

Identifying the Humanitarian Trap:  
The American Friends Service Committee's Perception of its Work With Palestinian Refugees in  
Gaza, 1948-51

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## **Abstract**

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) engaged in humanitarian work with Palestinians in Gaza as the newly formed United Nations took on a leading role in international humanitarian action. This M.A. thesis suggests that the AFSC's unique aid relationships with Palestinian refugees in Gaza during the late 1940s was ahead of its time in identifying certain pitfalls at the core of the modern practice of humanitarianism. Rather than continuing to provide relief, the AFSC withdrew from Gaza and recognized that the UN-implemented structure of humanitarian aid in Gaza exacerbated the condition of Palestinian displacement and dispossession. Furthermore, they perceived that an unending cycle of humanitarian action was in formation that prevented the right of return against the overwhelming will of Palestinian refugees themselves.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1947, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) received the Nobel Institute's Peace Prize in recognition of "300 years of Quaker efforts to heal rifts and oppose war." According to Chairman Jahn Gunnar of the Nobel Committee the AFSC received this illustrious award because of its unique, relational approach or in his words, their work "from the nameless to the nameless."<sup>1</sup> Chairman Jahn Gunnar further acknowledged that the AFSC's distinction derived from its novel humanitarian practice, rather than strictly from its sheer work in the world. In his mind, the AFSC generated a much-needed reorientation of humanitarianism itself. Propped by U.S. Quaker group's most recent initiative with Jewish refugees in and around Nazi Germany, "Governments and individuals knew they had no other aim than to aid," Gunnar explained. AFSC humanitarianism was more than "giving people food and clothes." For the U.S. Quaker group, at least as far the as Nobel Institute was concerned, it was "a question of restoring the integrity of the individual."<sup>2</sup>

The Nobel Peace Prize win solidified the AFSC's global reputation in humanitarian circles for "honest reporting, economy in overhead costs, and absence of sectarian bias."<sup>3</sup> Lured by this reputation, the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees (UNRPR) invited the AFSC, along with the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) and the League of Red Cross Societies (LRCS), to provide humanitarian assistance to approximately 960,000 Palestinian

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<sup>1</sup> The AFSC were recipients alongside their Quaker counterparts, the British Friends Service Council. American Friends Service Committee, "Nobel Peace Prize," Accessed on 16 October 2019, <https://www.afsc.org/nobel-peace-prize>.

<sup>2</sup> Jahn Gunnar, "Chairman of the Nobel Committee and Director of the Bank at the Presentation of the Nobel Peace Award for 1947," Accessed on 8 August 2020, <https://www.afsc.org/resource/nobel-peace-prize-speech-committee-chairman-gunnar-jahn>.

<sup>3</sup> William H. Wriggins, *Picking Up the Pieces from Portugal to Palestine: Quaker Refugee Relief in World War II, A Memoir* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 2001), 33.

refugees forcibly displaced by the newly established state of Israel during the first Arab-Israeli war of 1947-49.<sup>4</sup> All in all, the two-year AFSC initiative administered relief for over 200,000 Palestinian Arab refugees confined to the Gaza Strip, a small Palestinian territory jammed between Egypt and Israel off the southeastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>5</sup>

The AFSC surprised many when it abandoned its mission in Gaza in 1950, despite distributing aid with better efficacy than other nonstate actors in the area. But even more shocking was its motivation. In the midst of an unresolved humanitarian crisis, the U.S. Quaker organization (praised for “having no other aim than aid”) abandoned its relief work with Palestinian refugees for “moral reasons.”<sup>6</sup> When refugees needs were at their highest during the dead of winter January 1950, U.S. Quaker aid worker Paul Johnson wrote home: “We forcefully and vigorously feel that the AFSC must not renew its responsibility for the present type of operation.”<sup>7</sup> The AFSC clearly wanted out of Palestinian Gaza, but why?

This Master’s thesis assesses how relationships between members of the American Friends Service Committee and Palestinian refugees shaped humanitarianism in the Gaza Strip between 1948-1951. Specifically, it aims to unearth and explain the political and moral process

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<sup>4</sup> Asaf Romirowsky and Alexander H. Joffe, *Religion, Politics, and the Origins of Palestine Refugee Relief* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 2. For more on the Red Cross’s efforts in the West Bank at this time, see Salman Abu Sitta and Terry Rempel, “The ICRC and the Detention of Palestinian Civilians in Israel’s 1948 POW/Labor Camps” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 43, 4 (2014): 11-38.

<sup>5</sup> American Friends Service Committee, *Search for Peace in the Middle East: A Report Prepared for the American Friends Service Committee* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1971), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Nancy E. Gallagher, *Quakers in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: The Dilemmas of NGO Humanitarian Activism* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 96; Jahn Gunnar, “Chairman of the Nobel Committee and Director of the Bank at the Presentation of the Nobel Peace Award for 1947”; Ilana Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief: Humanitarian Predicaments and Palestinian Refugee Politics* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 100; Ilana Feldman, “The Quaker Way: Ethical Labor and Humanitarian Relief,” *American Ethnologist* 34, 4 (2007): 689-705; and Romirowsky, *Religion, Politics and the Origin of Palestine Refugee Relief*, 2-3 and 162-163.

<sup>7</sup> Memorandum, Paul Johnson to Foreign Service Executive Committee and Palestine Sub-Committee, 9 February 1950; Archive Highlights: Palestinian Refugees in Gaza, *Archives of the American Friends Service Committee*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania [Henceforth, AAFSC].

that undergirded the U.S. Quaker organization's decision to abandon its UN-sanctioned humanitarian mandate in 1950. In order to understand this decision and its implications, this thesis asks the following questions: In what way did these personal relationships with Palestinians shape the AFSC's decision to depart from Gaza? And, more broadly, how did the U.S. Quaker's distinctive approach to humanitarianism enable them to identify and escape what recent scholars have named the "humanitarian trap"?<sup>8</sup>

The concept of a "humanitarian trap" represents the double-edged danger in which humanitarian actors can entrap themselves and the people they seek to aid in a perpetual state of dependence on foreign aid. David Rieff coined the term "humanitarian trap" in English in response to a dialogue started by French writer Jean-Christopher Rufins's book of the same title, *Le piège humanitaire*. In the book, Rufins argues against the misappropriation of humanitarian aid or its use for political ends. *Le piège humanitaire* condemned the "myth of political impartiality" in humanitarian aid, especially when working with refugees.<sup>9</sup> According to the French scholar, "the humanitarian trap" is sprung on displaced civilians who escape war only to become "trapped" by humanitarian aid. Aid then becomes a means to pacification for suffering people and a tool for external political forces to leverage for their own benefit. As Rieff suggests, supranational structures, such as the United Nations, can "use humanitarian action in ways in which it was never intended, most importantly as a substitute for Western political engagement."<sup>10</sup> In other words, a trap is placed when humanitarians preserve the appearance of

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<sup>8</sup> According to David Rieff, the idea of a "humanitarian trap" was first introduced by French writer Jean-Christopher Rufins in his book *Le piège humanitaire : Quand l'humanitaire replace la guerre* (Lattès : Paris, 1986). David Rieff, "The Humanitarian Trap," *World Policy Journal* 12, 5 (1995): 1-11; and Romirowsky, *Religion, Politics and the Origin of Palestine Refugee Relief*, 4, 6, 162-3, 165, 167, and 171.

<sup>9</sup> Rufins, *Le piège humanitaire*, 261, 317, and 336.

<sup>10</sup> Rieff, "The Humanitarian Trap," 7.

caring for the victims without helping to solve the underlying problems and in doing so they end up contributing to an unending need for aid and other forms of humanitarian intervention.

In its initiative in Gaza, the AFSC forecasted the formation of a humanitarian trap taking place and, in turn, sought to escape it. First, the AFSC refused to be involved in a long-term aid project with no humane resolution in sight. From their perspective, it became increasingly clear that the only practical solution to the Palestinian refugee crisis in Gaza were political solutions that seemingly flew in the face of the AFSC commitment to remain apolitical. As the refugee situation in Gaza quickly stagnated, AFSC members there believed that the stasis led to “moral degeneration” among themselves, as well as displaced Palestinians. Consequently, the AFSC sensed that their humanitarian role prolonged the situation in a way that contradicted Quaker ethics.<sup>11</sup>

This thesis suggests that the AFSC, by way of its aid relationships with Palestinian refugees in Gaza during the late 1940s, was ahead of its time in identifying certain pitfalls at the core of the modern practice of humanitarianism. It recognized the inefficiency of the United Nations as a humanitarian actor both at that time and in that particular place, along with the fault lines of its overarching political role in global affairs.<sup>12</sup> The AFSC’s early departure from Gaza showcased that U.S. Quakers were not seeking to expand or prolong their humanitarian mission for their own economic gains. Instead, the AFSC’s concern centred on the welfare of Palestinians

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<sup>11</sup> Romirowsky, *Religion, Politics, and the Origins of Palestine Refugee Relief*, 162-163.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Hoffman and Thomas Weiss, “Humanitarian and Practitioners: Social Science Matters,” in Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, eds. *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 264-285.

Lisa Richey explains that traditional humanitarian organizations only survive long-term when they have abandoned their oppositional politics and instead engage within the supranational system like the United Nations. The result is that the larger political and economic structure that both funds humanitarianism and makes humanitarians necessarily are rarely brought into question. Lisa Richey, 2018, *Conceptualizing “Everyday Humanitarianism”: Ethics, Affects, and Practices of Contemporary Global Helping*, 2 and 14.

over the long term. Rather than providing relief, they recognized that the UN-implemented structure of humanitarian aid in Gaza exacerbated the condition of Palestinian displacement and dispossession, as well as contributed to a growing international approach that prevented return against the overwhelming will of Palestinian refugees themselves. In other words, the AFSC concluded that the solution to the Palestinian refugee problem had to be political, not humanitarian.

A key contribution of this thesis is its historicization of the “humanitarian trap.” It provides an important historical case study refuting Rieff’s claim that before the 1994 Rwandan crisis, “never before had mainline NGOs withdrawn not simply for reasons of safety, but rather in despair over the use their work was being put to and as a way of trying to draw a line between the compromises involved in any humanitarian operation and the morally compromising position that they felt they had been trapped in.”<sup>13</sup> Almost half a century earlier, the AFSC departed Gaza for those same reasons. While in Gaza, the AFSC took a unique approach to humanitarianism that focused on grassroots relationships and the repatriation of displaced peoples. It was the AFSC’s relationship with “nameless” refugee peoples in Palestinian Gaza that moved the AFSC to abort its humanitarian commitment to Gazans for “moral reasons.”<sup>14</sup>

This thesis contributes to challenging the historical misrepresentation of humanitarianism through the application of a conceptual framework that focuses on the relationships between people who give aid and those who receive aid. Its goal is to help expose the prevailing false

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<sup>13</sup> Rieff, “The Humanitarian Trap,” 9.

<sup>14</sup> The term “nameless” refers back to its use in the AFSC Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech. American Friends Service Committee, “Nobel Peace Prize”; and Romirowsky, *Religion, Politics, and the Origins of Palestine Refugee Relief*, 2.

binary that separates the “humanitarian liberator” and the “helpless refugee.”<sup>15</sup> This begins by demonstrating how Palestinian refugees in Gaza were not the “helpless,” or passive, actors that humanitarian narratives and photography commonly perpetuate.<sup>16</sup> Instead, it shows how Palestinian refugees were active agents that shaped international dimensions of the Arab-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. In the process, this thesis unearths an early historical situation whereby the morality of modern humanitarianism was simultaneously questioned by both the “recipients” and the “givers.” As a result, it will argue that the relationship between Palestinian refugees and U.S. Quakers in the Gaza Strip following the Nakba (Arabic for “catastrophe”) evidences a key historical shift in humanitarian thinking in the world.

Through an analysis of how Palestinian refugees impacted a U.S. humanitarian organization’s work and self-perception, this thesis hopes to humanize both the humanitarians and the people they served. Regrettably people who receive humanitarian aid, past and present, are reduced to statistics and images in curated photographs, exacerbating their victimization, voice-lessness, and dehumanization.<sup>17</sup> Attempting to both acknowledge and avoid this disturbing

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<sup>15</sup> For more on how humanitarian intervention led refugees to be perceived as voiceless victims, see Liisa Milkki, “Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization,” *Cultural Anthropology* 11, 3 (1996): 337-404; and David Kennedy, *The Dark Side of Virtue: Reassessing International Humanitarianism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 91-93.

The nature of historical study on humanitarianism tends to elevate the “giver” because records are mainly available in the archives of humanitarian organizations, thus representing their viewpoints. For such instances, see: James L. Barton’s *The Story of Near East Relief: An Interpretation* (New York: MacMillan, 1930); Gallagher, *Quakers in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*; and Wriggins, *Picking up the Pieces from Portugal to Palestine*.

<sup>16</sup> Maurice Jr. Labelle, “‘The American People Know So Little’: The Palestine Arab Refugee Office and the Challenges of Anti-Orientalism in the United States, 1955–1962,” *Mashriq & Mahjar Journal of Middle East and North African Migration Studies* 5, 2 (2018): 91-93.

<sup>17</sup> For more on the history of moral justification for humanitarianism, see: Didier Fassin, Translated by Rachel Gomme. *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Kennedy, *The Dark Side of Virtue*; and Randa Farah, “The Marginalization of Palestinian Refugees,” in Nicklaus Steiner et al., eds. *Problems of Protection: The UNHCR, Refugees and Human Rights* (London: Routledge, 2003), 155-74.

tendency, this research focuses on the moments of contact between AFSC personnel and Palestinian refugees, along with their impacts on U.S. Quaker ideas about the politics of humanitarianism. In the process, it also utilizes Quakerism's distinctive approach to humanitarianism to show how AFSC aid workers sought to listen to and raise the voices of the people they served.

## **Context**

The insidious display of inhumanity during World War II, from the grotesque genocide of the Shoah (Hebrew word for “catastrophe”), concentration camps, civilian bombings and nuclear bombs, created a new international sentimentality for protecting civilians, the dispossessed, and overall human dignity.<sup>18</sup> The Holocaust, in particular, discredited xenophobia and encouraged nation-states around the world to recognize the inherent moral value of human life. The 1948 UN Convention on the Presentation and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide assigned all human lives equal value and mandated that each member of the United Nations commit to their protection. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) that followed suit shortly thereafter claimed fundamental human rights to be universally protected for the first time.<sup>19</sup>

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For a current perspective on the shifting morality of humanitarianism, see: Lisa Richey, “Conceptualizing ‘Everyday Humanitarianism’: Ethics, Affects, and Practices of Contemporary Global Helping,” *New Political Science* 40, 4 (2018): 625-639.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Barnett and Thomas Weiss, “Humanitarianism: A Brief History of the Present,” in Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, eds. *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 22-24.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, “Convention on the Presentation and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,” Accessed 22 November 2020. <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide-convention.shtml>; and United Nations, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” Accessed 22 November 2020, <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

As international consensus grew upon the notion that all human life's had innate value, and human rights language began to consolidate itself in the late 1940s, the United Nations worked with Western non-state actors to undertake relief efforts in non-Western lands. UN General Assembly Resolution 212 part III, titled "Assistance to Palestine Refugees," showcased its commitment to humanitarianism by stating that "the alleviation of conditions of starvation and distress among the Palestine refugees is one of the minimum conditions for the success of the efforts of the United Nations to bring peace to that land."<sup>20</sup> Consequently, in the former British mandate of Palestine, the United Nations established the non-operational agency of the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugee (UNRPR) in November 1948 to recruit non-state organizations and coordinate aid distribution in areas where displaced Palestinians sought sanctuary during and after the first Arab-Israeli war of 1947-49.<sup>21</sup>

For Palestinians, the Arabic term Nakba signifies the catastrophic displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who fled from their homes in fear of the acute danger of the first Arab-Israeli war and news of indiscriminate Israeli killing in Palestinian villages, like Deir Yassin in mid-April 1948.<sup>22</sup> Displaced Palestinians left with the impression that they would be able to return to their homes and properties following the war's end. The newly created state of Israel, however, steadfastly opposed Palestinian return. Permanent displacement and

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<sup>20</sup>United Nations General Assembly, "Assistance to Palestine Refugees: A/RES/ 212 (III)," Passed on 19 November 1948, Accessed 24 December 2020:

<https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/EDC284B4A5508FD7852560E500670213>.

<sup>21</sup> Ilana Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief: Humanitarian Predicaments and Palestinian Refugee Politics* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 5-7.

<sup>22</sup> Ilana Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief*, 6; and Benny Morris, "The Historiography of Deir Yassin," *Journal of Israeli History* 24, 1 (Spring 2005): 99. For more on the Deir Yassin and similar acts of ethnic cleansing in 1948-49, see Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, 128-140.

dispossession of Indigenous Arabs from Palestine was inherent in Zionism's settler colonial ideology.<sup>23</sup>

During the latter half of 1948, international concern mounted over the emerging "Palestinian refugee problem." Such apprehension translated into international pressure, as the number of refugees swelled and their situations turned increasingly dire. The "problem" soon rose to the forefront of all internationally led discussions regarding an armistice between Israel and its Arab neighbours. Arab governments endeavoured to make the repatriation of refugees a primary condition for peace negotiations with Israel. In 1949, the pressure resulted in a short-lived, underwhelming, and ultimately retracted offer from Israel in which Tel Aviv agreed to the return of 100,000 of Palestinian refugees and their resettlement in a place of its choosing.<sup>24</sup> Thus with reintegration off the table in Israel and adequate resettlement in other Arab states also being either denied or rejected, the plight of refugees exacerbated.

