

Refuge and Resistance

Palestinians and the International Refugee System

Anne Irfan

In the decades after World War II, the United Nations established a global refugee regime that became central to the lives of displaced people around the world. This regime has exerted particular authority over Palestinian refugees, who are served by a specialized UN body, the Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Formed shortly after the 1948 war, UNRWA continues to provide quasi-state services such as education and health care to Palestinian refugee communities in the Middle East today.

This book is a groundbreaking international history of Palestinian refugee politics. Anne Irfan traces the history and politics of UNRWA's interactions with Palestinian communities, particularly in the refugee camps where it functioned as a surrogate state. She shows how Palestinian refugees invoked internationalist norms to demand their political rights while resisting the UN's categorization of their plight as an apolitical humanitarian issue. *Refuge and Resistance* foregrounds how nonelite activism shaped the Palestinian campaign for international recognition, showing that engagement with world politics was driven as much by the refugee grass roots as by the upper echelons of the Palestine Liberation Organization. It demonstrates that refugee groups are important actors in global politics, not simply aid recipients.

Recasting modern Palestinian history through the lens of refugee camps and communities, *Refuge and Resistance* offers vital new perspectives for understanding politics beyond the nation-state.

ANNE IRFAN is lecturer in interdisciplinary race, gender, and postcolonial studies at University College London.

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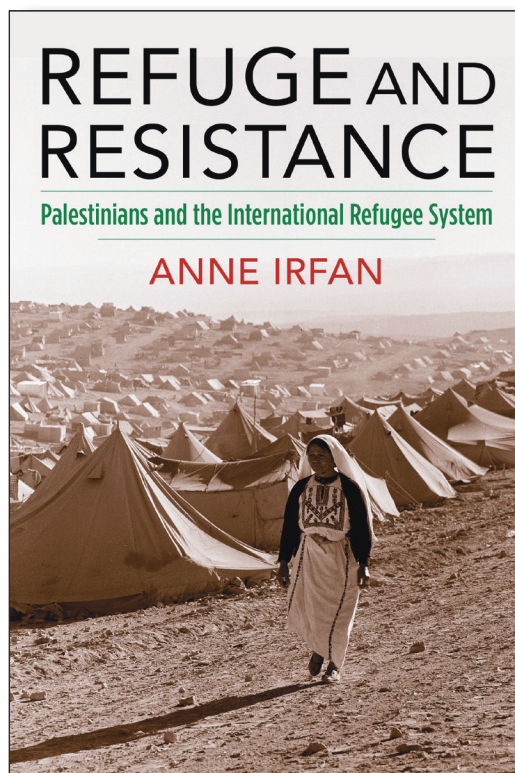
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“This book constitutes an original and thoroughly researched contribution to the study of both the interaction of international bodies, notably UNRWA, with the Palestine question, and of the agency of Palestinians, whether camp dwellers or the PLO, in relation to these bodies. It is one of the most fine-grained studies extant of UNRWA's work and of its role as a quasi-state.”

—Rashid Khalidi, author of
The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017

“With exemplary clarity and care, Irfan tells the story of how the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees became a significant locus for Palestinian national politics—for articulating what it means to be a Palestinian refugee and what it means to be a Palestinian. This is an excellent and original book.”

—Benjamin Thomas White, author of
The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria



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