



Dumper: The Future for Palestinian Refugees: Toward Equity and Peace

by *Reviewed by Michael R. Fischbach*

The Future for Palestinian Refugees: Toward Equity and Peace, by Michael Dumper. Boulder, CO, and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007. xii + 192 pages. Appendix to p. 202. Acronyms to p. 205. Bibliography to p. 222. Index to p. 231. \$55.00 cloth.

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It has become a truism that the situation of the Palestinian refugees displaced during the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948 constitutes one of the most difficult issues needing to be resolved if there is to be a lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. Another truism, one that has long held sway among politicians and academics alike, is that the Palestinian refugee problem represents a unique case. While it bears certain similarities to other refugee exoduses, the argument goes, the Palestinian case is so specific that it defies attempts to understand it in reference to other massive refugee exoduses brought about by war.

Michael Dumper of the University of Exeter has researched and written extensively on the topic of Palestinian refugees. He has produced here a unique little book that makes a significant and sorely needed contribution to both academic and political discussions of the Palestinian refugee problem in the context of Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking. Three steps frame his analysis: First, he studies a range of international “best practices” currently available to policymakers, international donors, and others seeking to deal with the Palestinian refugee dilemma. In doing this, Dumper highlights how policymakers working on the Palestinian case have neglected many of these best practices over the years out of their belief in Palestinian exceptionalism. Second, with these best practices in mind, he studies the several recent proposals for resolving the Palestinian refugee problem that have emerged in official negotiations and unofficial Track-II settings. Finally, Dumper tries to “bridge the gap between those often termed as ‘realists’ and those rooted in the discourse of human rights and international humanitarian law” (pp. 2–3), thereby making a concrete contribution to those seeking practical ways to deal with the Palestinian refugee dilemma.

Following an overview of the refugee situation, Dumper launches into an examination of international best practices as they have emerged from a host of refugee crises around the globe in recent years, including in Cambodia, Guatemala, Rwanda, and the former Yugoslavia. Here, he focuses on international refugee law and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and particularly on how the UNHCR has dealt with refugees generally and in the specific context of conflict resolution. Dumper concludes that the various proposals that have dealt

with the Palestinians “sadly fail to meet the guidelines developed by UNHCR” (p. 74) and thus ignore international standards of best practice. Dumper then delves deeper into the comparison of the Palestinian case with other refugee situations by discussing the three main ways of dealing with displaced populations that have emerged globally: local integration in the countries of refuge, repatriation to the home country, and resettlement to third countries. He insists on elucidating international best practices regarding repatriation in an attempt at “de-demonizing” (p. 79) Israeli concerns and fears about the right of return, which have led some to rule out repatriation completely in the Palestinian case. This section is particularly helpful for its discussion of various Track-II academic studies that deal with Palestinian repatriation in detail.

The book goes on to analyze the importance of having a “lead agency” coordinate all work relating to resolving refugee crises, and it takes a particular look at whether the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) could serve as this lead agency. The book’s final chapters deal with reparations (in the widest sense of the term, including compensation and restitution) and the related questions of the search for truth, justice, and reconciliation. As elsewhere, Dumper is careful to discuss the Palestinian case in a comparative context, focusing on precedents such as the German agreement to pay reparations for Nazi crimes and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, noting the ways that these examples can or cannot be carried over into the Palestinian case.

Overall, *The Future for Palestinian Refugees: Toward Equity and Peace* provides a fair-minded discussion and thoughtful conclusions that can guide future negotiations. In addition to its comparative analyses, Dumper’s book is particularly noteworthy for its breadth and for the author’s familiarity with the myriad studies and data on the Palestinian and other refugee cases. His appendix (“Sources of Data for Policy Formulation”) is a very useful guide that outlines sources for research on Palestinian refugees. Newcomers and veterans to the study of Palestinian refugees alike will benefit from this excellent, balanced study that argues against Palestinian exceptionalism and for “the primacy of international law” (p. 3) even as it recognizes the unique contours of the Palestinian case that have contributed to its henceforth intractable nature.

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