Initiatives like the UNRPR in Palestinian lands, undertaken amid an emerging human rights revolution globally, resulted in a rapid increase in humanitarianism's prestige and power.<sup>25</sup> In an era of decolonization, a new global humanitarian practice took shape during the United Nation's early years. This secularizing shift in the humanitarian imagination diverged from

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<sup>23</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 588. For more on Zionist settler colonialism, see Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London: Verso, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, 599; and Nur Masalha, "Dis/Solving' the Palestinian Refugee Problem: Israel 'Resettlement' Plans in the First Decade of the State (1948-1958)," in Ilan Pappé and Jamil Hilal eds. *Across the Wall: Narratives of Israeli-Palestinian History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 107. For more on the 100,000 offer, see Varda Schiffer, "The 1949 Israeli Offer to Repatriate 100,000 Palestine Refugees," *Middle East Focus* 9, 2 (1986): 14-20.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Redfield and Erica Bornstein, "An Introduction to the Anthropology of Humanitarianism," in Erica Bornstein and Peter Redfield, eds. *Forces of Compassion: Humanitarianism between Ethics and Politics* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2010), 18-20; and Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 101-103.

overtly religious roots and centred instead on utopian principles of neutrality and what today would be labelled human rights.<sup>26</sup> Humanitarian praxis was no longer predominantly rooted in religious goals, such as proselytizing, nor was it regularly undertaken by independently funded religious non-state actors. Instead, humanitarianism transformed into an UN-centered bureaucracy anchored in the collectively more palatable ideals of a secularized humanism.

While postwar humanitarians reframed their work in human rights language, they failed to escape the fundamentally flawed paternalistic tendencies of their religious forebears. Although commonly citing a “shared humanity” —rather than God—to explain their engagement and care for refugees, they still mainly saw humanitarianism as something that was done for and to others, not done *with them*.<sup>27</sup> An inherent contradiction in the legacy of humanitarian assistance continued to bifurcate “helpers” and “recipients.” In the words of Barbara Harrell-Bond, a social scientist who founded the Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford university, this dualistic approach traps both groups into an “asymmetrical relationships in a structure in which accountability is skewed in the direction of the donors who pay for the assistance, rather than the refugees.”<sup>28</sup> As such, the UN machinery perceived its sponsored assistance to Palestinian refugees as “charity,” rather than as a means of enabling so-called individual rights and resolving their collective

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<sup>26</sup> Samuel Moyn argues, “[h]umanitarianism, with its origins in Christian pity and Enlightenment sympathy through its high era of imperialist entanglement in the ninetieth century, had developed in historical independence of rights talk.” Thus, despite the two terms “humanitarianism” and “human rights” having become amalgamated, this did not happen until decades later during the latter half of the twentieth century. Immediately following World War II, humanitarian actors did not consider themselves as doing “human rights” work. Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 220.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Barbara Harrell-Bond, “Can Humanitarian Work with Refugees Be Humane?” *Human Rights Quarterly* 24, 1 (2002): 53 and 55.

plight. And as the Nakba unfolded, the basic needs of 960,000 Palestinian refugees necessitated the establishment of a “humanitarian apparatus.”<sup>29</sup>

The AFSC, which sought to buck this trend, engaged in humanitarian work with Palestinians in Gaza when the United Nations took on the leading responsibility of confronting humanitarian crises worldwide. Quakerism moved the AFSC to engage with Palestinian refugees in a way that differed from the predominant humanitarian imagination embodied by many fellow religious groups.<sup>30</sup> While most Christian denominations regard it as critical to imitate the life of Christ in the form of good works, General Conference Quakers differed from most other Christian denominations in doing this *without proselytizing*. This less prevalent Christian perspective and practice was a long-standing features of the Quakerism. Since the AFSC answered to the Friends General Conference, their values aligned with the broader Quaker community. Other key aspects were the Quakers’ commitment to egalitarianism, pacifism, humanitarianism, and peace-making. Following the principle that there is “that of God” in everyone, Quakers adopted a radical egalitarianism both in their processes and in their relationships with non-Quakers. This was also expressed in the work of AFSC. According to this

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<sup>29</sup> Romirowsky, *Religion, Politics, and the Origins of Palestine Refugee Relief*, 2; and Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief*, 5-7.

<sup>30</sup> For more on Quaker approaches to “the politics of help,” see: American Friends Service Committee, *Steps to Peace: A Quaker View of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Philadelphia: AFSC, 1951); Robert Byrd, *Quaker Ways in Foreign Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960); Neave Brayshaw, *The Quakers: Their Story and Message* (York, England: William Sessions, 1969); and Howard Brinton, *Friends for Three Hundred Years* (Wallingford, PA.: Pendle Hill Publications, 1965).

To consider the AFSC’s specific approach to humanitarianism, see: Guy Aiken, “Feeding Germany: American Quakers in the Weimar Republic,” *Diplomatic History* 43, 4 (2019): 597-617; American Friends Service Committee, *A Compassionate Peace: A Future for the Middle East* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); Larry Ingles, ““Truly Radical, Non-Violent, Friendly Approaches’: Challenges to the American Friends Service Committee,” *Quaker History* 105, 1 (2016): 1-21; and Clarence Pickett, *For More Than Bread: An Autobiographical Account of Twenty-Two Years’ Work with the American Friends Service Committee* (Boston: Little, 1953).

principle, those they worked with were equally important to discerning what should be done. This made a deep interpersonal relationship with aid recipients an indispensable element of their relief work.<sup>31</sup>

Like other Protestant denominations and similarly enticed by Orientalist viewpoints, a desire to physically reconnect with the land of the Gospel spurred U.S. Quakers to be active in Palestine during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Eli and Sybil Jones, the aunt and uncle of AFSC's founder Rufus Jones, opened their first of six Quaker-funded girl schools in Ramallah in 1869. Although spreading the faith through direct evangelism was not central to U.S. Quakers, their theology of individual action resulted in establishing institutions, such as the schools in Ottoman Palestine, that taught "Christian values." As a result, Quaker schools faced controversy as locals waged accusations for alleged missionizing and Western imperialism.<sup>32</sup> In 1924, Palestinian Muslim leaders called for the closure of the missionary schools. In response, U.S. Quakers consolidated their smaller rural schools into one larger-established school in Ramallah. In 1927, Palestinian nationalists demanded more control of the AFSC missionary school, leading Quakers to appoint the school's first Palestinian principal Khalil Totah.<sup>33</sup> Henceforth, the

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<sup>31</sup> C. H. Mike Yarrow, *Quaker Experiences in International Conciliation* (London: Yale University Press, 1978), 1 and 5; and Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief*, 99-100.

'The phrase "that of God in every man" has been widely used in the twentieth century as an expression which signifies the central truth of the Quaker message. Many present-day Quakers, when asked what the Quakers believe, are likely to reply: "They believe that there is that of God in every man.'" For more context read: Lewis Benson, "'That of God in Every Man" -- What Did George Fox Mean by It?'," *Quaker Religious Thought* 12, 2 (Spring 1970), retyped for electronic distribution by Simon Watson. Accessed 28 September 2021: <http://www.qhpress.org/essays/togiem.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Ela Greenberg, *Preparing the Mothers of Tomorrow: Education and Islam in Mandate Palestine* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 85-86.

<sup>33</sup> Gallagher, *Quakers in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 24.

incorporation of Totah into Quaker leadership in Palestine engendered an important historical shift in the humanitarian relationship between Palestinians and U.S. Quakers.

The AFSC officially began operations in the Gaza Strip in early 1949 under the auspices of the UNRPR. Despite being given the smallest UNRPR operation in Palestinian lands, the AFSC's involvement in Gaza was its most significant humanitarian effort to date and marked the first time it relied on external funding.<sup>34</sup> As the first Arab-Israeli war of 1947-49 scaled down, the Palestinian Gaza Strip became unofficially governed by neighbouring Egypt. The terms of the latter's so-called administrative rule over the former territory were "profoundly unclear." As the Nakba continued unabated even though a cessation of conflict between Israel and neighbouring Arab states was in negotiation, Gaza's political status hung in the balance. Under UN Resolution 181's provisions of partition, the Palestinian territory was to be part of a newly-established "Arab" state—albeit in an arbitrary and non-Palestinian-governed way. The newly established state of Israel's military annexation of lands in the "Arab"-allocated areas of the former British mandate nullified the implementation of the United Nation's partition plan. As such, the United States suggested that Israel take over Gaza to repatriate refugees. Meanwhile, Britain contemplated turning it into a base for its troops stationed in the neighboring Egyptian Suez Canal zone. Perhaps in response to such Western machinations, a contingent of Palestinians appealed to Egypt to annex the territory. In the end, Egypt insisted on governing Gaza as a distinctly Palestinian space without ever claiming formal sovereignty over the strip of territory.<sup>35</sup>

Strict Egyptian oversight in Gaza was short-lived. Like the AFSC's aid work there and the UNRPR more broadly, Egypt's unilateral administration of the Gaza Strip ended in May

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<sup>34</sup> Gallagher, *Quakers in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 56.

<sup>35</sup> Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule, 1917-1967* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 7-10.

1950. At that time, the newly created United Nations Relief and Works Administration (UNRWA) undertook an ambiguous co-supervision with Egypt in Gaza. Egypt refused to claim sovereignty over Gaza, instead seeing its administration only as a “placeholder” for a future Palestinian state. This fresh administrative arrangement left British officials to problematically identify the Gaza Strip as “res nullius, i.e. nobody’s property.”<sup>36</sup>

As part of its responsibilities, UNRWA took over the emergency relief—that is, temporary relief—for Palestine refugees previously coordinated under the supports of the UNRPR and undertaken by the AFSC. UNRWA's establishment stemmed from the ideals outlined in the UN General Assembly's Resolution 194.<sup>37</sup> Passed in December 1948, this resolution stated that “refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.”<sup>38</sup> UNRWA, as a result, organized itself as a temporary agency to be operational for either a year or until a solution to the Palestinian refugee problem was found that safeguarded the right of return outlined in UN Resolution 194. Whereas Egyptian association with Gaza ended in 1967 following Israel’s formal occupation of the Palestinian

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<sup>36</sup> Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, 10-11.

<sup>37</sup> Resolution 194 was passed by the following vote. In Favour: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, France, Greece, Haiti, Honduras, Iceland, Liberia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, Venezuela; Against: Afghanistan, Byelorussian SSR, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Ukrainian SSR, Union of Soviet Socialist Republic, Yemen, Yugoslavia; Abstained: Bolivia, Burma, Chile, Costa Rica, Guatemala, India, Iran, Mexico.

<sup>38</sup> United Nations, A/RES/194 (III), 11 December 1948.” Accessed on 11 November 2020, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/C758572B78D1CD0085256BCF0077E51A>.

territory, UNRWA operations persist to this day and taunt the idealism of its early days that it would be a short-term solution. Palestinian refugees remain ensnared in statelessness; both they and UNRWA remain trapped in a state of humanitarian stagnation.

## **Historiography**

Existing scholarship of the AFSC's time in Gaza overlooks the role refugees played in the AFSC's departure. Nancy Gallagher's *Quakers in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* is a broad history anchored in the perspective of U.S. Quakers throughout the entirety of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It provides a satisfactory chronological recounting of AFSC involvement with UNRPR and beyond. However, the voices of refugee peoples are sparsely present, except in quotes such as "the Gazans found AFSC volunteers to be, 'a breath of fresh air.'"<sup>39</sup> The perspectives of Palestinians offered in Gallagher's work either simply reinforce the exceptionalism of AFSC members or demonstrate Palestinian vulnerability. As a result, Gallagher unintentionally mispositions aid recipients as either helpless victims or props to elevate the AFSC's actions.

In contrast to the generous lens provided by Gallagher, Romirowsky and Joffe's *Religion, Politics, and the Origin of Palestine Refugee Relief* is critical and at times even cynical of the U.S. Quaker approach in Gaza. It argues that AFSC workers were not strictly in Gaza to provide humanitarian aid; they also had a political agenda that tried to exercise its influence on issues such as pacifism and disarmament. Romirowsky and Joffe question the AFSC's motivations in Gaza by contending that the United States asked the U.S. Quaker group to remain in Gaza for

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<sup>39</sup> Gallagher, *Quakers in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 94.

“[t]he interests of American Oil Companies.”<sup>40</sup> *Religion, Politics, and the Origin of Palestine Refugee Relief* also claims that AFSC abandoned its religious roots to become radical and political in the late 1940s. Romirowsky and Joffe attribute “this new direction” primarily to a leading U.S. Quaker, Clarence Pickett.<sup>41</sup>

Ilana Feldman, a professor of Anthropology and History, has written three books that intersect with the AFSC’s work in Gaza in the late 1940s. *Life Lived in Relief: Humanitarian Predicaments and Palestinian Refugee Politics* explores how humanitarianism affected and continues to affect the lives of Palestinian refugees, including those who reside outside of the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, *Governing Gaza* and *Police Encounters: Security and Surveillance in Gaza Under Egyptian Rule* both focus on the complex governmental structure overseeing the Gaza Strip between 1917 and 1967. Distinguishing characteristics of the three books are the inclusion of the ethnographic work Feldman conducted with Palestinian refugees. Unlike Gallagher, Romirowsky, and Joffe, Feldman also included records from the UNRWA archive in Jordan.

## **Methodology**

This thesis relies heavily on colonial archives since the transient impermanence of historical refugeedom often leaves little space for extensive record keeping. It follows the approach crafted in Keith Watenpaugh’s *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism*. Watenpaugh’s critical approach aims to avoid “simply repackaging the history of a non-western people as part of a larger diplomatic or institutional history in which

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<sup>40</sup> Letter, Arthur Ringland (Department of State Executive Director) to Clarence Pickett, 3 January 1951; Box (Country – Israel: Proposed Gaza Project) Foreign Service 1951, Country-Indonesia (STA – General) series, AAFSC.

<sup>41</sup> Romirowsky, *Religion, Politics and the Origin of Palestine Refugee Relief*, 30-33.

Europeans are the principle actors.” As such, he addresses the challenge of writing cultural history with sources not written by that cultural group. Watenpaugh asks: “How can we use Western state, intergovernmental, and foundational archives to write about humanitarianism in a way that does more than repackage a kind of diplomatic or institutional history in which the history of non-Western people is retold from a Eurocentric perspective?”<sup>42</sup>

Seeking to curtail a prevalent limitation in humanitarian scholarship, Watenpaugh employs a “framework of empathy” that actively looks for and listens to the “aid receiver” and interrogates the ways that archives construct their own narratives, along with the places allocated to humanitarian recipients. Such an approach allowed Watenpaugh to write a historical account of modern humanitarianism in the Middle East that critically utilized the materials available in colonial archives.<sup>43</sup>

Like Watenpaugh, this thesis approaches documentation in a critically empathetic way. Alas, it also shares Watenpaugh's limited access to sources outside colonial archives. Palestinian perspectives are overwhelmingly filtered through Western archives, interviews, and research. Most source materials on Palestinians came from archives in North America and were written in English. The central locations were the AFSC's archive in Philadelphia, Haverford Library's special collection on Quaker materials, and the United Nations archives in New York City. These archives contain a diverse array of diplomatic letters, personal letters, journals, meeting minutes, including photographs with detailed descriptions.

## **Chapter Outlines**

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<sup>42</sup> Keith Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Oakland, Ca: University of California Press, 2016), 20-23.

<sup>43</sup> Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones*, 23.

Chapter one examines a series of three questions. First, what motives did the United Nations have for inviting the American Friends Service Committee to distribute aid in the Gaza Strip? Second, why did the AFSC accept an invitation they knew would tax their resources? Lastly, why did individual AFSC members agree to volunteer for this mission, and what prompted their invitations? Exploring these critical questions will reveal both the organizations' initial motives for taking on the aid project and what they deemed to be their highest priority objectives. Revealing that, while the United Nations and AFSC's narratives often retroactively claim the only reason they went into Gaza was to aid and help the great human need, their archival records reveal a startlingly more complex narrative. This new account reflects how diplomatic motives blemished the humanitarian action in Gaza. Furthermore, the motivations that AFSC members revealed in their stories adds a layer of complexity and humanity. Despite leading with good intentions, the impact the humanitarians had was limited by various factors, including their own short-sightedness, lack of resources and training, and lastly oversight by the United Nations.

Chapter two examines how Palestinians found themselves displaced to Gaza and the AFSC's ensuing humanitarian project there, from its start on New Year's Day 1949 to the Quaker's official departure in the spring of April 1950. It traces the supposed gradual "moral degeneration" of Palestinian living in Gaza area refugee camps.<sup>44</sup> Centring around the voices of Palestinian refugees when possible and the AFSC's novel humanitarian practice, which focused on interpersonal relationships, the chapter shows how a unique environment was created within the refugee camps and amongst Indigenous Gazans. A channel was created through AFSC for

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<sup>44</sup> Operational Report, AFSC, December 1949; file #67, Foreign Service 1949: Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*, 4.

Palestinian refugees' concerns to be heard outside the Strip. While AFSC cultivated this atmosphere, their depictions of Gazans were not without problems. For example, staff were prone to using broad generalizations that invoked the racialization of “the Arab.” Generalizations about Palestinian refugees undermined the agency that refugees exhibited in shaping the aid they were receiving. Nonetheless, the problematic aspects of the U.S. Quakers’ relationship with Palestinians were in many ways quite progressive within their historical context. Ultimately these relationships still led to the AFSC’s withdrawal from Gaza, its organizational refusal to renew its contract with the United Nations, and a U.S. Quaker evasion of the humanitarian trap.

Chapter three traces the process by which the Gaza Unit’s goal of repatriating Palestinian refugees to their homes was replaced with failed plans for resettlement and their so-called rehabilitation. It outlines how AFSC’s initial optimism that the United Nations would speedily resolve the “refugee problem” dissolved shortly after the transition from UNRPR to UNRWA. The U.S. Quakers’ reliance on satellite leadership from Philadelphia and their initial confidence in UNRWA fractured both internal AFSC relationships and external ones with Palestinian refugees. The fractures were exacerbated by paternalism under the AFSC’s new “rehabilitation” focus. These various challenges led U.S. Quakers to lose sight of the Palestinian refugee’s communicated desires and needs. Instead, they often found themselves operating as vessels for western imperialism until they ultimately departed from Gaza, never having made a major contribution to the resettlement or reintegration of Palestinian refugees.

