit for December, 1949."
72. As late as 1964, the Annual Report lamented the large number of men who were "not only unemployed but were virtually unemployable" because of the limited work opportunities in Gaza (UNWRA 1964:2).
73. Salim and others also suggested that UNRWA relief was part of a Western imperial plot to make Palestinians accept the loss of their homeland.

74. This judgment was sometimes shared by native Gazans. One person described to me, a bit wistfully, how refugees—initially looked down on as poor and illiterate—had become more educated than the native population.
75. AFSC, #60 FS Sect Palestine, Report on Education Activities for December 1949.
76. The opportunity to work and earn money—whether in an expanding government bureaucracy, for UNRWA, in Arab countries (especially Gulf countries), or, during the first 25 years of the Israeli Occupation, inside Israel—had a transformative effect on the refugee condition. Over the years, fewer and fewer people continued to receive rations from UNRWA. Now only “hardship cases” get rations.
77. This was how the legal adviser to the UNCCP put the matter after consultation with the political-juridical protection department of the UNHCR as part of an effort to settle on a definition of a Palestinian refugee (UNCCP 1951).
78. Further complicating matters, Palestine had never been fully sovereign (Louis 1969; Wright 1923, 1930). The Palestine Mandate, like the other mandates established in the wake of WWI and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and German colonial possessions, was governed by a European power (in this case Great Britain) under the authority of the League of Nations, with the stated purpose shepherding the native population to independence (Uptegrove 1954:17). In practice the Mandatory powers exercised the powers normally associated with sovereignty, although they purported to be doing so on behalf of the governed territory and its “latent sovereignty” (Anghie 2001–02:569). The question of sovereignty was especially complicated in Palestine as a result of conflicting British responsibilities to the native population and to the Jewish settler community. For discussion of struggles over sovereignty and citizenship in different mandates, see Massad 2001 and Thompson 2000.
79. At this moment, as in so many others, the fate of Palestine was caught up in struggles for power among various Arab countries. Without any infrastructure or financial base, the APG was unable to operate effectively and could not maintain any independence. Almost as soon as it was established, it was essentially decommissioned and its headquarters were moved to Cairo. The APG thus stands as an example of “theoretical” sovereignty, just as the British Mandate was an instance of “latent” sovereignty. As a practical matter, Egypt exercised control over the territory.
80. The PLO was established in 1964 by the Arab League, as much to contain as to support Palestinian national aspirations. It was not until Fatah (founded in 1959) took control of the organization in 1968 that it could be said to be fully Palestinian.
81. Many people have explored the complex interplay between what James Holston and Arjun Appadurai identify as the formal and substantive aspects of citizenship (1999). See also Balibar 2004; Berlant 1997; Caldeira 2000; and, for the Middle East, see specifically Davis 1997.
82. Ong’s earlier articulation of the idea of “graduated sovereignty” highlights the ways that differently located citizens are subject to different modes of domination and come to enjoy different sorts of rights (1999:215). In her case, of course, there is a state—with the power to confer or deny legal rights—which has important consequences for the social processes on which she focuses. Nonetheless, this approach to citizenship is very useful for the Palestinian case.
83. The PNA is not identical to the PLO, long recognized as the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.”
84. As Rita Giacaman et al. note: “important elements of citizenship [have] resided in membership in the Palestinian community and its institutions” (1996:11).
85. For explorations of contests over citizenship other locales see Ferme 2004; Petryna 2002; Sieder 2001.
86. The most common word for citizen—*muwatan*—is directly tied to the idea of nation—*watan* in Arabic, although *muwatan* is also widely used in the more local civic way described above.
87. It was also an aspiration, about preparation for participation in a future state. In later years these ideas found expression in policy, as people were encouraged to act now like the citizens they would one day be. As the Egyptian Administration later explained its educational objectives in Gaza, the goal was not “to settle them in the places where they are living, but the goal is that they should be good citizens [*muwataniin salahiin*] when they return to their country” (Dar Al-Watha’iq [DW], Cairo, *Qawā’im Al-Mushir*, Group 41, File 90505, Letter from Director

