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## Author biography

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Are Knudsen and Sari Hanafi (eds),

*Palestinian Refugees: Identity, Space and Place in the Levant*, Routledge: Abingdon, 2011; 230 pp.: ISBN 9780415580465, £95.00 (hbk), 9781138788947, £26.99 (pbk)

**Reviewed by** Sophie Richter-Devroe, *University of Exeter, UK*

## Keywords

Lebanon, Palestinians, refugees, space

The stated aim of Are Knudsen and Sari Hanafi's edited book, *Palestinian Refugees: Identity, Space and Place in the Levant*, is to focus attention away from the past and the future to the present: 'It is about the Palestinian living conditions, modes of governance of refugee camps, camp reconstruction and improvement, humanitarian management and refugee crisis' (p. 1). As such, it departs from the majority of writings on Palestinian refugees, which either tend to deal with the past (especially the Nakba) or the future (especially the refugees' right of return and/or proposed solutions to the Palestine–Israel conflict).

The book is divided into four parts. In the first part ('Space, governance and locality'), the authors debate concepts and definitions of the terminology pertaining to refugee, diaspora and migration studies. Julie Peteet's chapter considers the cases of Palestine and Iraq, finding that population displacements in these two contexts 'are diagnostic of who is included in the political body and who is outside' (p. 13). She identifies displacement as a defining feature of Middle East nation-state building processes, and offers an eloquent enquiry into how such an understanding should force us to rethink not only the category of the refugee itself, but also that of the refugee camp. As spatial devices, camps control and contain refugees, but they also give rise to distinct collective identities and serve to reinforce the recognition of refugee status. Peteet traces how camps have developed, often losing their distinct character and being integrated into surrounding urban spaces. This raises difficult questions: 'Without camps, do the displaced run the risk of

becoming invisible and atomized exiles rather than a self-conscious aggregate with a potential voice and identity?’ (p. 19).

In the next chapter, Sari Hanafi analyses different modes of governance in camps in Lebanon and Syria. Whereas in Syria refugee camps are ‘normalized’, i.e. integrated into and treated like other urban structures, camps in Lebanon are excluded and segregated from surrounding urban environments, and treated as ‘spaces of exception’ (Agamben). ‘In this near absence of conventional governance’, he contends, ‘alternative governmentalities have emerged among camp populations’ (p. 47). These alternative governmentalities, he stresses, are essential for the daily functioning of the camps.

Rosemary Sayigh’s chapter studies changing notions of camp identity. Sayigh uses testimonies from Jenin camp in the West Bank and Shatila camp in Lebanon, examples of self-organization in camps and data from the Civitas Project to argue that a specific group identity can emerge in camps, especially in times of crisis. These multiple local Palestinian (camp) identities, she argues, play an important role in sustaining the national. ‘A recognition of group rights and multiple identifications as *part of liberation*’, she urges, ‘is a necessary condition for steps towards a democratic nationalism to be installed before, not after, the achievement of a state’ (p. 62, emphasis in original).

The book’s second part (‘Urbanisation, place and politics’) continues the debate on the refugee camp, tracing changes through urbanization and the development of ‘city-camps’ or ‘camp-cities’ (p. 7). Mohamed Kamel Dorai studies the experience of Palestinians in Lebanon (especially in Mar Elias camp), arguing that here boundaries between city and camp are increasingly blurred, despite the fact that in Lebanon camps are marked by segregation. In particular, Dorai takes issue with dichotomous categorizations of ‘refugee camp dwellers’ versus ‘urban refugees’. He finds that, as a result of economic activities, daily mobility, as well as non-Palestinians (mainly new migrants) moving into the camp and Palestinians moving out, Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon today are part of and can be characterized as urban settlements.

Following a similar understanding of camps as cities, Philipp Misselwitz’s chapter reflects on a two-year participatory ‘Camp Development Pilot Project’ carried out by Stuttgart University and UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) in three refugee camps in the West Bank (p. 82). His chapter gives an overview of the discussions that arose in Fawwar camp when residents engaged with the camp improvement project. Residents’ voices reflect concerns about the compatibility of the right of return with camp improvement: can improving camp conditions, and developing their permanent urban characteristics, undermine refugees’ right of return? Misselwitz notes: ‘Camp residents have long learnt to claim and exercise civil rights alongside their ongoing insistence on political rights as refugees’ (p. 89). A more pragmatic position that calls for improvement of conditions here and now and does not find these to be incompatible with the right of return has therefore emerged among camp residents.