## CHAPTER 1

### **Mixed Motives: The AFSC's Humanitarian Approaches to the "Palestine Challenge"**

Before the first Arab-Israeli war of 1947-49 and the Nakba, the city of Gaza served as a regional marketplace whose breadbasket overflowed with citrus, wheat, and barley.<sup>45</sup> The majority of its Palestinian population worked in the nearby countryside. Many Gazan landowners and farmers owned or worked on citrus groves and pastures outside the area later known as the Gaza Strip. The Nakba drastically altered the area's socio-economic life. Local residents in Gaza were swift and generous in responding to the fleeing needs of Palestinian refugees. They donated money, food, clothing, and other supplies. Indigenous Gazans opened up their homes, religious buildings, and public buildings for shelter. One local hospital was set aside exclusively for the use of the refugees.<sup>46</sup>

In spite of such hospitality, local residents' ability to aid refugees was woefully inadequate. The minimal short-term provisions withered as Gaza was essentially cut off from its historical economic network with the establishment of Israel. As a result, the local Gazan economy was ravaged. Within a few months, the small area of the Gaza Strip depended nearly entirely on imports.<sup>47</sup> Simultaneously, the influx of Palestinian refugees, categorized largely as unskilled labourers, joined some 80,000 local residents. This created a surplus of "unskilled labour" and drove wages for the few available jobs down and below a livable salary. The effect was an economic disaster for the Palestinian populace, Indigenous residents and refugees alike.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Beryl Cheal, "Refugees in the Gaza Strip, December 1948-May 1950," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18, 1 (1988): 139.

<sup>46</sup> Cheal, "Refugees in the Gaza Strip, December 1948-May 1950," 138-140.

<sup>47</sup> Cheal, "Refugees in the Gaza Strip, December 1948-May 1950," 139.

<sup>48</sup> Clarence Pickett, *For More Than Bread*, 266; and Cheal, "Refugees in the Gaza Strip, December 1948-May 1950," 139.

The escalating humanitarian crisis in Gaza gained global attention as the local Gazan people and regional Arab states were unable to sustain their relief efforts. As a result, the United Nations intervened and arranged an agreement with the American Friends Service Committee to commence their aid work in Gaza. The arrangement was supposed to be temporary, as both the United Nations and the AFSC believed that a political solution to the Palestinian “refugee problem” was imminent.<sup>49</sup>

As the United Nations General Assembly determined the refugee crisis in Palestine an emergency, it called for “immediate and substantial assistance to the refugees on a completely non-political basis.”<sup>50</sup> Trygve Lie, the first Secretary-General of the United Nations, pleaded for volunteer organizations to help in the Holy Land. Lie supported claims by the recently assassinated UN mediator Count Bernadotte, who elucidated that assisting these refugees represented “the choice between saving the lives of many thousands or permitting them to die. [Since] the situation of the majority of these hapless refugees [was] already tragic... [F]or the international community to accept its share of responsibility for the refugees of Palestine is one of the minimum conditions for the success of its efforts to bring peace to that land.” Bernadotte’s plea urged for aid as a type of reparation; a prerequisite to “bring peace to the land.”<sup>51</sup> Yet

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<sup>49</sup> Cheal, “Refugees in the Gaza Strip, December 1948-May 1950,” 149.

<sup>50</sup> Elmore Jackson, “Meeting Human Needs in the Near East,” *New York Herald Tribune*, Foreign Service 1949: Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>51</sup> At the time of his assassination Count Bernadotte was serving as the U.N. Security Council mediator for the Arab-Israel conflict and was well known for negotiating the release of approximately 31,000 prisoners from German concentration camps. In an eighty-page report titled “Mission to Palestine,” the AFSC and Friends Service Council of London expressed their awe and shock regarding the assassination of Folke Bernadotte by noting: “I had not written three words of these notes before the radio announced the news of Bernadotte’s assassination, surely the consummation of evil. We owe sanity a debt and love a sacrifice for the life of this good man.” Report: Mission to Palestine, April – May 1948, James G. Vail, Kendall G. Kimberland, and Edger B. Castle; Archive Highlights: Palestine Refugees in Gaza, *AAFSC*.

Progress Report of the United Nations Acting Mediator for Palestine, Submitted to the Secretary-General for Transmission to the Members of the United Nations, 18 October 1948” (Supplement to Document A/648 (Part Three), Accessed 16 February 2021: <https://unispal.un.org/pdfs/A689.pdf>.

Bernadotte's conclusion undermined Trygve Lie's subsequent call for a "completely non-political" humanitarian efforts because the assassinated UN mediator's claims intertwined aid with political motives.

The United Nations was not prepared to handle the large scale of this humanitarian operation. For the sake of practicality, it needed external help. Lie recognized this need and recommended that the United Nations not set up its own elaborate and expensive organization to handle relief assistance in the Palestinian territories of Gaza and the West Bank. Instead, the Secretary-General sought out "non-political, non-governmental, volunteer organizations already experienced in field operations."<sup>52</sup> The United Nation's intention was to create the "fastest least cumbersome least expensive and most efficient organization to rush aid to the Middle East."<sup>53</sup> Administrative machinery was swiftly set into motion by the newly appointed director of UNRPR Stanton Griffis, who put Lie's proposed plan in motion.

Within a few days of his appointment, Griffis signed agreements with three non-state agencies, including the AFSC, to handle the upcoming relief projects' distribution and field operations for Palestinian refugees. However, only four months into the work, Griffis admitted in a press release how the UN-sanctioned "program is dependent on governmental donations... [which] have come in more slowly than expected." As a result, UNRPR only provided the "minimum required to keep refugees alive." It relied on the connections of the volunteer non-state organizations to provide the items that the United Nations could not fund.<sup>54</sup> Despite

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<sup>52</sup> Elmore Jackson, "Meeting Human Needs in the Near East," *New York Herald Tribune*, Foreign Service 1949: Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>53</sup> Bulletin, Plight of Palestine Refugees: United Nations Aid Plan in Operation, *Reprint from the United Nations Bulletin* 6, 3 (1949), Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>54</sup> Report, United Nations Palestine Relief Head Commends Agencies' Work in the Near East, United Nations Department of Public Information: Lake Success, New York, Press Release (PAL/492), 16 April 1949.

recruiting volunteer organizations providing the “least expensive” means of distribution aid, the UNRPR program remained severely underfunded. While urgency and cost-effective solutions were significant motivators for the United Nations extending their invitations to non-government organizations like the AFSC, the United Nations held ulterior motives.

In Gaza, and by association the West Bank, the United Nations sought to bolster its reputation and maintain political influence. In official UN imaginations, the Holy Land was a strategic asset. In a personal memoir reflecting on the United Nations’ early work in Palestine, Trygve Lie discussed the complexities of the “Palestine Challenge.” Coloured with Eurocentrism, the UN secretary general blamed myriad complications for the trouble in the area. Issues such as religious tension and extreme nationalism mired the so-called Palestinian problem. According to Lie, these were “always strongest in young states.” Lie also invoked that it was a “conflict between the old feudalism of the East and twentieth-century social concepts,” the “human rights issues,” and lastly, Western interests in oil exploration and exploitation. Because the so-called Palestine challenge was so incredibly complex, political capital was to be won by whoever “solved it.” Trygve Lie, as such, chased such prestige for the United Nations. He coveted the area, explaining that “[i]f [we] wished to do something positive through the United Nations, here [in the Holy Land] was the place to do it.”<sup>55</sup>

Despite being a young organization, the United Nations was already at the center of negotiations for various major crises across the globe. Having just risen from the ashes of the dissolved League of Nations and its mandate system, which in the case of Palestine had “disintegrated before the UN could make up its mind on how to replace it.”<sup>56</sup> Consequently, the

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<sup>55</sup> Trygve Lie, *In the Cause of Peace: Seven Years with the United Nations* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954), 158-159.

<sup>56</sup> Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 127.

infant United Nations faced the sudden collapse of British Palestine in 1948 and moved to aggressively target some internationally acceptable solution to the delicate Arab-Zionist conflict there.<sup>57</sup> The United Nations General Assembly perceived a partition of the land as the best solution. It proposed a plan calling for the creation of separate Jewish and Arab states and the acceptance of international status for Jerusalem with free access for all races and religions. This United Nations plan, outlined in Resolution 181, was approved by a two-thirds vote of its members.<sup>58</sup> The partition was not accepted by the local Palestinian Arabs, nor by any of the neighbouring Arab states.<sup>59</sup>

As a result, Palestinian frustrations started to haunt the United Nations' work and the perception of their intentions in the Holy Land and its environs around Gaza. Palestinians demonstrated an ever-present skepticism, stemming from the United Nations' support of Resolution 181. The proposed partition plan left some to claim that Palestinian Arabs felt as though they were facing unjust disposition and paying for Europe's war crimes committed against the Jews.<sup>60</sup> The mounting Palestinian skepticism and disfavour meant that if the United

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<sup>57</sup> American Friends Service Committee, *Search for Peace in the Middle East: A Report Prepared for the American Friends Service Committee* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1971), 9.

<sup>58</sup> Resolution 181 was passed by the following vote. In favour: Australia, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Canada, Costa Rica, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, France, Guatemala, Haiti, Iceland, Liberia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Sweden, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, Union of South Africa, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela. Against: Afghanistan, Cuba, Egypt, Greece, India, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, Yemen. Abstained: Argentina, Chile, China, Colombia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Mexico, United Kingdom, Yugoslavia.

<sup>59</sup> American Friends Service Committee, *Search for Peace in the Middle East: A Report Prepared for the American Friends Service Committee* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1971), 9.

<sup>60</sup> The AFSC adds a religious dimension to this claim stating that, "The Palestinian Arabs, chiefly a Muslim people, concluded that they were being required to pay for the anti-Semitic sins of the Christian West," in American Friends Service Committee, *Search for Peace in the Middle East: A Report Prepared for the American Friends Service Committee* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1971), 9; Shira Robinson, *Citizen Stranger: Palestinians and the Birth of Israel's Liberal Settler State* (Stanford University Press: Sandford California, 2013), 22-23.

Nations wanted to continue exercising influence in the area, it would be to its benefit to operate in a more covert manner. UN officials conceived that supporting initiatives with goodwill reputations like humanitarianism would prove to be a good fit for the Palestinian situation.

Thus, the United Nations pursued non-state actors for its aid project in Israel/Palestine capable of a large-scale humanitarian operation. In the process, it attempted to counteract its increasingly undesirable reputation with Palestinians and in the Arab Middle East more broadly. By inviting “non-political and non-governmental organizations” to reframe its humanitarian mandate, the United Nations sought to depoliticize and universalize the appeal of its initiative. The UN motivation to refocus the work on humanitarian efforts, instead of political ones, is transparent within the United Nations’ public call for assistance: “[t]his task is a humanitarian one—the saving of over half a million souls from exposure and starvation. It is not a political problem helpless people are starving and their race is the human race.”<sup>61</sup>

In summary, the reasons that the United Nations extended the invitation to the American Friends Service Committee included practical motivations linked to the international organization’s limited budget and insufficient humanitarian infrastructure. The added complexity of an emergent Palestinian distrust towards the United Nations and questions regarding how a non-state actor could be trusted to take on humanitarian work without enacting the will of the (mostly Western) nation-states comprised the United Nations decision-making. The United Nations perceived the AFSC as a natural fit to help fulfill the international organization’s humanitarian mandate.

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<sup>61</sup> Bulletin, *Plight of Palestine Refugees: United Nations Aid Plan in Operation*, *Reprint from the United Nations Bulletin* 6, 3 (1949), Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, AAFSC.

## **Why AFSC Accepted the Invitation**

Why did the AFSC so willingly accept the UN's invitation? According to meeting minutes from late November 1948, the U.S. Quaker group worried that their involvement in the UN mission would strain AFSC resource capacity "to the utmost." They also feared that the risk of failure would engender public consequences, as they would be in the "limelight" of the world. Even if they had some success, they "shall certainly not satisfy everyone." Despite these trepidations, the pros outweighed the cons in U.S. Quaker deliberations. They believed rejecting the invite would be "a grave decision" to the detriment of themselves, as well as the United Nations because "[s]uccess in Palestine [was] a vital necessity for the power of the UN." The Quakers believed that by succeeding in Gaza, the United Nations would garner praise and trust from the international community. This, in turn, would allow it to further intervene in world affairs in a "non-combative way" and make peace.<sup>62</sup> This was a top priority in the eyes of the AFSC.

U.S. Quakers felt that the "opportunity to demonstrate the power of the non-violent approach [was] enormous. [Trusting that] the political people have turned to [them] because they believe [the AFSC had] something more to offer than merely a politically neutral position." Fifty years later, this same motivation for proving the efficacy of a non-violent approach was echoed in the words of AFSC and Gaza operation alum Alwin Holtz. In an oral history interview conducted by the AFSC, Holtz revealed: "[t]here was the worry that nobody had ever proven:

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<sup>62</sup> Meeting Minutes, Foreign Service Executive Committee Meeting, 17 November 1948, submitted by Julia E. Branson, *AAFSC*.

Could pacifists go into a military zone and survive and do anything? And boy, oh, boy, we proved it [was effective].”<sup>63</sup>

Two months after formally accepting the United Nations urgent plea for aid, the AFSC published another layered reason for agreeing to head to Gaza in the *New York Herald Tribune*. The article challenged the contemporary narrative, which retroactively claimed the only reason the AFSC went to Gaza was because of “the great human need.” According to U.S Quaker Elmore Jackson, who penned the *Tribune* piece, the AFSC did so “because it appeared that a framework had been found through which the combined resources of governments and voluntary groups could be quickly mobilized to meet th[e] need[s]” of Palestinian refugees. “As the program develops,” Jackson noted, “it will be illuminating to see whether this combined effort, which makes direct administrative use of international voluntary agencies in the distribution of public funds, constitutes to any degree a useful pattern for future international relief administration.”<sup>64</sup> Heading into Gaza, the AFSC saw its aid work as an experiment on the effectiveness of depoliticizing United Nation funds by adding a filter in which external organizations with virtuous reputations managed the operational aspect of the international body’s humanitarian projects.

Jackson’s *Tribune* article repeatedly separated the distinctly humanitarian role the AFSC saw itself playing in Gaza from that of the more politically driven managerial role of the United Nations. Since the United Nations was composed of nation-state governments, its actions represented “necessarily an amalgam of national policies.” Although the United Nations’ close

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<sup>63</sup> Meeting Minutes, Foreign Service Executive Committee Meeting, 17 November 1948, submitted by Julia E. Branson, *AAFSC*; and AFSC, Oral History Interview #604, Narrator Alwin Holts, Interviewer: Joan Lowe, 19 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 82.

<sup>64</sup> Elmore Jackson, “Meeting Human Needs in the Near East”, in *New York Herald Tribune*, *Thursday February* 1949, Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

connection to its Western membership was a key component of its ability to raise lifesaving funds swiftly, the U.S. Quaker opined that it also raised concerns of conceivable imperial intent. Thus, in order to avoid enacting the political will of the “composed governments” that made up the United Nations, it was imperative for the AFSC and the integrity of its operation that it be given “complete independence.” According to the AFSC, its focus was “the simple task of preserving life.” The problems of finance, reintegration, and resettlement of Palestinian refugees, for their part, were left to “others.”<sup>65</sup>

Jackson’s understanding of “complete independence” had already been secured prior to his article appearing in the *New York Tribune*. Terms around “complete independence” had been formally negotiated two months earlier in December of 1948 within an agreement between the United Nations and the AFSC. The agreement stated that the United Nations would give AFSC “complete independence, [and would] not in any way place it in a subordinate position with respect to the United Nations.”<sup>66</sup>

Moreover, the AFSC sought to avoid enacting the will of the so-called proposed governments by adding to its terms that the AFSC would determine distribution based “on the basis of minimum essential need, without distinction to race, colour, creed or political belief so as to ensure that one group of refugees will not be favoured to the prejudice of any other group.”<sup>67</sup> The U.S. Quakers wanted to establish clear control of their operation while working under the United Nations. They feared the United Nations might hold political motives and other

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<sup>65</sup> Elmore Jackson, “Meeting Human Needs in the Near East”, in *New York Herald Tribune*, Thursday, February 1949, Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>66</sup> Agreement Between the Director of United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees and the Executive Secretary of the American Friends Service Committee, December 1948, Archive Highlights: Palestine Refugees in Gaza, *AAFSC*.

<sup>67</sup> Agreement Between the Director of United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees and the Executive Secretary of the American Friends Service Committee, December 1948, 2.

prejudices that could prove harmful to the work. AFSC director Pickett explained in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* that the “arrangement insures the impartial and non-political character of the relief service.”<sup>68</sup> In short, the AFSC did not want the external international organization to determine where and how Palestinian aid would be distributed. It trusted in own process and did not want UN interference. Nevertheless, the United Nations’ categorization of Palestinian refugees determined who was eligible for assistance and who was not. These categories certainly impacted Quaker's distribution plans. The AFSC's desire to work independently was tested, especially regarding how to handle the increasingly dire circumstances of Indigenous Palestinian Gazans ineligible to receive UN-funded relief.

The terms of the Agreement also signalled the AFSC’s earnest commitment to remain pacifist, noting that “[i]n the event of active hostilities extending to Egypt, then the American Friends Service Committee may withdraw from the refugee relief operation in combat areas.”<sup>69</sup> The United Nations agreed to recruit a devoted pacifist organization, even though their pacifism represented a hurdle that had previously led to the derailment of UN initiatives in the Holy Land. One year earlier in 1948, the United Nations had appointed Quaker Harold Evans to be the municipal commissioner of what they believed would soon be the internationalized city of Jerusalem. However, his pacifism was a reoccurring roadblock. Harold refused to accept the required military escort to Jerusalem as it did not align with his Quaker values. He would step down as the proposed commissioner shortly after his refusal to take up the role unless both sides upheld the tedious truce that was in place at the time.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Clarence E. Pickett, “Friends Feed Exiled Arabs” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 March 1949.