- of Palestine Affairs Administration to Governor General, March 7, 1960). Changing Egyptian policies and attitudes toward Palestinian organizing in Gaza came to be important in ideas about nationality and citizenship. Egypt always viewed the entire population of Gaza as Palestinian nationals. At the same time, the strong control over political life exerted by the Administration, meant that Palestinian claims about citizenship sometimes produced confrontation with the government. For more on these questions see Feldman in press.
88. The idea of a “humanitarian space”—a space apart from conflict in which people can be protected—is a key concept in the later humanitarian practice of Médecins Sans Frontières [MSF]. Here I mean it in a more institutional sense.
  89. The latter exclusion could be dealt with, as it ultimately was, by finding another source of aid. This development did not give natives the international recognition that refugee status conferred.
  90. Raja Shehadeh notes that the term *sumud* was coined at the 1978 Baghdad Conference. He notes as well that “long before Arab politicians outside defined *sumud* as a pan-Arab objective it had been practised by every man, woman, and child struggling on his or her own to learn to cope with, and resist, the pressures of living as a member of a conquered people” (1982:viii).
  91. As *sumud* later developed it was precisely in these terms that it became a political value: “Behind this notion lies the assumption . . . that by merely staying on their land, Palestinians were asserting their nationhood—the *natural* expected behavior from them being flight and exile” (Tamari 1991:61–62).
  92. It should be noted that generally whether Palestinians stayed in their homes or left was determined by circumstance, not because of their particular commitments. It was after the fact that people were judged for this.
  93. Gaza is often described as a place with a “weak political culture” (Roy 1995:3), but it has proven central to Palestinian political history. Fatah was founded by Gazan refugees (Yasser Arafat among them); Hamas was formed in Gaza; the first intifada began there.
  94. AFSC #84 FS Sect Palestine, Memo from John Devine to Ambassador Griffis, December 13, 1948.
  95. Fida’iyyin were most active in Gaza between 1955 and the first Israeli occupation of 1956. After the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, fida’iyyin movements developed outside the territories.
  96. DW, *Qawā’im Al-Mushir*, Group 41, file 90505, Memo from Governor General, November 15, 1958.
  97. A debate in the Gaza Legislative Council in 1959 about this question illuminates these tensions. When one native Gazan council member (Hassan Shawa) complained about the universal appellation refugee, others responded that this universality was crucial to the goal of keeping the concept of a Palestinian entity alive (DW, *Qawā’im Al-Mushir*, Group 41, File 91215, Report of the 5th Regular Session of the Legislative Council, July 11, 1959). Although Shawwa argued, from the position of the individual citizen, that it would make travel easier if the documents distinguished between refugees and nonrefugees, his objections were overridden.
  98. The Israeli occupation of Gaza in 1967 once again transformed the political landscape, although, as I have indicated, these distinctions have continued to matter.
  99. Even as over the years the particular sufferings that made Quakers so aware of this inadequacy were addressed through other means, including both finding other sources for assistance to natives and a general improvement of economic conditions that made life easier for everyone (although they have at times been replaced by new suffering) the sense of distinction has been long lasting.
  100. A 1993 change in UNRWA’s registration rules, which made it possible for more people to register by eliminating “the requirement of need and initial flight in 1948 to a country within UNRWA’s area of operations” (Cervenak 1994:313), seems an acknowledgment precisely of the broad importance of refugee status. These new registration rules “effectively eliminate[e] the need requirement for UNRWA assistance” (Cervenak 1994:315). Only “hardship cases” receive rations now, but anyone who fit into the category of a refugee is potentially eligible for UNRWA education and health services.
  101. That the Oslo Accords, which were intended to provide a path to find a solution for Israel and Palestine, seemed to so inadequately address the concerns of refugees (especially those

- living outside the territories) was one reason they were so sharply critiqued by many Palestinians.
102. The plight of Sudanese refugees in Egypt—where the processing of applications was halted after a peace accord was signed in Sudan, leaving people in a limbo where they are permitted to remain in Egypt but not recognized as UNHCR refugees—highlights the significant impact of the loss of formal status (Ghazaleh 2002; Makar n.d).
  103. *Editor's Note: Cultural Anthropology* has published a number of articles on the cultural dimensions of humanitarianism, and also on Palestine. On humanitarianism, articles include Amitav Ghosh's "The Global Reservation: Notes toward an Ethnography of International Peacekeeping (1994), Liisa Malkki's "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization" (1996), Peter Redfield's "Doctors, Borders, and Life in Crisis (2005) and Dider Fassin's "Compassion and Repression: The Moral Economy of Immigration Policies in France" (2005). On Palestine, articles include Ted Swedenburg's "Occupational Hazards: Palestine Ethnography" (1989), Julie Peteet's "The Writing on the Walls: The Graffiti of the Intifada (1996), Ulf Hannerz's "Reporting from Jerusalem" (1998), and Iris Jean-Klein's " Nationalism and Resistance: The Two Faces of Everyday Activism in Palestine during the Intifada" (2001).

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