Are Knudsen’s chapter analyses the 2007 Nahr al-Bared disaster in Lebanon. Fifteen weeks of intense fighting between the militia group ‘Fatah al-Islam’ and the Lebanese Army left the camp destroyed, approximately 500 dead, and many wounded. Knudsen is interested in how different political actors attempted to control ‘the refugee file’ (i.e. the refugee issue in Lebanon) prior, during and after the Nahr al-Bared disaster. He

studies the positions taken by five different political actors – the Future Movement, Hezbollah, Fatah, Hamas and the Lebanese–Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC) – on the Nahr al-Bared case, and comes to the conclusion that for all of them controlling the ‘refugee file’ constituted an important way to gain and strengthen their own political power.

The third part (‘Civic rights, legal status and reparations’) deals with refugees’ rights, especially citizenship rights in the host country and the right of return. Abbas Shiblak’s detailed and knowledgeable chapter traces how statelessness and related legal barriers have prevented Palestinians from gaining rights in Arab host countries. He finds that statelessness is the defining feature of Palestinian refugees: ‘Statelessness exposed the Palestinian refugee to various degrees of discriminatory practices in Arab host states. It has had a profound effect on their mobility, welfare and livelihood and their ability to build better future[s] and to sustain themselves’ (pp. 126–127). Shiblak urges the international community, relevant United Nations agencies and regional host states to consider and act upon this issue.

The next chapter, by Jalal Al Hussein and Riccardo Bocco, analyses the ways in which Palestinian refugees’ different legal status in five different regional contexts (Lebanon, Syria, Gaza Strip, West Bank and Jordan) has affected their construction of communal identities, their building of institutions, as well as their views on UNRWA, the host country and their right of return. Based on survey data, the chapter highlights refugees’ critical views of UNRWA and its services, as well as on the Arab host states’ refusal to grant civil rights. This chapter also engages with the question of refugees’ right of return and, in line with Misselwitz’s findings, explains that ‘[i]mproving the modalities of their integration in these countries, especially in the economic and social fields, is no more seen by the refugees, inside and outside camps, as a threat to their political rights; quite the opposite’ (p. 142).

In the next chapter, Shahira Samy takes a closer look at the question of compensation and reparations for refugees – a sensitive topic, because refugees often fear that accepting either of the two might nullify their right of return. Drawing comparisons with approaches to reparation in other conflict contexts, Samy calls for a wider approach to reparation. In particular, she stresses the importance and need for a ‘formal apology’ and acknowledgement of past wrongdoings, which have been absent in the Israeli–Palestinian ‘peace’ process.

The fourth and final part of the book (‘Memory, agency and incorporation’) considers refugees’ changing family patterns, identities, memories and forms of organization. Sylvain Perdigon’s ethnographic study of changing practices and meanings of kinship and family among camp refugees in Tyr questions a romanticized understanding of the Palestinian family as the only, or core, surviving unchanging social institution. Rather, contrasting dominant discourse on ‘the exceptionality of the Palestinian family’ with actual practices that point to much more heterogeneity, Perdigon maintains that refugees construct and enact different ‘familyscapes’. This renders, he argues, Agamben’s notion of the camp as a ‘state of exception’ problematic, because refugees in fact are not reduced to bare life, but rather engage in rich and creative strategies to cope with their prolonged exile.

Maria Holt’s chapter also stresses refugees’ agency and resilience. Based on interviews with Palestinian camp women in Lebanon (2006–2007), Holt argues that women

use storytelling and memory as a strategy to find hope, look to the future and deal with the hopelessness, extreme violence and insecurity of the present.

Manal Kortam's final chapter provides a fascinating insight into forms of self-organization and self-management in Shatila camp. In 2005, Shatila residents set up the 'Follow-Up and Reform Committee' and tasked it with improving living conditions in the camp (e.g. electricity, water, education, sewage) and preparing democratic elections for a new camp leadership committee. Elections did take place, and a new 'Committee of the Camp's Population', made up of professionals and technocrats rather than faction leaders, was elected. The Committee, however, was short lived: after six months, members were forced to withdraw as a result of threats, and the former (unelected) Popular Committee took over again. Despite its eventual failure, this initiative nevertheless launched a severe challenge to existing camp governing structures and highlighted that camp residents do not feel represented by factions and the Popular Committees.