<sup>69</sup> Agreement Between the Director of United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees and the Executive Secretary of the American Friends Service Committee, December 1948, 6.

<sup>70</sup> For more see: Nancy E. Gallagher, *Quakers in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 33-43.

As noted earlier, the AFSC was highly motivated to show the world that non-violent intervention could help resolve complicated political matters. The Service Committee deemed the possibility of withdrawing from areas where active combat took place to be worth the risk to themselves. For the AFSC, the chance of succeeding in the “limelight” was enticing. Despite their members sharing concerns that Arab countries used refugees in Gaza as a “political football” or that “the plight of the refugees as human beings is not much of a factor [to others,]” the AFSC may have also perpetuated some of these offences in pursuit of success in this highly publicized endeavour.<sup>71</sup> The idea that Palestinians had been wrongly used as a type of “political football” appears in multiple places in the AFSC historical records. Lamentably, this issue may have seeped into their motives too. While it may not have been their primary motivation, the AFSC also utilized Palestinians as a humanitarian means to political ends upon entering Gaza.

### **Why Did Individual Members Agree to Join the Gaza Unit?**

Brooke Anderson, a non-Quaker member of the Gaza Unit (an AFSC term used stateside for the relief operation in Gaza), joined the operation for an array of personal reasons. First, Anderson was attracted to “the opportunity to participate with a team of likeminded individuals in trying to maintain a tenuous truce in one of the potentially explosive corners of the world.” Moreover, he reasoned that “it was an opportunity to do something for a great mass of suffering humanity, more especially the 70,000 Arab children.” Finally, Anderson committed himself to the AFSC aid operation in Gaza because it made a strong personal appeal to his newly minted pacifist principles. He explained that “[a]s a soldier in France... [he] had come to realize from

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<sup>71</sup> AFSC, Oral History Interview #604, Narrator Alwin Holts, Interviewer: Joan Lowe, 19 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 78 and 92; and Report: Arab Refugee Concerns, Donald Stevenson to Bronson P. Clark, 29 March 1950; file #268 Foreign Service 1950, Country (Palestine) series, *AAFSC*.

this experience that war, in [his] opinion, was the absolute denial of Christianity, and of all those ideals which we hold dear.” Disillusioned by his life experiences, he welcomed the opportunity to work on the Gaza Unit because it allowed him to be “serving as a witness to a more peaceful way of life and volunteered [his] services with those who believe and act on the belief that there is that of God in every man, the Quakers.”<sup>72</sup>

Anderson’s collective motives were rooted in a deep-seated desire for peacemaking, a pursuit he was more and more convinced required a non-combative, pacifist approach, an approach that was a pivotal piece to U.S. Quaker relief efforts more broadly. Thus, not only was the AFSC chosen by the United Nations to enter Gaza because of its unique “Quaker Ethics,” many of the individual Service Members who chose to join the Gaza Unit were lured in by those same values.

Howard Mckinney, a Quaker, applied to join the Gaza Unit because he felt like an outsider within the broader U.S. Quaker community. Despite having two young kids at home in the United States, he joined the AFSC in Gaza for six months because “[he] had never really been a part of the kind of thing” that Quakers had become known for doing. Explaining that Quakers were known for their service projects, McKinney admitted: “I had never really been a part.”<sup>73</sup> The act of tangible service working alongside others was such a fundamental characteristic of living a Quaker life for McKinney. He felt he was missing something without a service project under his belt.

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<sup>72</sup> Letter, Brooke Anderson to Mr. Joe Nettles, 13 February 1950; file #268, Foreign Service 1950, Country (Palestine) series, *AAFSC*, 7.

<sup>73</sup> AFSC, Oral History Interview #652, Narrator: Howard Mckinney, Interviewer: Joan Lowe, 11 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 108.

In contrast to McKinney's motives, David Walker confessed that he was "frankly a lot more interested in the Service Committee than [he] was the Quakers."<sup>74</sup> He was interested in joining the Service Committee project, while also being apprehensive about working with Quakers. In his experience, the "Quakers were a little bit beyond [his] grasp."<sup>75</sup> Despite feeling some apprehension, Walker and his wife Della decided to join the Gaza project. Although receiving "virtually" no orientation for the trip beyond getting "lots of shots in the same day, and a tremendous reaction to the typhoid, tetanus, all in the same day" by "some Quaker doctor" likely did not ease his initial hesitation to work with Quakers.<sup>76</sup>

While Quakerism did not initially enthrall Walker, he thought the value of the AFSC, an organization built upon Quaker values, was praiseworthy. The AFSC's distinctive humanitarianism encouraged Walker to join the Gaza Unit. In the end, he was profoundly impacted by the work and became a Quaker.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, years later when asked what refugees thought of the Quakers, he answered: "I think they trusted us. I think they were puzzled by us[,] but I think they trusted us. I think being a Quaker has phenomenal advantages with people when they learn of us. Being a Quaker is Fabulous."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> AFSC, Oral History Interview #609, Narrator: David Walker, Interviewer: Joan Lowe, 20 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 206-7.

<sup>75</sup> AFSC, Oral History Interview #609, Narrator: David Walker, Interviewer: Joan Lowe, 20 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 206-7.

<sup>76</sup> AFSC, Oral History Interview #609, Narrator: David Walker, Interviewer: Joan Lowe, 20 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 208.

<sup>77</sup> According to Service member Paul Johnson: "50 Quakers at any time [were] doing work that eight Red Cross staff were doing second hand. [The Red Cross] didn't identify with people. They lived separately in guarded houses. We lived as close as we could live and still remain active at the level of local folks. I will say we were stingy with our own food. We were open and present and among the people all the time. If we sent a staff member and a Palestinian assistant out to a milk station or a feeding place there you were. There were 10,000 refugees who were getting rations that day. We weren't working through somebody else's hands. We were working as best we could through our own and I think that's what constitutes a Quaker presence." AFSC, Oral History Interview #601, Narrator: Paul Johnson, Interviewer: Joan Lowe, 12 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 16.

<sup>78</sup> AFSC, Oral History Interview #609, Narrator: David Walker, Interviewer: Joan Lowe, 20 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 225.

While not inaccurate, the pervasive internal narrative that AFSC members joined the Gaza Unit with the sole purpose of helping the “great human need” did not paint the whole picture. Some individual sought to fulfill a perceived rite of passage or duty of living a Quaker life. Others went merely because they were infatuated with the idea of having an adventure in a new, seemingly exotic place.

Vreede Burher, another non-Quaker member of the Gaza unit, agreed to join the UN-sanctioned humanitarian project because she “liked to work to help people. That was it,” she relayed in an oral history interview undertaken by the AFSC. “I wanted to help.”<sup>79</sup> While her intentions initially seem entirely altruistic, not unlike the non-state actor she chose to join, it is revealed shortly thereafter that “[she] did it also for traveling and getting to know the country... You get to know much better the country, than when you go as a tourist.”<sup>80</sup>

Not unlike Burher, part of the Russ Rosene’s interest in heading to Gaza stemmed from the chance to be working in an “interesting part of the world.” Upon receiving a telegram asking if he and his wife would “accept immediate service in Palestine,” Rosene reflected that their initial thoughts were “Very positive, very eager, very much involved.” Although “it was a difficult part of the world, [it was also an] interesting part of the world.” He wanted “to know how [they] could work in the situation and the only way to know is to go.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> AFSC, Oral History Interview #602, Narrator: Josina Vreede Burher, Interviewer: Paula Goldberg, 19 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 28.

<sup>80</sup> AFSC, Oral History Interview #602, Narrator: Josina Vreede Burher, Interviewer: Paula Goldberg, 19 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 28. Burher’s motives also align with the rapidly growing and increasingly criticized contemporary practice of “voluntourism.” This is a form of tourism where travelers participate in voluntary work, typically for a charity. While it may be tempting to think of her motives as representative of an absolute dichotomy of altruism versus self-interest. Similar to volunteer tourists in our modern-day Burgher conceivably possessed multiple motivations simultaneously.

<sup>81</sup> AFSC, Oral History Interview #602, Narrator: Russ Rosene, Interviewer: Paula Goldberg, 19 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 133-34.

A sense of adventure and discovery also motivated individual involvement in the AFSC aid work in Gaza. A desire to explore a “difficult part of the world” appeared primary to an imagined duty to alleviate the great human need. These reasons reinforced the problematic power imbalance that often-separated humanitarian’s givers from those who received aid around the halfway point of the twentieth century. Refugees sought to have their most basic needs met at times, literally being a matter of life and death. Meanwhile, humanitarians (albeit with seemingly noble motives) had the privilege of choosing to step out of their pleasant and secure lives in order to help other humans in need. All the while, they were simultaneously fulfilling their desire for an adventure in a foreign land.<sup>82</sup>

The individuals that composed the AFSC’s Gaza Unit held divergent rationales. From the chance to aid fellow humans in need to the more innocuous adventure-seeking of which some were self-proclaimed “rebels looking for a cause,”<sup>83</sup> the Gaza Unit was a bit of a motley crew. So, why was the AFSC offering positions to such a diverse range of people?

According to Paul Johnson, who was an AFSC member before heading to Gaza, the U.S. Quaker group selected an array of non-professionals amongst its professionals out of necessity. Essentially, they were running out of options. At least this rang true in his case, as he explained that “[a]ll of a sudden the Service Committee said, ‘Will you go to Gaza?’ I didn't know anything, I think, about Gaza except as a staff member. Not directly related to the program.” When asked directly in an oral interview why the AFSC chose him in particular, Johnson

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<sup>82</sup> For more on dichotomy of aid workers and the conversation around their intentions being altruistic or selfish, read: Tony Vaux, *The Selfish Altruist: Relief Work in Famine and War* (London: Routledge, 2001), 14-15.

<sup>83</sup> AFSC, Oral History Interview #609, Narrator: David Walker, Interviewer: Joan Lowe, 20 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 207.

candidly responded: “[w]ell, I think they were scraping the bottom of the barrel!”<sup>84</sup> Another AFSC alumni confessed that when he was first asked to go to Gaza, he had no idea what and where the Palestinian land was. His first thought was that he had just been invited to go to a bar named “Gaza” for a drink.<sup>85</sup>

While the AFSC may have been getting desperate to staff the large operation in Gaza that would tax its administration “to the utmost,” there were still some deal-breakers. Standards remained in place regarding who would be selected to work in Gaza. For example, Lee Dinsmore was scouted by an AFSC member visiting Cairo, where Dinsmore was working in a professional capacity for the YMCA. Dinsmore was recruited by the AFSC when they found out he could be an asset to their work, mainly since he spoke fluent Arabic. However, there was an apprehension to recruit him because of his religious affiliations and Baptist roots. A letter outlined this concern stating, “that because [he was] coming from the Y and because of [his] religious background, [he] might be feeling inclined to proselytize while [he] were there.” It was only after “somebody assured them that [he was not] the proselytizing type” that he was formally invited to join the Gaza Unit.<sup>86</sup> In the eyes of the AFSC, evangelism would not be tolerated because it stood in contrast to their commitment to remain impartial and had the potential to undermine the trust they so desperately sought from Palestinians in Gaza.

The trial to see if United Nations could improve their reputation, while depoliticizing their work through the American Friends Service Committee, began on 1 January 1949. While the AFSC had its own reason for agreeing to take on a humanitarian mission in Gaza, it also

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<sup>84</sup> AFSC, Oral History Interview #601, Narrator: Paul Johnson, Interviewer: Joan Lowe, 12 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 9.

<sup>85</sup> AFSC, Oral History Interview #612, Narrator: Vern Pings, Interviewer: Paula Goldberg, 19 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 247.

<sup>86</sup> AFSC, Oral History Interview #610, Narrator: Paul Johnson, Interviewer: Joan Lowe, 12 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 130-32.

sought to strengthen the United Nations' status, especially its potential power to solve political problems via non-violent means. While these aims were not always shared, or at least not the top priority for Gaza Unit members, they undeniably shaped their time in Gaza. Non-violence was especially central in the AFSC'S attempt to forge personal relationships with Palestinians, the Egyptian army, as well as each other.

## CHAPTER 2

### **“End Our Problems and Turn Us Back to Our Homes”<sup>87</sup>:**

#### **Palestinian Refugees and the American Friends Service Committee’s Humanitarianism in Gaza Before the United Nations Relief and Works Agency**

This chapter examines the AFSC’s humanitarian project in Gaza, from its start on New Year’s Day 1949 to its official end in the spring of April 1950. U.S. Quakers arrived in Gaza during the frigid and bitter winter of 1948-49. The situation for Palestinian refugees there was already critical. Some contended that their survival hinged on support from U.S. welfare organizations and international aid agencies, such as the AFSC.<sup>88</sup> The weather was far from the only obstacle Indigenous Gazans, Palestinian refugees, and the AFSC’s original nine-person team faced. They also navigated life amidst the ongoing first Arab-Israeli war. As an AFSC member noted, the U.S. nonstate actor set foot in Gaza “when bombs were still dropping on the city.”<sup>89</sup>

The Nakba that displaced Palestinians gradually took place both during and following the first Arab-Israeli war. The AFSC arrived in Gaza amidst the continued expulsion of Palestinians from their homes. This led to increasing numbers of refugees in the Gaza Strip and correspondingly an increased need for humanitarian action. The acute needs amongst Palestinian refugees intensified, as they believed their displacement would be short-lived when they left their

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<sup>87</sup> Letter, written by a refugee boy in the fifth class of the Secondary School, 31 January 1950, Gaza, Palestine; file #268, Foreign Service 1950, Country—Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>88</sup> Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 142.

<sup>89</sup> Story by Brooke Anderson, sent by Field Director Paul Johnson to AFSC, 1 February 1950; file #268, Foreign Service 1950, Country—Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*, 4-5.

homes; most only prepared to be away for a few days. This was certainly the case when Um Jabr Wishah left her family home during the war in 1948.

Um Jabr Wishah, a Palestinian refugee, recalled how a *mukhtar* (village head) refused to fly a white flag outside of their village, Bayt ‘Affa, during the British withdrawal from Palestine. Um Jabr Wishah explained, “our village *Mukhtar* refused because he considered that putting white flags above their village homes meant that we had surrendered our village.” Locals guarded Bayt ‘Affa. Nonetheless, war led her to flee south “twenty minutes by foot” to neighboring Karatiyya following an attack on her home village by Zionist forces that started at “one o’clock in the morning on the first day of Ramadan.”<sup>90</sup>

In the wake of Egypt’s recapturing the village of Bayt ‘Affa in July 1948, Um Jabr Wishah explained that she and her husband refused to return home immediately. They recognized “that it was only a battle and still the war had not ended.” An intense fear remained that they faced death if their home was to be recaptured in future battles. Following reassurance from the Egyptian military that they needed to “wait seven days [as] the 1948 war would end,” after which they could return home, they stayed with relatives in Karatiyya. Instead of being a temporary layover, Wishah and her family’s journey to Karatiyya became the start of their perpetual displacement. Israel prevented Um Jabr Wishah’s return to Bayt ‘Affa after the first Arab-Israeli war. She later lamented that “if [she] had known that it would not happen and this would be the situation [still being displaced], [she] would never have left [her] home, even if [she] died there.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Jabr Wishah, “Palestinian Voices: The 1948 War and its Aftermath,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 35, 4 (2006): 55.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

The village of Karatiyya went on to be taken by Zionist forces later in 1948, despite being outside of the Israeli land allotment in accordance with the United Nation's partition line of 1947. A November 1948 *New York Times* article, titled "Israel Balks at U.N. Order for No Man's Land in Negeb [Negev]," outlined the United Nations' recommendation that Zionist forces withdrawal from Karatiyya. Since it fell beyond Israel's proposed borders, the United Nations deemed it appropriate Zionist forces leave Karatiyya.<sup>92</sup> That recommendation was never followed. Indigenous villagers of Karatiyya and Bayt 'Affa never returned to their homes and both villages would go on to be occupied by Israeli forces and eventually demolished.<sup>93</sup>

The first Arab-Israeli war continued in Gaza notwithstanding the AFSC's humanitarian intervention in January 1949. Um Jabr Wishah's odyssey exemplified many Palestinian experiences who found themselves displaced within refugee camps throughout Gaza and partially relieved by the arrival of AFSC humanitarianism. Um Jabr Wishah explained that the U.S. Quaker arrival prompted her family's relocation from the repurposed prison of al-Kalabush into the small tents.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, Abu Nadine, a Palestinian refugee from Yibna (a village that was the target of mortaring and firefight by Zionist forces during the war, where the aim was to "force the Arab inhabitants 'to move'") also recalled the AFSC's arrival.<sup>95</sup> Abu Nadine explained that, when their family first left their village, they experienced starvation and destitution. The family remained without supplies or really anything until U.S. Quakers arrived. Abu Nadine

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<sup>92</sup> "Israel Balks at U.N. Order for No Man's Land in Negeb [Negev]," *New York Times*, 15 November 1948, pp.1 and 5.

