



The Politics of Denial: Israel and the Palestinian Refugee Problem

Nur Masalha

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The 1948 war ended in the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their villages and homes. Israeli settlers moved in to occupy their land and the Palestinian refugees found themselves in refugee camps, or in neighbouring Arab countries. Today there are nearly four million Palestinian refugees -- and they want the right to go home. Their problem is the greatest and most enduring refugee problem in the world.

Since 1948 Israeli refugee policy has become a classic case of denial: the denial that Zionist "transfer committees" had operated between 1937 and 1948; denial of any wrong-doing or any historical injustice; denial of the "right of return"; denial of restitution of property and compensation; and indeed denial of any moral responsibility or culpability for the creation of the refugee problem.

The aim of this book is to analyze Israeli policies towards the Palestinian refugees as they evolved from the 1948 catastrophe (or nakba) to the present. It is the first volume to look in detail at Israeli law and policy surrounding the refugee question. Drawing on extensive primary sources and previously classified archive material, Masalha discusses the 1948 exodus; Israeli resettlement schemes since 1948; Israeli approaches to compensation and restitution of property; Israeli refugee policies towards the internally displaced ('present absentees'); and Israeli refugee policies during the Madrid and Oslo negotiations.

Masalha asks what rights Palestinians possess under international law? How can a refugee population be compensated, and will they ever be able to return to their homes? Masalha questions the official Israeli position that the only solution to the problem is resettlement of the refugees in Arab states or elsewhere. This book is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the subject that lies at the heart of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

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