Thus, this volume brings together an impressive array of writings. Chapters cover a wide range of topics and offer new perspectives. Although there are some repetitions that could have been edited out (e.g. several chapters deal with the history of Palestinians in Lebanon), and the book starts with an editorial mistake ('In 2010, it was 64 [rather than 62] years since the refugees' fateful exodus from Palestine' [p. 1]), this book is essential reading for anyone interested in Palestinian refugees.

Many of the chapters make cutting-edge contributions to current conceptual debates in refugee studies. In particular, they are united through their different engagement with Agamben's notion of the 'state of exception', questioning (or not) its applicability to the case of Palestinian refugees (e.g. the introduction and chapters by Perdigon, Hanafi and Misselwitz). Several chapters also work with Agier's writings on camps as cities, and on camps as 'nonspaces' of humanitarian management (e.g. the introduction and chapters by Peteet and Misselwitz). Although a theoretical frame including these two authors is provided in the introduction, not all contributors integrate it in their analyses. Some of the more empirical, descriptive chapters might have benefited from more conceptual engagement. This could have pulled the volume together even more closely and coherently.

The book also provides detailed ethnographic accounts and interesting case studies of the changing nature of refugee identity, social structures and forms of governance (largely in the Lebanese context). Moreover, it takes up crucial analytical debates as expressed in academia, policy circles and refugees themselves. These include – to name just a few – issues such as the compatibility of the right of return, camp development and the attaining of rights in the host country; the changing nature of refugee camps into cities; and refugees' evolving hybrid local (camp/refugee)–national (Palestinian) notions of identity and identification. The volume emphasizes refugees' voices, narratives and practices, and, in doing so, challenges nationalist hegemonic discourses that try to speak for (or on behalf of) Palestinian refugees.

The book's stated aim is to focus on the present; it does so in an interesting, informative and persuasive manner. It makes a core contribution to the field and fills an important gap, and, as such, is sure to become a major reference on Palestinian refugees in the future. Through its engagement with broader theoretical and analytical debates, the book's reach, however, is much wider, providing original insights not only for Palestine studies, but also - among others - Middle East, migration, diaspora and refugee studies.

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Fokasz Nikosz (ed.),

*Identitások határán: Közösségi élet és beilleszkedési stratégiák a magyarországi görögök körében 1949–2012; Μεταξύ δύο ταυτοτήτων: Κοινοτική ζωή και στρατηγικές Ενσωμάτωσης των Ελλήνων της Ουγγαρίας 1949–2012* [At the Borders of Identities: Community Life and Integration Strategies among Greeks in Hungary, 1949–2012], Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó: Budapest, 2013; 244 pp.: ISBN 9789632870625

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## Keywords

Diaspora, Greeks, Hungary, minorities

What does it mean to be Greek? What does it mean to be Hungarian? And what does it mean to be both? An analysis of different types and components of ‘collective identity’ – such as ethnic, national, European identity, or even some kind of global citizenship – can hardly be carried out if we ignore the mundane problems and activities of people: their ‘lifeworld’. In a study of collective or social identity, both the collection of data and the analysis itself imply an approach to national, ethnic and other forms of identity through the communication practices of the persons in question. Thus, a social-psychological and sociological study of identity can primarily be based on conversations or discourse. Interviews conducted for the purposes of social scientific research are nothing but such conversations and discourses.

There are, of course, various types of interviews, and only one of them is the so-called ‘research interview’. Interviews are conducted, for instance, at entrance examinations, during job seeking, by social service or immigration offices, and are often given by public figures, in which case they take a mediated form. Only one among the many conversations is the interview conducted for the purpose of gaining a social scientific insight. The ‘interview society’ thesis (Silverman, 2011), in short, claims that the interview is a fundamental means of generating and circulating information in today’s society. In the interview society, self and identity is created through interviews. The volume being reviewed is based on such interviews: it reports on the experiences of Greeks living in Hungary. The book focuses mostly on the lives of 6000–9000 people and their offspring who came to Hungary after the end of the Greek Civil War in 1949.

Publishing the volume was doubtless a dream of Nikos Fokas, a Greek who is Hungarian. An unusual but nice gesture expresses this duality: the chapters appear in both Greek and Hungarian. Perhaps he is counting on readers of both groups, but this certainly exhibits the main theme of the studies: they are about people who are Greek and Hungarian, or Hungarian and Greek. The institutional and financial conditions of the