<sup>93</sup> Wishah, "Palestinian Voices: The 1948 War and its Aftermath," 60.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

<sup>95</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 179, 255-260, and 528.

reflected that “[a]fter four months, an agency came – the Quakers – and started to distribute flour, supplies, blankets and things like this.... They opened supply centers.”<sup>96</sup>

The AFSC’s Gaza Unit was immediately struck by both the fallout of war and the conditions of the local populace. U.S. Quaker Elwood Geiger reflected upon the devastation of seeing so many displaced people when he arrived as part of the initial AFSC team of nine aid workers. Previous aid experience notwithstanding, Gaza’s conditions overwhelmed him. In Geiger’s opinion, there was no way “anyone can be prepared for 200,000 or more people without homes.” He could not “emphasize that enough.” Years later, Geiger admitted to his naivety of Arab culture upon arrival and his need at the time to understand “their side of the story.” He knew “a whole lot about what had happened to the Jews in Europe,” as he witnessed “the Warsaw ghetto when it still stank.” In his own words, “[he] had seen a pretty brutal picture and that’s the background of getting to Gaza.”<sup>97</sup>

### **Early Days of Optimism**

Not long after the Gaza Unit commenced aid relief, the AFSC sent Board Member Howard Wriggins and Executive Director Clarence Pickett to observe and separately report on its largest humanitarian operation to date. Pickett lamented in his memoir that his trip to Gaza was spent chiefly among staff and public officials. While it was not lost on him that U.S. Quaker work was to be relational, Pickett admitted that he failed to uphold those Quaker ideals during his brief visit in January 1949. He was clear that when it came to the AFSC, however: the “larger the operation, the more we feel the necessity to give personal content to the work.” The AFSC

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<sup>96</sup> Abu Nadim, “Refugee from Yibna, Gaza City, 22 February 1999,” in Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule, 1917-1967* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 123.

<sup>97</sup> AFSC, Oral History Interview #607, Narrator Elwood Geiger, Interviewer: Joan Lowe, 19 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 157-158.

executive director realized that, in his own words: “the picture I give is one-sided, only scantily suggesting the arduous labor of the AFSC unit and the colorful personal contacts they had with the refugees themselves.”<sup>98</sup> Pickett, to his credit, identified the limits of his assessment, but also acknowledged that AFSC work needed to be done in relationship and alongside Palestinian aid recipients.

Wriggins’ report, meanwhile, focused on early concerns and tactics utilized by the U.S. Quakers in Gaza. The AFSC board member thought it important that the Gaza Unit reciprocated the warm hospitality he received, as it would build trust and connection with Palestinian refugees. Wriggins also joked that perhaps Indigenous Gazans were being too hospitable to refugees. He noted that, while “Arab Hospitality is proverbial... several tribes of nomadic [A]rabs who have been so generous to their guest[,] the refugees[,] that they have given away everything they have and killed virtually all their sheep.”<sup>99</sup>

Both Pickett’s and Wriggins’ reports stressed that AFSC humanitarianism in Gaza adopt a relational approach. In response to such feedback, alongside “the incredible amount [sic] of hospitality which is showered on the gang,” the Gaza Unit set up a tearoom where “all team members [could] bring back anyone they want.”<sup>100</sup> The tearoom was a practical action U.S. Quakers took to build relationships with the populace in Gaza. It also served as a reminder that the humanitarian actors were privileged to share tea and coffee with others in their tearoom, as it was considered a luxury in Gaza at that time. Abu Hassan, a Palestinian refugee from the village of Majdal (who went on to work as a teacher under the UNWRA’s successor program in Gaza)

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<sup>98</sup> Pickett, *For More Than Bread*, 169.

<sup>99</sup> Confidential Report on Trip to Gaza, Howard Wriggins to Colin Bell, 24 February 1949; file #71, Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*, 3.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

reflected on how he was unable to buy tea and coffee during the AFSC's time in Gaza, explaining that "[c]offee and tea were only drunk and offered to guest at the *mukhtar's* place."<sup>101</sup>

Wriggins outlined key structural and mental elements required to frame the AFSC's relational approach with Palestinian refugees in Gaza. In his opinion, the implementation of a straightforward method by which AFSC personnel heard and responded to refugees' complaints was paramount. He believed that such mechanisms fostered interpersonal trust and ensured that the Gaza Unit was aware of issues as they arose. U.S. Quakers aimed to be the primary touchstone for Palestinian misgivings. Working with the Egyptian lieutenants that administered Gaza also mattered, due to existing circumstances. Wriggins noted, "[o]ur group felt very strongly that complaints should be handled by AFSC personnel" and not Egyptian military officers.<sup>102</sup> The AFSC feared Egyptian military involvement could strain their humanitarian relationship with Palestinian refugees, resulting in missing important complaints and concerns. Emmett Gulley, the AFSC's chief of mission in Gaza, echoed this sentiment. He determined that a relational approach that provided an avenue for Palestinian complaints served as a key element for AFSC humanitarianism. Gulley expounded that the process of hearing complaints "requires great patience and no end of time, but is a MUST."<sup>103</sup>

According to Wriggins, the "ageold Quaker Problem, of getting across to a very different culture and a very different religious background" clouded the Gaza Unit during its onset. As the AFSC board member's report emphasized, it was "particularly important that as soon as possible, as many [U.S. Quakers] as possible take every opportunity to learn about and penetrate

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<sup>101</sup> Abu Hassan, quoted in Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, 123.

<sup>102</sup> Confidential Report on Trip to Gaza, Howard Wriggins to Colin Bell, 24 February 1949; file #71, Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*, 9.

<sup>103</sup> Report from the Gaza Area by Emmett Gulley (Chief of Mission) to AFSC, 15 February 1949; file #72, Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*, 5.

the Arab community and culture.” Historically, this was something “[they] find difficult enough even when dealing with French or Italian cultures.” Wriggins perceived a more significant cultural divide in Gaza than past aid projects. It was likely, in his view, that the Gaza Unit’s attempt at “penetrating the community and culture” may fall short given time and budget restraints. Nonetheless, it was imperative to run an effective aid program from the start. It served as the “very best indicator of [their] conception of equality and respect for all people.”<sup>104</sup>

Toward the end of Pickett’s and Wriggins’ stay in Gaza, Gulley wrote a confidential report to AFSC headquarters in Philadelphia. Amongst Gulley’s topmost concerns was how to manage the “extremely difficult problem” of “hungry people other than refugees.” “Hunger,” shared the Gaza Unit’s chief of mission, “is becoming a major problem for everyone.” Despite being outside the UNRPR’s humanitarian mandate, Gulley relayed the increasing needs of local Indigenous Gazans who were going hungry. On a few occasions, the Gaza Unit fed locals initially denied distributions and relayed that “their appreciation knew no bounds.” Gulley then problematically deduced that Palestinian bedouins “are on the whole more highly disciplined and show greater character than the usual run of Arabs.”<sup>105</sup> The goodwill garnered from feeding the bedouins was later noted in a March 1949 phone call: “[i]n any of [the bedouin’s] tents the Quakers worker is always welcome.”<sup>106</sup>

U.S. Quaker involvement with local bedouins and Palestinian refugees shepherded the Gaza Unit’s reputation and opened dialogue between aid receivers and givers. Gulley’s unit was in ongoing talks with displaced Palestinians. The mayor of Gaza City, seconded by councilmen,

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<sup>104</sup> Letter Impression of Stay in Gaza by Howard Wriggins to Delbert Replogle, 24 February 1949; file #72, Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>105</sup> Report from the Gaza Area, from Emmett Gulley Chief of Mission to AFSC, 15 February 1949; file #72, Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*, 5.

<sup>106</sup> Manuscript from Telephone Transcription, Elden Mills, 5 March 1949; file #109, Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine, Refugee Project (Clapp Mission) series, *AAFSC*, 1.

expressed “great satisfaction with our feeding program.” Importantly, they appreciated that “Quakers were willing to meet with people on a friendly basis and talk with them as equals.” Although he “had to speak [to the mayor] through an interpreter,” Gulley explained that “even the barrier of language did not prevent [their] communication of friendship.”<sup>107</sup>

The Gaza Unit’s relational mindset with both Indigenous Gazans and Palestinian refugees paved the way for the AFSC to recognize crucial insight in the early days of its UN-sanctioned aid project. As the AFSC established its humanitarian presence, “many refugees [were] requesting the Quakers to do something regarding permission to return to their homes.” According to Gulley, and subsequent to the passage of United Nations Resolution 194, “[t]he most challenging question is the matter of repatriation.” Gulley correspondingly recognized “little or nothing regarding the problem [could] be done from Palestine.” Consequently, he trusted that the “Philadelphia office by every conceivable means, [would] work at [solving] that problem.”<sup>108</sup>

As AFSC workers established their relational approach in Gaza, Palestinian refugees shared their moral frustrations over the Nakba. Of particular frustration was their inability to return home even as fighting slowed and political matters simmered after Egypt signed an armistice with Israel in February 1949.<sup>109</sup> The new armistice agreement between Israel and Egypt outlined new provisional borders for Gaza. The reconfiguration of borders dispossessed Indigenous Gazans. Under the Egyptian-Israeli armistice, parcels of land in Gaza now fell on the other side of a new border and were deemed part of Israel. While local Gazans had not been displaced from their homes, many faced the loss of their livelihoods. Their exclusion from

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<sup>107</sup> Report from the Gaza Area by Emmett Gulley (Chief of Mission) to AFSC, 15 February 1949.

<sup>108</sup> Report from the Gaza Area by Emmett Gulley (Chief of Mission) to AFSC, 15 February 1949.

<sup>109</sup> Romirowsky, *Religion, Politics, and the Origins of Palestine Refugee Relief*, 60-61.

humanitarian intervention exacerbated the loss as they fell outside of the purview of the UN's definition of refugee. As a result, aid workers in Gaza were often tormented by the constraints on their ability to give aid.<sup>110</sup>

The Gaza Unit's relational approach to humanitarianism impacted both Palestinian refugees and AFSC members, albeit in differing ways. Palestinian resilience astonished U.S. Quakers. The Gaza Unit's first field report, dated 1 May 1949, registered: "[o]ne of the most noteworthy things in connection with this project is the tremendous ability of the [Palestinian] people to endure hardship and face adverse conditions with a philosophical attitude and a minimum of real bitterness."<sup>111</sup> The auspicious tone in this assessment evidenced the Gaza Unit's early idealization of Palestinian attitudes, which in the face of suffering were allegedly able to "endure."<sup>112</sup>

The AFSC's early romanticization of Palestinian abilities to *endure* overlooked the lived experience of many who felt humiliated by relying upon charity. Da'ud Ahmed, a boy at the time of the Nakba, recalled the consternation he felt when he first received food aid. "Someone put a piece of cheese in my pocket and sweets in the other pocket... At the time, I felt myself as a strange beggar," recalled Ahmed. "I was twelve years old[,] and I was crying...The people there brought food to us like beggars."<sup>113</sup> Another Palestinian refugee, Salim Rashid, lamented his new reality in Gaza. "From [Rashid's] point of view... it was better if there was no agency [*wikala*].

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<sup>110</sup> Ilana Feldman, "Gaza's Humanitarianism Problem," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 38, 3 (2009): 26-27.

<sup>111</sup> Report Number One on UNRPR, 1 May 1949; file #67, Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine, Refugee Project (Clapp Mission) series, AAFSC, 8.

<sup>112</sup> *Endure [tahammul]* and *steadfastness [sumud]* are common terms used by humanitarians and Palestinians. The notion of *Sumud* has been challenged by some Palestinians as privileging passivity over action and viewed as an insufficient mechanism for achieving the goal of liberation, return, an end to occupation. Ilana Feldman, "Looking for Humanitarian Purpose: Endurance and the Value of Lives in a Palestinian Refugee Camp," *Public Culture* 27, 3 (2015): 427-447.

<sup>113</sup> Interview, Shati camp, 16 March 1999, in Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, 138.

Prophet Mohammed said[,] ‘the high hand is better than the low hand.’ What does this mean? It means that the one who gives is better than the one who takes.”<sup>114</sup>

Ahmad and Rashid’s words revealed a feeling of hierarchy that existed between those who gave aid and those who receive it in Gaza. They also exposed the complexity and stigma commonly associated with “dependency on food-aid.” As was the case in Amhad and Rashid’s memories, dependence on food aid interspersed with a sense of shame and defeat.<sup>115</sup> Relying on external assistance, it is argued by researchers Paul Harvey and Jeremy Lind, has undermined fundamental refugee desires for independence and autonomy. In order to address these significant concerns, aid recipients often demanded a voice in the distribution of aid.<sup>116</sup> When the input of aid recipients was historically ignored, it led to a refusal of rations as a form of resistance. In the case of UNRPR, this tactic was utilized by Palestinian refugees under the care of the Red Cross during a scandal reported in *The New York Times*. The concept of dependency is complicated further by the input of the aid agencies and their donors.

Aid agencies like the United Nations and AFSC, as well as their nation-state donors, feared the creation of dependency on aid in the decade after World War II. Often, such fear justified the scaling-back of relief rations to the detriment of humanitarian recipients.<sup>117</sup> The U.S. government disproportionately financed UNRPR aid for Palestinian refugees. Contemporary U.S. views on aid dependency influenced the situation in Gaza.<sup>118</sup> In 1949, U.S. diplomat Hal

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<sup>114</sup> Interview, Gaza City, 11 March 1999, in Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, 129.

<sup>115</sup> Janice Gross Stein, “Humanitarian Organizations: Accountability – Why, to Whom, for What, and How?” in Michael Barnett and Thomas Weiss, eds. *Humanitarian in Question* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 135.

<sup>116</sup> Paul Harvey and Jeremy Lind, *Dependency and Humanitarian Relief: A Critical Analysis* (London: Humanitarian Policy Group, July 2005), 3.

<sup>117</sup> Harvey and Lind, *Dependency and Humanitarian Relief*, 2.

<sup>118</sup> Nearly half of the \$25,000,000 fund for UNRPR, to the sum of \$12,000,000, was donated by the United States. See: “Notes on the Secretary-General’s Draft Report on the Works of U.N.R.P.R.” in *United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine*, (A/AC.25/W/28), 27 October 1949.

Lehrman publicly contemplated “dependency on aid” and whether the United States should further support UNRPR activities with Palestinians. He noted, “[t]he refugees obviously could not be left to die. But neither could the UN be again dunned for subscriptions to an eternal soup-kitchen.” Lehrman dehumanized refugee camps, noting that funds should not be spent on “a rat-hole.” Instead, U.S. aid should be spent on projects that would “finally dispose of Arab refugees.” In Lehrman’s opinion, “[U.S.] Congress could not be expected to underwrite a perpetual breadline.”<sup>119</sup>

While less overt in their paternalistic propensities than Lehrman, U.S. Quakers internally discussed the drawbacks of aid dependency in Gaza. According to an AFSC member, it was “not uncommon to see [refugees] smile, or to participate in their lively banter” despite “‘the Arab’ [having] been hurt and confused.”<sup>120</sup> U.S. Quaker Donald Stevenson shared Lehrman’s perspective and problematic language during his visit with the Gaza Unit. In a letter to fellow Quakers, Stevenson opined that it was a “great tragedy” to have children in camps. Young Palestinians were growing up as “ignorant little animals.” In lieu of education at onsite colonial schools, they learned “to steal and engage in boy gang warfare.”<sup>121</sup>

By May 1949, roughly four months after the Israeli-Egyptian armistice, Palestinian hope ran low. As a result, the Gaza Unit feared a revolt. The UN General Assembly’s “inactivity, [and] lack of work [for the refugees]” after Resolution 194, it explained, were “going to take their toll and bitterness will replace the hope [amongst refugees].” Those AFSC members close enough with Palestinian refugees recognized that many already lost faith in the UN-proclaimed

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<sup>119</sup> Hal Lehrman, “Gathering Storm in U.S.-Israeli Relations,” *Commentary* 10 (1949): 319-320.

<sup>120</sup> Report Number One on UNRPR, 1 May 1949; file #67, Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*, 8.

<sup>121</sup> Letter by Donald Stevenson to Dear Friends [Quakers], 4 January 1950; file #239, Foreign Service 1950, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

right of return. All that remained was a “solemn hope for [their] return to [their] home, if [in the words of a Palestinian refugee] ‘God wills it.’” According to the Gaza Unit, there were “no signs of [a] highly organized attempt to unite.” That said, simultaneous demonstrations took place at multiple distribution points. As they individually became more coordinated, Palestinian protests shared a standardized message and “demonstrate[d] to all the foreigners gathered at each distribution point their intense desire to return to their homes, ‘come what may.’”<sup>122</sup>

Palestinian refugees in Gaza grew more “restless,” indeed. The Gaza Unit reported increased agitation as rations became “regularized”—that is, rations were being reduced. An ongoing reduction of rations stemmed from budgetary concerns and UNRPR miscalculations. The UN agency underestimated the number of people in need of food and did not consider the ethical obligation to care for the Indigenous Gazans also profoundly impacted by the Nakba. Only 650,000 of the 940,000 Palestinian refugees obtained UNRPR rations. The UNRPR defined bedouins as not being “true Refugees.”<sup>123</sup>

The Gaza Unit quickly recognized the UNRPR’s blunder and sought to rectify it. The AFSC undertook “serious attempts to carry out a census.”<sup>124</sup> At first, U.S. Quakers in Gaza tried to count each man and all members of his family. Palestinian refugees, when realizing that the amount of food they received depended on the number of children they had in their family, devised a clever plan to inflate their numbers. To help their families “grow,” the children, after being counted as members of one family, were routed around the building to become members of

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<sup>122</sup> Report by AFSC to UNRPR, 1 May 1949; file #67, Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>123</sup> Report by AFSC to UNRPR, 1 May 1949; and “Summary Records of a Meeting between the Conciliation Commission and Representatives of Relief Organizations in Geneva, 7 June 1949,” United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, (A/AC.25/SR/LM/17).

