Uniquely Protected or Uniquely Protracted?

The recent displacement of Palestinian refugees from Syria

Jasmin Fritzsche
Ruhr-University Bochum
Jasmin.Fritzsche@rub.de

Presented at:
ISA/IPSA/ECPR/APSA Joint Conference on Human Rights and Justice
Human Rights in an Age of Ambiguity
Fordham University New York, 13-15 June 2016

The establishment of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and the subsequent exclusion of Palestinian refugees from the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the protection mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), was intended to protect the identity and rights of the Palestinian people. This institutionally manifested division has contributed to the construction of a separate and unique category of 'Palestine refugees'. In this paper I argue that the international measures adopted for Palestinian refugees are unsuitable and inadequate to manage their protracted and multiple displacements occurring since the 1940s, as they have not only failed to resolve or cope with it but have rather contributed to its perpetuation. In particular, this paper looks at the effects this exclusion as well as the differing conceptualization of protection by UNRWA and UNHCR have on the individual protection of Palestinian refugees during secondary displacement. To approach this, I will take a closer look at the most recent displacement of Palestinian refugees from Syria and their individual protection in Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt. With this, the paper aims to contribute to the broader critical debate on the shortcomings of the global refugee regime.

Keywords: Refugees; Palestine; Global Refugee Regime