<sup>124</sup> Letter by Sir J. Troutbeck, “Summary of General Impressions Gathered During Week-End Visit to the Gaza District, 16 June 1949,” FO 371/75342/E7816, 123 in Romirowsky, *Religion Politics, and the Origins*, 201.

another family. This realization prompted the AFSC to restart their census. The second time around, the Gaza Unit calculated “the refugees at night when everyone was asleep.”<sup>125</sup> AFSC accuracy increased by placing “native workers in each distribution line” to audit the rolls and update information that affected the rolls, such as new births or deaths in the family.<sup>126</sup> While their counting process was utilitarian, it still underscored how ration reduction compounded the impact of the already reduced caloric intake of Palestinian refugees.<sup>127</sup>

Im ‘Amir, a Palestinian refugee in Khan Yunis refugee camp, explained that despite being on UNRPR rations, her family “had no bread or food to cook. [Their] living was difficult... [They] were fighting over the distributions of supplies and every day or two people were injured... [While they] ate dried dates and guava, it was not enough.” Palestinian refugees like herself “started going to the forest and bringing wood to sell to bakers for a [small sum]. [They] sold wood in order to eat.”<sup>128</sup> It was clear that being on the rations list was not an assurance that the humanitarian action was truly meeting basic needs of displaced Palestinians.

### **AFSC Aspirations to Maintain Morale**

Initial U.S. Quaker optimism was short-lived. In a July 1949 report to the UNRPR, the Gaza Unit outlined its trepidation. The “morale” of displaced Palestinians worsened. Palestinian refugees in Gaza were “completely bewildered by the lack of any knowledge of what may happen to them in the future... it is probably true that some off[-]colour scheme such as

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<sup>125</sup> Lorton Heusel, *Friends on the Front Line: The Story of Delbert and Ruth Replogle* (Greensboro, NC: Friends Historical Society, 1985), 110-111.

<sup>126</sup> Gulley, *Tall Tales by a Tall Quaker* (Self-Published, 1973), 17.

<sup>127</sup> The original allotment of calories was to be 2000 daily, but one Service Member noted they were only able to give each refugee about 1600 calories, falling significantly short of the average person's physical needs. See: *New York Times*, “\$1,000,000 Waste in Bared in U.N. Middle East Relief,” 16 June 1949, 5; and also, Clarence E. Pickett, “Friends Feed Exiled Arabs” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 March 1949.

<sup>128</sup> Interview, Khan Yunis, 15 June 1999, in Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, 136-137.

communism might find a response in such hopeless outlooks as are common in this area.” Not only had the boogeyman of communism seeped into the U.S. Quaker's minds amid an emerging global Cold War, it was also wielding influence and concocting fear in how the AFSC administered relief. The increasing unrest and angst of supposed communist influences concerned the Gaza Unit enough that it informed UNRPR of plans to implement activities aimed to “maintain a better morale among the refugees.”<sup>129</sup>

The dropping morale of the Palestinian refugees, coupled with ongoing budgetary obstacles, generated friction between the AFSC, their workers, and the United Nations. There were indeed significant budgetary challenges. Some were more trivial, such as the “local mice whose biggest crime is not the amount [of rations] they consume but the damage they do to the [flour] sacks.”<sup>130</sup> Others were egregious problems. A titanic scandal unfolded in June 1949. A *New York Times* investigation uncovered that, from the proposed \$32,000,000 budget for the UNRPR,<sup>131</sup> “more than \$1,000,000 of United Nations relief funds [had] been wasted in excess profits for middlemen [over] the past four months... Contracts for the supply of food-stuff have been kept secret in the past[,] and the middlemen took advantage of the chance to sell low grade flour at 10 to 43 cents above market value.” The League of Red Cross Societies first brought the scandal to light by refusing to continue distributing the cheap food in the West Bank, demanding that all future supplies be bought through open bidding. The terms of the contract were then

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<sup>129</sup> UNRPR June Report by AFSC, 15 July 1949; file #67, Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>130</sup> Report by Walt Johnson to AFSC, “Gaza Warehouse Report August 1949;” file #150, Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>131</sup> While the proposed budget was \$32,000,000 as of February 1949 the operation had only secured a \$5,000,000 loan from the United Nations. President Truman went on to ask congress to secure “no more than \$16,000,000’ as the United States’ share. See: Elmore Jackson, “Meeting Human Needs in the Near East,” in *New York Herald Tribune*, in Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

made public. Palestinian refugees protested that the food was unfit to eat. Humanitarian inaction resulted in attacks on Red Cross distributors in some of the camps.<sup>132</sup> Popular Palestinian refusal to eat rations and rejection of low-quality food were acts of resistance.

This conflict between the Red Cross and Palestinian refugees in the West Bank alarmed the Gaza Unit. Due to limited funds, as U.S. Quaker Corinne Hardesty disclosed to the *New York Times* that the AFSC offered “only 1,500 calories a day for refugees in its area and [was] unable under the terms of the United Nations grant to do anything at all for the normal inhabitants of the area, who now are as destitute as the refugees and lack even the inadequate relief rations.”<sup>133</sup> While reform on the buying process ensued, this failure under the direct supervision of the United Nations exacerbated growing Palestinian scepticism and watered a mounting seed of distrust towards the international organization.<sup>134</sup>

Apprehensions also arose with local Palestinian workers employed by the Gaza Unit. Palestinian workers were not paid by the United Nations, as outlined in the initial agreement between UNRPR and AFSC. The agreement required that the United Nations provide funds to the AFSC to cover local recruitment, employment, and other expenses. In turn, the AFSC supplied monthly operational reports and financial expenses incurred in the fulfilment of their agreement, certified by accredited auditors as required.<sup>135</sup> The AFSC reported in September 1949 that local Palestinian “guards still have not been paid.” Workers “threatened to resign; but when they learned they would lose all right for claiming back pay, they decided to stay.” The

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<sup>132</sup> “\$1,000,000 Waste in Bared in U.N. Middle East Relief,” *New York Times*, 16 June 1949, pp. 1 and 5.

<sup>133</sup> “\$1,000,000 Waste in Bared in U.N. Middle East Relief,” *New York Times*, 16 June 1949, p. 5.

<sup>134</sup> “U.N. Relief Waste Denied by Griffis,” *New York Times*, 17 June 1949, p. 18; and “U.N. Refugee Body Shifts Buying Plan,” *New York Times*, 18 June 1949, p. 5.

<sup>135</sup> The agreement also outlined that the AFSC was able to withdraw from the operation should active hostilities were to break out. For more see: “Agreement between UN and AFSC Relief Work, December 1948,” Archive Highlights: Palestine Refugees in Gaza, *AAFSC*.

warehouse manager in Rafah, Dick Smith, insisted that “[i]t is certainly important that an effort be made to secure their pay.”<sup>136</sup>

Aside from feeling “plagued by the general UN fear of lack of money,”<sup>137</sup> the AFSC’s distinctive relational approach to humanitarian relief with displaced Palestinians in Gaza safeguarded its UN-sanctioned mission. L. F. Skene, the warehouse manager in Gaza City, explained that Palestinian porters employed by U.S. Quakers received a fair wage. While paid less than those employed by the International Red Cross in the West Bank, they outworked the underpaid Palestinian porters employed by the Egyptian Army in the area. Skene noted that “in the long run[,] I think our portage is much cheaper, in that we do not have the thieving, and our men are willing to do any job.”<sup>138</sup> The prioritization of advocating and recruiting local workers, instead of importing more people, was unique to the AFSC. Gaza Unit member Josina Vreede Burger “always appreciated very much” that U.S. Quakers gave more responsibility to “local helpers.”<sup>139</sup>

Amid ongoing aid struggles in Gaza, Palestinian refugees continued to impress their desire to return home upon U.S. Quakers. AFSC workers, in response, deduced that the resolution of the Palestinian plight hinged on either an acceptance of repatriation (the return of refugees to their homes) or the much less desirable option of resettlement (immigrating refugees

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<sup>136</sup> Report by Dick Smith to AFSC, “Rafah Warehouse Monthly Report, September 1949;” file #160, Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>137</sup> Report on UNRPR for the month of June by Gaza Unit to AFSC, 15 July 1949, *AAFSC*, 5.

<sup>138</sup> AFSC, Oral History Interview #604, Narrator Alwin Holts, Interviewer: Joan Lowe, 19 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 60; and Report by L.F. Skene, “Gaza Warehouse Report 25 July 1949;” file #160, Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>139</sup> Clarence Pickett explained that it would be advantageous to “their mission” in Gaza that they do not import too many doctors from outside and instead focus on local recruitment where possible.” See: Clarence Pickett, “Excerpts from letter written C. Pickett in Cairo on 19 January 1949;” file #133 Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine, Refugee Project (Clapp Mission) 1949, *AAFSC*, 2; and AFSC, Oral History Interview #602, Narrator Josina Vreede Burger, Interviewer: Paula Goldberg, 19 September 1992, 41.

elsewhere). Both options required a good deal of international intervention. However, the AFSC feared the “refugee problem” disappeared from the international agenda after Syria signed an armistice agreement with Israel in July 1949.<sup>140</sup> The tenuously brokered peace arrangement contributed to the diversion of global attention elsewhere as the refugee problem “disappeared from the international agenda.”<sup>141</sup> In correspondence with the AFSC in Philadelphia, the Gaza Unit sought to regain global attention and pled: “[w]e cannot too strongly emphasize the necessity of urging [the United Nations] to consider the refugee problem as the Number One item in their September meeting.”<sup>142</sup>

### **A Growing Rebellious Spirit**

The downward trend in Palestinian morale proved unrelenting into the fall, as U.S. Quakers witnessed “a growing rebellious spirit among the younger people.” Two main factors compounded this spirit within the Gaza Strip. First, the AFSC’s “attempt to bring those refugees without adequate shelter into organized tent camps” engendered “a feeling of unrest.” Although many wanted a “new, waterproof tent for the winter months,” Palestinian refugees in Gaza

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<sup>140</sup> The President of the UN Security Council: “I have the honour to inform the Security Council that a General Armistice Agreement, in pursuance of the resolution of the Security Council of 16 November 1948, was signed by the delegations of Israel and Syria on 20 July 1949.” United Nations Security Council, “United Nations Acting Mediator on Palestine to the Acting Secretary-General Transmitting the Text of an Armistice Agreement Between Israel and Syria, 20 July 1949,” (S/1353).

<sup>141</sup> Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, 143. While international deliberation cooled or even stalled regarding repatriation, Arab countries created their own policies towards Palestinian refugees within their lands. There was a rising fear in Lebanon and Jordan that full integration of refugees would upset their religious or ethnic boundaries leading to a so-called “Palestinization” of their respective countries. King Abdullah of Jordan, who was overseeing the West Bank during this time, was known to be “keenly aware of this danger and set out to assimilate the Palestinians.” For more on the subject read: Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, 142-145; and Avi Shlaim, *The Politics of Partition: King Abdullah, the Zionists and Palestine 1921-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2004).

<sup>142</sup> Report on UNRPR for June, 15 July 1949, AAFSC, 7.

refused to move into “organized camps.”<sup>143</sup> In the wake of the Shoah, as Ilana Feldman explains, *camps* were often associated with the horrors of Nazi “concentration camps.” As a result, other humanitarian groups used the terms *shelter* and *refugee centers* instead of *camps*.<sup>144</sup> Second, the UN-mandated mission continued to cut down Palestinian ration rolls. The Gaza Unit’s “vigorous cutting of lists, according to the request of UNRPR that the total registration be cut to 192,000[,] brought an element of further unrest into the area and caused a good many tensions.”<sup>145</sup>

“[I]n spite of these potential sources of trouble” and humanitarian challenges notwithstanding, the AFSC perceived that its relationship with displaced Palestinians in Gaza “remained, on the whole, good.” “Maintenance of morale” activities offered both Palestinian refugees and U.S. Quakers temporary reprieve from UN politics and humanitarianism’s underbelly.<sup>146</sup> The Gaza Unit organized various activities, such as woodwork, sewing groups, and sports programming. The AFSC provided transportation for Friday night soccer games, which sparked enthusiasm and drew in an estimated three thousand spectators on game nights.<sup>147</sup> A Palestinian woman enthusiastically shared with an AFSC aid worker: “I live for Tuesday and the sewing class.”<sup>148</sup>

During the summer of 1949, the AFSC observed that the morale of Palestinian refugees was “built chiefly on the hope that they will be allowed to return to their homes; they wait with impatience whenever news may come from the UN assembly. When they cease to be buoyed up by the hope of going back to the place from which they came, then their morale can be expected

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<sup>143</sup> Operational Report for Gaza Unit to AFSC, October 1949; file #67 Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>144</sup> Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief*, 7.

<sup>145</sup> Operational Report AFSC, October 1949, *AAFSC*.

<sup>146</sup> Operational Report AFSC, October 1949, *AAFSC*.

<sup>147</sup> Recreation Reports, May 1949; file #68 Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project: Clapp Mission) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>148</sup> Operational Report AFSC, October 1949, *AAFSC*.

to sag.”<sup>149</sup> Thanks to its relational approach to its humanitarian relationship with displaced Palestinians, the Gaza Unit understood that their morale was intricately tied to the United Nations’ willingness and ability to solve the so-called refugee problem.

In response to Palestinian and AFSC appeals, the United Nations surveyed the situation in Gaza. In November 1949, it acknowledged Palestinian calamity. Due to Gaza’s “limited area, the enforced idleness, and the continual presence of [Egyptian] troops [from] the military government,” the UN report concluded that “the area takes on the aspect of a prison camp. The only saving feature is the effective patience and kindly ministrations of the Quaker group who are in charge of ration distributions.”<sup>150</sup> UN accolades for the Gaza Unit came with a plea. The international organization requested that the AFSC extend its agreed-upon fifteen-month presence in Gaza. Rumours of U.S. Quaker intentions to abandon their humanitarian mandate swirled. The newly-minted UNWRA program was far from ready to take reins. Lehrman noted the “Quakers were beginning to fidget over their unending chore.”<sup>151</sup> The United Nation’s praised the AFSC because they subsequently feared an early departure by U.S. Quaker’s would result in a lack of humanitarian intervention in Gaza leading to local unrest.

During the fall, the Gaza Unit sent a telling letter to AFSC Director Pickett. It explained how aid workers felt “an obligation” to communicate the opinions and feelings of Palestinian refugees because it was “very difficult” for the latter to “communicate with the outside world.” Two sentiments prevailed that were crucial to Palestinian dispossessed in Gaza. First, many Palestinian refugees felt the United Nations was “responsible for their plight.” As such, Palestinians felt that it was the obligation of the international organization to take care of their

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> UN Survey Economic Report, 9 November 1949; Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project: Clapp Mission) series, *AAFSC*, 3.

<sup>151</sup> Hal Lehrman, "Gathering Storm in U.S.-Israeli Relations," *Commentary* 10 (1949): 319.

needs. Second, a popular feeling persisted that “the matter could be finished by war.” The Gaza Unit quoted Palestinian refugees in Gaza as pleading: “Why don’t you leave us.”<sup>152</sup> Abu Ayub, a refugee living in Shati camp, deplored: “[t]hey brought us food, blankets some cheese, and dry dates and everything. There was more food than you can imagine. But what is the benefit?”<sup>153</sup> Following further discussions, the AFSC concluded that Palestinian refugees overwhelmingly wanted it to leave Gaza. Consequently, U.S. Quakers internally warned the AFSC to not renew its aid agreement with the United Nations.

### **Morale v. Morals**

As the end of UN-mandated humanitarian mission neared its official conclusion in December 1949, the Gaza Unit relayed the ongoing “morale degradation” of dispossessed Palestinians. “As the refugees in the Gaza Strip entered a second winter of miserable living conditions with no relief insight,” aid workers explained to AFSC headquarters: “the deterioration of morale, evidenced by an increased feeling of discouragement and disillusionment, has continued. The almost universal attitude now is that any change is preferable to what they are now enduring.” The weather did not help when a torrential downpour destroyed tents throughout camps: “tents thought to be waterproof turned out to be no better than sieves.” What is more, Palestinian refugees received approximately sixteen hundred calories of food aid per day—that is, four hundred calories below the rations reported at the start of 1949.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Letter, Gaza Unit to Director Clarence Pickett, 12 October 1949, Archive Highlights: Palestine Refugees in Gaza, *AAFSC*.

<sup>153</sup> Interview with Aby Ayub, Shati Camp, 16 March 1999 in Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, 275.

<sup>154</sup> Operational Report of AFSC, December 1949; file #67 Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

While the reduction of calories was clearly more deleterious and encompassing for Palestinian aid receivers, it had a psychological impact on U.S. Quaker aid givers that drove a divide between the two groups. Gaza Unit member Brooke Anderson wrestled with the cut rations and feeling of guilt about receiving more than enough calories to fill his needs. Anderson shared the uncomfortable position he and others found themselves in while trying to navigate their humanitarian work in Gaza:

I had a friend of a friend in Beirut, a doctor, who had the reputation of having personally kept alive 1000 people during the war. Yet he said to me one occasion, ‘Anderson, I have seen women with children on their breasts starving in the street outside of my house, yet I have gone in and eat a hearty dinner.’ I wondered what I would do under similar circumstances. I know the answer now. I eat from 3200 to 3600 calories daily. I think that there is a psychological twist to it which makes me feel that I want more to eat not less, although I know that I am surrounded by more hungry people than there are citizens, let's say, in the city of Richmond [approx. 250,000]. This question has dogged and deviled the conscience of many in this team before I joined it. It seems to be one of those things which each has to deal with personally, and leave him wondering whether if he satisfied his appetite will he lose his conscience.<sup>155</sup>

The “dogged and deviled conscience” Anderson described revealed how aid workers experienced a type of “morale degeneration” in a relational way in Gaza. While AFSC aid workers confronted a deep discomfort, it came at the expense of the suffering of displaced Palestinians.

The AFSC’s humanitarian mindset made it clear that, by the end of 1949, the situation of Palestinian refugees stagnated. The Gaza Unit, as a result, underwent a shift not only in morale but also morals.<sup>156</sup> U.S. Quakers sensed that their humanitarian role prolonged the Nakba in a

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<sup>155</sup> Story by Brooke Anderson, sent by Field Director Paul Johnson to AFSC, 1 February 1950; file #269 Foreign Service 1950, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*, 4-5.

<sup>156</sup> Operational Report of AFSC, December 1949; file #67 Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project), series, *AAFSC*, 4. It was alleged refugee life was also having deleterious effect on the morals of displaced Palestinians. The Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahram* described the refugees as “living in a society with no religion, no morals, and no community life.” Hanan, an Indigenous Gazan, drew a

way that contradicted “Quaker ethics.”<sup>157</sup> It particularly affected the ethic that their aid work was meant to uphold the dignity of people. This changing reality upended the AFSC’s “shared ethical practice” with recipients of humanitarianism.<sup>158</sup>

An ongoing illustration that gnashed and pulled against U.S. Quaker ethics were the continued orders from the United Nations to reduce ration rolls. This ongoing requirement conflicted with the Gaza Unit’s relational approach and created unwanted fractures with Palestinian refugees. The United Nations forced the AFSC into “using food as a weapon” in Gaza. The international organization obliged the Gaza Unit to remove women from the roll who married non-dispossessed Palestinians and rewarded *muktars* who reported falsified rolls to decrease rations from 245,000 to about 211,000.<sup>159</sup> Such imposed tactics proved unacceptable to

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connection between “bad habits” and impoverished living conditions. Hanan additionally reflected that the humanitarian action in their lands undergirded a class struggle or “class rancor” (*haqd al-tabaqi*) between Indigenous Gazans and the displaced Palestinians harboring in Gaza. See: “*Al-Ahram*, 18 August 1951” and “Interview with Hanan, Gaza City, 19 April 1999,” in Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, 128-130.

<sup>157</sup> Romirowsky, *Religion, Politics, and the Origins of Palestine Refugee Relief*, 163.

<sup>158</sup> Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief*, 101.

<sup>159</sup> Report, Measures Employed by the American Friends Service Committee to Reduce the Number of Rations Issued in the Gaza Strip, December 1949; file # 83 Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

For more on the ways in which Quaker ethics were challenged during their time in Gaza see Ilana Feldman’s article, “The Quaker Way: Ethical Labor and Humanitarian Relief,” *American Ethnologist* 34, 4 (2007): 689-705.

The practice of weaponizing food is a way that humanitarian action can become an avenue for imperial powers to retain influence in foreign lands. A particularly ironic example of weaponizing food as a means of foreign policy is from 1973 was when the United States literally gave Israel weapons and gave Egyptian’s food. At the end of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, American President Nixon told his staff, “[w]e must maintain the balance. Weapons for Israel and P[ublic] Law 480 [also known as Food for Peace] for Egypt.” See: Memorandum of Conversation, 31 May 1974; *FRUS*, 1969–1976, Vol. 26, *Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1974–1976*, Doc. 91.

For a history of food being utilized as a tool of American foreign policy, read: Barry Riley, *The Political History of American Food Aid: An Uneasy Benevolence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

U.S. Quakers in Gaza. The latter, a result, identified that UN involvement structurally countered the AFSC's desired relational approach with Palestinians refugees.

As menacing weather, social tensions, and lowering rations disturbed collective morale in Gaza, U.S. Quakers maintained a dialogue with dispossessed Palestinians. By 1949's end, the Gaza Unit firmly believed most refugees maintained "strong hopes that a political settlement will allow them to return to their homes." Some, especially amongst the older population, desired "no more than compensation for what they have lost." Others wanted a "plan—any plan—which will give them a feeling of permanency and a sense of security."<sup>160</sup> The displacement, impermanency, and insecurity of living life as a refugee downgraded Palestinian hope. This change was not lost on AFSC workers. While somewhat hand-tied in the field, they continued to implore the United Nations and their home offices to work towards a meaningful political solution to the ongoing crisis.

The lasting Nakba directly found its way to the U.S. Quaker headquarters when AFSC worker Jean Johnson passed along a full one-page letter penned by an unnamed Palestinian boy that she tutored in English twice per week. According to Johnson, the letter "expresses the refugees' situation so much better than [her] words can." The Gaza Unit member "knew, of course, that many refugees are far worse off – but they are the ones who cannot speak for themselves as this [B]oy can."<sup>161</sup>

The Palestinian boy's letter outlined "this bad life which every refugee live" in Gaza. He offered a rare glimpse in English of "how the refugees live." His immediate family, totaling fifteen, lived in three small tents. They were fortunate, even though they had five persons per

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<sup>160</sup> Operational Report AFSC, December 1949.

<sup>161</sup> Letter from Jean Jonson to Branson Pettibones at AFSC Headquarters, 5 February 1950; file # 268 Foreign Service 1950, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

tent. “[M]any strangers are living in one tent,” which was “not good.” Furthermore, “[s]ome of the tents are new and most of them are old,” he explained. Many often did not withstand the rain and barely shielded sandstorms. To make matters worse, there were not enough tents for everyone. The same applied for “good clothes to wear or to cover with save some blankets which are from Quakers.” He relayed that nearly all Palestinian refugees in Gaza were “without shoes” and “other necessary things.”<sup>162</sup>

UN food rations affected his family deeply. According to the Palestinian boy, his family received “ten kelos of flour and other things monthly. This sum of flour,” he contended, “was not enough to satisfy every one save the children.” Refugee families were thus “obliged to buy other some of flour beside the first sum.” His family, like most, had no money. Others “dared to go to their villages” to find items to sell; “Sometimes [they] might die.” The Palestinian boy did not even have a “a table to read on or a chair to sit on” in his family’s tent. He “had no bed to sleep on.” In the end, all he wanted was for “God to end our problems and turn us back to our homes to live a good and quiet life.”<sup>163</sup>

Eventually, an overwhelming panoply of Palestinian pleas led U.S. Quakers to identify a humanitarian trap in Gaza and attempt to escape it. In early 1950, the Gaza Unit’s voiced stateside that it had “complete unanimity”: it “forcefully and vigorously fe[lt] that the AFSC must not renew its responsibility for the present type of operation.” U.S. Quaker aid workers believed that “[b]y putting our foot down [,] we can bring pressure on the U.N. to get busy and go to work on its responsibilities.”<sup>164</sup> The AFSC believed that such responsibilities included

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<sup>162</sup> Letter written by a refugee boy in the fifth class of the Secondary School, 31 January 1950, Gaza, Palestine; file # 268 Foreign Service 1950, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>163</sup> Letter written by a refugee boy in the fifth class of the Secondary School, 31 January 1950, *AAFSC*.

<sup>164</sup> Memorandum to Foreign Service Executive Committee and Palestine Sub-Committee, 9 February 1950; Archive Highlights: Palestine Refugees in Gaza, *AAFSC*.

wielding its global influence to find a political solution to the so-called refugee problem. Since the AFSC believed itself to be apolitical, the U.S. nonstate actor wanted the United Nations to formally take over—albeit while still employing former members of the Gaza Unit. In talking with aid recipients, U.S. Quakers believed that an AFSC departure obliged the United Nations to solve its Palestinian refugee problem.

The Gaza Unit, as a result, adamantly refused to renew their contract with the United Nations past the previously established end date of 31 March 1950. It collectively outlined four factors contributing to this imploration. Firstly, they believed that the Gaza program continued to become less and less an AFSC program. Secondly, they feared that failure to name a specific date of withdrawal would leave them “trapped” in a humanitarian trap where “the postponements may have no end.” Thirdly, and most ominously, “[they] do not want to be there when the blow-up occurs.” Lastly, they felt that refusal to renew their work pushed the United Nations to have more extensive involvement that may lead to promising political solutions that remained unfeasible as long as the AFSC undertook humanitarian work in Gaza. In the end, “The worst weather in fifty years” upended the AFSC’s March departure from Gaza, resulting in a one-month extension of its UN-sanctioned mission. After formally agreeing to stay through April, the AFSC found it “quite clear that the Gaza staff is at present laboring through a very difficult situation, and that the refugees themselves are in an impossible position. It points up again clearly that the only solution for the Gaza refugees is their movement out of this Strip and settlement elsewhere.”<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Letter from Jean Jonson to Branson Pettibones at AFSC, 5 February 1950; file # 268 Foreign Service 1950, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project) series, *AAFSC*.

The AFSC's novel approach to humanitarianism facilitated its identification of a "humanitarian trap" at work in Gaza during and immediately after the first Arab-Israeli war. Their divergent approach centred upon the Quakers' firm belief that a deep interpersonal relationship with aid recipients was an indispensable element of relief work.<sup>166</sup> Listening to Palestinian refugees ultimately led to the U.S. Quaker refusal to be involved in a long-term aid project with no humane resolution in sight. From the AFSC's perspective, it became increasingly clear throughout their time in Gaza that the only practical solutions to the Palestinian refugee crisis in Gaza and beyond were political ones; political solutions that seemingly flew in the face of the AFSC's commitment to remain apolitical in their humanitarian pursuits.

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<sup>166</sup> Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief*, 99-100.

## CHAPTER 3

### Humanitarians Entrapped:

#### When A "Heart for People in Trouble"<sup>167</sup> Is Not Enough

The AFSC's official aid mandate in Gaza ended on 1 May 1950. As UNWRA took over, AFSC members no longer saw themselves as humanitarians who delivered emergency aid. Instead, most U.S. Quakers who remained in Gaza saw themselves in new roles focused on training refugees and shepherding impending resettlements.<sup>168</sup> The AFSC, at that time, was under the illusion that UNWRA would maintain a relational approach to humanitarian relief with Palestinians after its departure. The United Nations, they also thought, would quickly remedy the Palestinian refugee crisis, effectively evading the formation of a "humanitarian trap." Both beliefs proved false. Upon identifying UN failures, former Gaza Unit members maintained that the AFSC had an "ethical obligation" to help Palestinian refugees resettle. However, Quaker ethics stood at odds with AFSC humanitarian work in Gaza. U.S. Quakers believed that the "UN should assume responsibility" of administering continued relief.<sup>169</sup> By 1951, such tensions led the AFSC to lose faith in UNWRA and reject working with or under UNWRA to resettle Palestinian refugees in Gaza and elsewhere.<sup>170</sup>

Upon handing over their humanitarian responsibilities to UNWRA, the AFSC shared the United Nation's paternalist assumption that repatriation or reintegration hinged upon education

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<sup>167</sup> Letter from Paul Johnson to 'Friends,' 20 November 1951; file: General Administration, Foreign Service 1951, (General) series, *AAFSC*, 1-4.

<sup>168</sup> Letter from Donald Stevenson to Friends, 29 March 1950; file #225, Foreign Service 1950, Country-Palestine (Middle East Commissioner) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>169</sup> Memorandum Relating to the Arab refugee Problem, Gaza Unit to AFSC, 9 November 1949; file: General Administration, Foreign Service 1951, (General) series, *AAFSC*, 11.

<sup>170</sup> Memorandum from Julia Branson to Clarence Pickett, 5 January 1951; file: General Administration, Foreign Service 1951, (General to International Centers) series, *AAFSC*.

and training, or the so-called “social rehabilitation of the refugees.”<sup>171</sup> The creation of UNWRA represented a flawed UN attempt to resolve the Palestinian refugee crisis and elude long-term humanitarian involvement in Gaza by seeking to pass humanitarian responsibility off to regional Arab governments.<sup>172</sup> UNWRA was meant to be short-term and impermanent at its creation. From the perspectives of the U.S. Quaker group and the United Nations, UNWRA would only be temporarily operational, pending repatriation into Israel or reintegration of refugee camps into non-Palestinian Arab host countries. The AFSC naively assumed that UNWRA would provide the “adequate steps for the resettlement or repatriation of refugees soon.”<sup>173</sup> In the end, the AFSC withdrew from Gaza without alleviating the necessity of foreign aid or overseeing large scale resettlements. Meanwhile, UNWRA’s short-term mandate was cemented into a “humanitarian trap,” entrapping both humanitarians and Palestinian refugees in an endless cycle of humanitarian intervention.

### **Shifting Motives: How “Rehabilitation of Refugees” Moved to the Forefront**

As the Gaza Unit’s UN-sanctioned humanitarian project ended, AFSC leadership in Philadelphia shifted its focus toward resolving the so-called Palestinian refugee problem and stifling the developing “humanitarian trap” for aid givers and receives alike. In its final three months in the Gaza Strip, the U.S. Quaker group employed “maximum influence toward a

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<sup>171</sup> Final Report of the United Nations Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East, UNCCP, 28 December 1949; (UN Doc. A/ AC.25/6), 15–16.

<sup>172</sup> Anthropologist Ilana Feldman argued in *Governing Gaza* that the establishment of UNWRA was an “implicit recognition that the problem would not be solved immediately and that there had to be more than an hoc means of providing assistance to the Palestinian refugees.” In other words, by establishing UNWRA, Feldman believed that the United Nations was admitting that humanitarian action would be needed in Gaza long-term. See: Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule, 1917-1967* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 275.

<sup>173</sup> Memorandum Relating to the Arab refugee Problem, 9 November 1949, 14-15.

permanent solution of the refugee problem.” AFSC headquarters in Philadelphia tasked its members in Gaza to hold “a series of quiet talks” with Egyptian and Israeli representatives, which purposefully excluded Palestinians, to find a “genuine solution.” In another turn of AFSC field operations, it also encouraged the Gaza Unit to find personnel who could gain Israel’s confidence to make possible the “resettlement and integrating of Arabs into Israeli life.”<sup>174</sup>

As the AFSC leadership outside of Gaza took a political turn toward the so-called Palestinian refugee problem, U.S. Quakers in Gaza adopted a paternalistic approach to their humanitarian efforts that differed significantly from its previous relational focus. AFSC humanitarians prioritized the “rehabilitation” of Palestinian refugees over working alongside Palestinian refugees to deliver aid equitably. The notion of rehabilitating refugees was inherently paternalistic, positioning humanitarians as teachers who taught prescribed skills to Palestinian refugees that were deemed necessary for successful resettlement or reintegration. The concept of Palestinian rehabilitation also invoked problematic assumptions that Palestinian refugees needed to be taught. That is, the AFSC accepted the idea that the Palestinian refugee problem was a now more of a human problem, rather than a political one. In other words, this new approach placed more culpability on Palestinians than on the political situation that engendered Palestinian displacement and exile. The implication being that Palestinian refugees could be trained or educated out of poverty and humanitarian intervention would no longer be required. As a result, the U.S. non-state actor called upon its aid workers that remained in Gaza to draw up “self-help projects” for Palestinian refugees that could utilize soon to be available UNWRA funds earmarked for new works programs.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Memorandum, Copy of Confidential Report from Elmore Jackson to Clarence E. Pickett, 11 December 1949; Archive Highlights: Palestine Refugees in Gaza, *AAFSC*.

<sup>175</sup> Memorandum, Copy of Confidential Report from Elmore Jackson to Clarence E. Pickett, 11 December 1949; Archive Highlights: Palestine Refugees in Gaza, *AAFSC*.

The AFSC supported UNWRA's early objective to give Palestinian refugees, especially unemployed farmers and unskilled workers, the opportunity to gain new skills as they worked "where they were."<sup>176</sup> UNRWA sought to involve Palestinian refugees in programs of temporary small-scale public works that would "help refugees become self-reliant."<sup>177</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV)<sup>178</sup> tasked UNWRA with the "social rehabilitation of the refugees."<sup>179</sup> Passed on 8 December 1949,<sup>180</sup> Article 7 dictated that UNWRA's primary objectives were to "carry out in collaboration with local governments the direct relief and works programs"<sup>181</sup> and consult with regional governments "concerning measures to be taken by them preparatory to the time when international assistance for relief and works projects is no longer available."<sup>182</sup>

According to UNRWA, its works program offered a key first step for the permanent settlement of refugees into host economies and represented an international long-term solution to

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Jalal Al Hussein, "UNRWA and the Refugees: A Difficult but Lasting Marriage," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 40, 1 (2010): 7.

<sup>178</sup> United Nations, A/RES/302(IV) adopted by with the following vote: 47 yes; 0 no; 6 abstentions; 6 non-voting; total voting membership was 59. (Non-recorded based on A/PV.273 - No machine generated vote). United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 302 (IV), Article 7 (a) on 8 December 1949. Accessed 16 June 2021, <https://www.unrwa.org/content/general-assembly-resolution-302>.

<sup>179</sup> The recommendation was the product of an Economic Survey Mission or (ESM) that was established by the UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP) in August 1949 to examine ways to solve the Palestinian refugee problem via socioeconomic measures. See: UNCCP, "Final Report of the United Nations Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East, December 28, 1949," (UN Doc. A/ AC.25/6), 15-16 and 30; and Jalal Al Hussein, "UNRWA and the Refugees: A Difficult but Lasting Marriage," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 40, 1 (2010): 6.

<sup>180</sup> United Nations, A/RES/302(IV) adopted by with the following vote: 47 yes; 0 no; 6 abstentions; 6 non-voting; total voting membership was 59. (Non-recorded based on A/PV.273 - No machine generated vote). United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 302 (IV), Article 7 (a) on 8 December 1949. Accessed 16 June 2021, <https://www.unrwa.org/content/general-assembly-resolution-302>.

<sup>181</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 302 (IV), Article 7 (a) on 8 December 1949. Accessed June 16, 2021, <https://www.unrwa.org/content/general-assembly-resolution-302>.

<sup>182</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 302 (IV), Article 7 (b) on 8 December 1949. Accessed June 16, 2021, <https://www.unrwa.org/content/general-assembly-resolution-302>.

the so-called refugee problem.<sup>183</sup> By reducing the economic burden of hosting refugees and simultaneously training refugees with new vocational skills, UN officials believed that exiled Palestinians would become more desirable for non-Palestinian host countries. UNWRA established infrastructure within refugee camps with the hope of eliminating the need for humanitarian intervention.<sup>184</sup>

In the Gaza Strip, population density coupled with the limited land availability complicated UNWRA's goal of creating permanent settlements where refugees were already residing. In early 1950, UNWRA and the Egyptian government planned to relocate 62,000 Palestinians refugees from Gaza into a new permanent camp in the Sinai Desert. Palestinian refugees, however, resisted the resettlement plan. They were unwilling to compromise compensation of lost land or even jeopardize future opportunities to return to their homes.<sup>185</sup> In response to the proposed relocation project in Sinai, a Palestinian refugee leader explained: "The refugees cannot be settled, they cannot be disposed of, and they will not be settled outside the [Gaza] strip and this will force the UN to solve their problems in a way [refugees] accept."<sup>186</sup> The failure of the Sinai project showcased how the United Nations' imagined solution to the Palestinian refugee crisis diverged from the popular will of Palestinians, which continued to disproportionality support the Palestinians right of return outlined in UN Resolution 194.

### **Words Matter: Resettlement, Not Repatriation**

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<sup>183</sup> Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief*, 81.

<sup>184</sup> Jalal Al Hussein, "UNRWA and the Refugees: A Difficult but Lasting Marriage," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 40, 1 (2010): 6-9.

<sup>185</sup> Ilana Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief*, 83-84.

<sup>186</sup> "Attitude and Thinking on Project in Gaza Strip," n.d. Inactive Files, Box 2 E/810/4, at *Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees Archives (AU)*, Amman, Jordan in Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief*, 83 and 232.

Amidst UNWRA's founding near the end of 1949, the terms "repatriation" and "resettlement" were highly politicized in international conversations surrounding "the refugee problem." International conversations moved away from the previously favored Palestinian right of return in favor of the terms "repatriation" and "resettlement." Resettlement elsewhere, in other words, overtook the Palestinian call for return in pursuits seeking to solve the refugee crisis. According to the AFSC's Clarence Pickett, the two terms became so "charged with emotional content" that it was "practically impossible for a U.N. deliberating body to make any progress towards the solution of the [refugee] problem by continuing to use [those] particular words." Instead, it was problematically suggested that "reintegration" or "rehabilitation" were better suited and Pickett candidly acknowledged that "everyone recognize[d]" these newly acceptable terms were just a disingenuous way of discussing "repatriation and resettlement."<sup>187</sup>

The United Nations began to stray away from seeking to repatriate Palestinian refugees to their homes, viewing it as increasingly unfeasible. As Israel phased out international humanitarian relief to internal refugees, its War of Return further impeded the right of return for Palestinians. Moreover, Israeli delegates at the United Nations utilized their new General Assembly seat to block issues pertaining to the Palestinian right of return. These tactics made the presence of Palestinian Arabs within Israel misleadingly appear to decrease.<sup>188</sup> Consequently, the United Nations fell under the misguided illusion that Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews could not co-exist. As such the United Nations sought solutions beyond right of return to solve the refugee

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<sup>187</sup> Letter, "Discussions at General Assembly on the Report of the Clapp Mission," Elmore Jackson to AFSC, 29 November 1949; file #123 Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project: Clapp Mission) series, AAFSC.

<sup>188</sup> Shira Robinson, *Citizen Strangers: Palestinians and the Birth of Israel's Liberal Settler State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 37-39 and 74-82.

crisis. Instead “rehabilitation” and “resettlements” were pursued, bolstered by mounting evidence that Israel would not yield any territory gained during the war.<sup>189</sup>

In the wake of a local survey mission, the United Nations affirmed their belief that “Arabs [could not] live comfortably or securely within Israel territory,” even if they were given the option to return. While Israel expressed “good faith” during UN-led negotiations to accept the return of Palestinians to their homes, there was “great doubt whether local authorities and local gangs would co-operate adequately.” Only “Arabs who [were] willing to accept discrimination and a new culture” would be able to live within Israel. As a result, “it was clear that the partition scheme accepted by the UN Assembly [was] outdated” and any future partition schemes “should be on the basis of separate areas for the Arabs and the Jews.”<sup>190</sup> The United Nations’ objective to separate the two groups shelved the Palestinian right of return during negotiations.

From the United Nations’ perspective, the threat of local Zionist groups and other forms of settler colonial violence made compensation for lost property the “most important factor” in facilitating a permanent relocation of Palestinian refugees to places other than their homes and ending the so-called refugee problem.<sup>191</sup> U.S. Quakers in Gaza witnessed Israel’s settler colonial ambition to control Palestinian lands without its Indigenous peoples firsthand. Elwood Geiger, a member of the Gaza Unit, doubted the feasibility of Palestinian refugees returning to their homes after the Nakba. En route from Tel Aviv to Gaza, Geiger saw “probably hundreds of dozers”

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<sup>189</sup> Memorandum Relating to the Arab refugee Problem, 9 November 1949; file #123 Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project: Clapp Mission) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>190</sup> Memorandum Relating to the Arab refugee Problem, 9 November 1949; file #123 Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project: Clapp Mission) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

leveling Palestinian Arab villages. That drive represented the moment when he “woke up.” “[F]or the first time it was clear” to him that Palestinian refugees would not be returning home.<sup>192</sup>

While AFSC leadership in the United States became increasingly involved in the international politics of the Palestinian refugee crisis beyond Gaza, former Gaza Unit members joined UNWRA, contributed to a paternalistic legacy of Western aid in Gaza, and reinforced the myth of American exceptionalism. Like many U.S. humanitarians at this time, former Gaza Unit members imagined that humanitarianism with Palestinian refugees in Gaza functioned as an ethical and moral vessel to place the United States’ presence in foreign lands in a more acceptable manner. As David Watenpaugh explains, “humanitarianism allowed for an expression of an American colonial paternalism without the brutality of reign rule.”<sup>193</sup> The AFSC portrayed itself as above these kinds of pitfalls, as it was an apolitical group that strictly sought to aid their fellow humans. Imperial legacies, however, influenced U.S. Quakers.

### **AFSC and UNWRA: An Uneasy Alliance**

The AFSC cautiously encouraged “certain members” of its Gaza staff to join UNWRA, instead of returning to the United States.<sup>194</sup> The Quakers “ethical obligation” to Palestinian refugees notwithstanding, the recommendation was made partly because AFSC leadership in

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<sup>192</sup> AFSC, Oral History Interview #60, Narrator Elwood Geiger, Interviewer: Joan Lowe, 19 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 159.

<sup>193</sup> Keith Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones*, 55-56.

The US Department of State’s request in January of 1951 that for “the interest if American oil companies...it would be desirable for the Friends [AFSC]” to continue their work with Palestinian refugees. See: Letter, Advisory Committee on Voluntary Foreign Aid, Arthur C. Ringland (Executive Director of the Department of State) to Clarence Pickett of the AFSC; Country – Israel: Proposed Gaza Project, Foreign Service 1951, Country-Indonesia (STA – General) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>194</sup> Memorandum, Elmore Jackson to Clarence E. Pickett, 11 December 1949; Archive Highlights: Palestine Refugees in Gaza, *AAFSC*.

Gaza prejudicially felt that Palestinians were unable to “maintain order” without the routine and “orderly distribution” of food that the AFSC provided.<sup>195</sup> Heeding the advice to stay, approximately twenty-five—around of half of the Gaza Unit—agreed to join UNRWA on an interim basis. U.S. Quakers shared with their new UNWRA leadership that the plight of the Palestinian refugees in Gaza concerned them most.<sup>196</sup> Observing their “ethical obligation” to uphold the dignity of the people they served, U.S. Quakers feared the ways in which humanitarian action in Gaza prolonged the Nakba and at times contradicted Quaker ethics. In their efforts to resolve the perceived harm of providing humanitarian aid with no end in sight, the remaining Gaza Unit members turned their efforts towards resettlement, believing it to be the best option to help and uphold the dignity of Palestinian refugees.<sup>197</sup>

Accordingly, the AFSC humanitarians who stayed shifted their foci away from emergency aid towards the “training and rehabilitation” of Palestinians. In the eyes of U.S. Quakers in Gaza, they “wish[ed] to see ‘these people’ receive help through school programs, vocational training to give refugees more opportunities in the future.”<sup>198</sup> Thus, when UNWRA took up its humanitarian work, U.S. Quakers that hoped for swift repatriation under UN auspices shifted away from their former relational approach towards “rehabilitation” initiatives. The AFSC’s desire to stay involved in “social welfare activities” in Gaza, particularly in schools, evidenced a perpetuation of humanitarian action cloaked in paternalistic imperial ways.

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<sup>195</sup> Meeting Minutes, Palestine Sub-Committee, 6 January 1950; Archive Highlights: Palestine Refugees in Gaza, *AAFSC*.

<sup>196</sup> Letter from Donald Stevenson to Friends, 29 March 1950; file #225, Foreign Service 1950, Country-Palestine (Middle East Commissioner) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>197</sup> Memorandum from Julia Branson to Clarence Pickett, 5 January 1951; file General Administration, Foreign Service 1951, (General to International Centers) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>198</sup> Letter from Donald Stevenson to Friends, 29 March 1950; file #225 Foreign Service 1950, Country-Palestine (Middle East Commissioner) series, *AAFSC*.

The U.S. Quaker organization wanted to ensure school adhered to their views on subjects such as gender, commanding that school “was not only for boys, but girls as well.” They alleged that previous schooling was mere indoctrination. Instead, they wanted schools in Gaza to focus on education, “not just propaganda.” They maintained that school should be free and open to all social classes. The AFSC noted a need for "outside personnel" to direct the school programs to "withstand the local pressure" to revert to previous practices.<sup>199</sup> In all three instances, the AFSC’s expectations for schools centred around Eurocentric paradigms. The idea that “local pressure” or local involvement in directing school policies would corrupt the quality of education played into fears that anything less than a Eurocentric education would result in the failure to properly “rehabilitate” students and negatively impact their future chances of resettlement.

The “self-help” projects proposed by the AFSC in Gaza were training efforts meant to “professionalize” supposedly “unskilled” Palestinian refugees. The objective, in step with UNRWA’s mission, was to make Palestinians more desirable candidates for reintegration into Israel or resettlement in other countries. According to AFSC director Clarence Pickett, Israel was a “modern state.” As such, Palestinian refugees needed to embrace modernization *à la américaine*. They should be willing to make the “adjustments necessary” to reintegrate into a “new advanced way of life.” Moreover, Pickett believed that “Arabs needed to realize that even if they go home as all of them long to do their lives can never be the same as they were before the circumstances.” Most Palestinian refugees were farmers; “most of them farmed their little plots of land as they were farmed in the days of Jesus.”<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Meeting Minutes, Palestine Sub-Committee, 6 January 1950, Archive Highlights: Palestine Refugees in Gaza, AAFSC.

<sup>200</sup> Clarence E. Pickett, “Friends Feed Exiled Arabs” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 March 1949.

In the eyes of the AFSC, training appeared to be a key to emigrating Palestinians into neighbouring Arab countries that rejected refugees as “unskilled” labourers.<sup>201</sup> For example, it was noted that Egypt gradually moved Palestinian refugees who could not support themselves outside of Egypt’s formal borders and into the Gaza area.<sup>202</sup> Under Pickett’s leadership, the AFSC used its position within UNWRA to prescribe what “was best” for refugees, instead of their former approach that focused on listening and working alongside Palestinians to reach solutions.

As a result of this new direction, a fissure started to form between the AFSC and their former employees who remained in Gaza. The disbanded Gaza Unit wrote a field manual for the United Nations. The AFSC unit’s field manual evidenced its trust that UNWRA would maintain personal connections and keep Palestinian refugee desires at the core of its humanitarian work. The Gaza Unit outlined some practical advice, such as organizing the blankets by quality before distribution and allowing “no exchanges,” checking inventory daily to determine percentage of loss, as well as keeping *mukhtars* out of the distribution centres for the sake of efficiency. Flakes

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<sup>201</sup> Lebanon opposed resettlement within their boundaries and often denied Palestinians the legal right to work within Lebanon. In the case of neighboring Syria, Ilan Pappé recorded that were too many poor and unemployed Syrians who needed the under-paid jobs and this resulted in Syrians “quite naturally displaying animosity towards [their] competitors [the Palestinian refugees].” Read: Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 145; and Memorandum Relating to the Arab refugee Problem, 9 November 1949; file #123 Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project: Clapp Mission) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>202</sup> According to a report dated 9 November 1949, Egypt and Lebanon had both taken a strong position against accepting refugees as permanent residents. “There are not more than 7000 refugees presently within Egypt other than those in the Gaza Strip.” According to the same report the Egyptian were gradually forcing refugees “who cannot support themselves” out of Egypt and into the Gaza area. While Lebanon was not as drastic, they also opposed resettlement within their boundaries and often denied Palestinians the legal right to work within Lebanon. See: Memorandum Relating to the Arab refugee Problem, 9 November 1949; file #123 Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project: Clapp Mission) series, *AAFSC*.

For more on the UN’s effort to turn relief efforts towards works and training program see: Phyllis H. Brinks, “AFSC: Background, Administration, Social Work Contributions,” Master’s Thesis, The University of British Columbia, School of Social Work (1954), 26-27.

of U.S. exceptionalism were also sprinkled within the pages amongst comments about how it was desirable for all employees down to the labourers to know English. The field manual asserted a need to cultivate the virtue of honesty amongst Palestinian workers and establish clear office hours for handling complaints, or risk spending “full time [hours] as a ‘counsellor’ or ‘father confessor.’” Racial prejudices notwithstanding, it was also apparent that U.S. Quakers strongly believed that a relational approach was crucial to working within Gaza. For example, the AFSC cautioned that success in managing ration cards would depend strictly on UNWRA’s reputation with Palestinian refugees. As such, it was imperative to “spend some time trying to understand [Palestinian refugees]” and their culture.<sup>203</sup> This last piece of advice was primarily ignored under the new UNRWA leadership.

It was not long after AFSC’s withdraw from Gaza that the lingering U.S. Quakers started to question the trust they placed in UNWRA. In an oral history interview, AFSC Refugee Camp Director Alwin Holtz recounted the consternation he felt in a conversation with the UN diplomat that took over his job during the spring of 1950. After offering to take the new camp director out the next day to introduce him to all the local people, he was met with a shocking response: “Hold it, Al. None of that. I came down here with a case of scotch and was told to get along with the Egyptians.”<sup>204</sup> Instead, the “political appointee... surrounded himself with a bunch of jugheads.” His replacement’s “concern for the refugees [was] at a minimum.” According to Holtz, “most concern seem[ed] to be for the type of car you drive and to hold onto your job.” UNWRA, in his opinion, was becoming a rent-seeking agency that overlooked the Palestinian refugees it served.

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<sup>203</sup> Administrative Instructions from Alwin Holts of AFSC to James Kean (United Nations Field Director), March 1950; file #200, Foreign Service 1950, Country-Palestine (Refugee Project: Gaza) 1950” series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>204</sup> AFSC, Oral History Interview #604, Narrator Alwin Holts, Interviewer: Joan Lowe, 19 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 87.

UNWRA's "whole [humanitarian] program lack[ed] guts, integrity and administrative good sense."<sup>205</sup>

The criticism of UNWRA and the United Nations more broadly was perceivably sharper coming from Palestinian refugees. A Palestinian refugee (whose name was not recorded) reported that: "after UNWRA started to distribute rations, the Palestinian started to take. He started begging – and morals were destroyed."<sup>206</sup> This Palestinian refugee believed the dependence on aid that the international organization fostered was the main factor in a perceived decline in Palestinian morals. Palestinian allegations emerged, at this time, that UNWRA actively worked to placate refugees into accepting displacement instead of return. Palestinian refugee Salim Rashid, who was noted in the previous chapter for suggesting "it was better if there was no agency [*wikala*]," indicated that UNWRA relief was part of a Western imperial plot to make Palestinians accept the loss of their homeland.<sup>207</sup> The general distrust for the United Nations created an instantaneous distrust of UNWRA amongst many Palestinians. AFSC member Colin Bell explained that he was "sure UNWRA would welcome and support in all sorts of useful ways any pilot resettlement project undertaken under other auspices [such as the AFSC]" because "the fact [was] that [UNWRA is] bogged down [by] the general hatred and mistrust of anything which bears the UN label."<sup>208</sup>

Moreover, in a rare move to consider the often-elusive perspective of Palestinian refugees within Western documents, Bell logged the "impressions of the Refugees" in a survey report

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<sup>205</sup> Letter from Alwin Holtz to Corrinne, November 1950; file (Country – Israel: Proposed Gaza Project), Foreign Service 1951, Country-Indonesia (STA – General) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>206</sup> Interview, Gaza City, 14 February 1999, in Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, 129.

<sup>207</sup> Interview with Salim Rashid, Gaza City, 11 March 1999, in Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, 129.

<sup>208</sup> Report on Conference on the Middle East Refugee Problem, held at Beirut, Lebanon, 1-8 May 1951, written by AFSC member Colin Bell; file (Country – Israel: Proposed Gaza Project), Foreign Service 1951, Country-Indonesia (STA – General) series, *AAFSC*.

seeking a solution to the "refugee problem." According to Bell, Palestinian refugees were suspicious that UN relief agencies were "corrupt, inefficient, and quite happy to keep them just existing." UNWRA was "regarded as the UN sop," or bottom of the barrel by Palestinian refugees. It was believed UNWRA halted the "really positive action which the UN ought to be taking in the area" that could lead to Palestinian resettlement. Palestinians viewed the United Nation's failure to uphold various key resolutions and its proposed partition plans as criminal acts. Interestingly, when Palestinian refugees shared their opinions with Bell, he noted that "the Jews were mentioned far less than the United Nations."<sup>209</sup>

Visits to myriad Palestinian refugee camps throughout the Gaza Strip shaped Bell's perspective. These types of visits from various diplomatic groups were anything but a novelty to Palestinians within these camps. Bell noted how conversations with *mukhtars* reached "rather alarming intensity of passion" as they did not want any more "visiting groups."<sup>210</sup> The Palestinian refugees were exhausted by the revolving door of foreign groups who visited and conducted surveys. All the while, no change in their circumstance seemed to ever result from those visits. Palestinian refugees grew weary of visits where they shared their difficulties and "humiliating"<sup>211</sup> living conditions with Western outsiders.

Bell observed amongst Palestinian refugees a shift towards accepting resettlement outside of Israel, if it would bring them out their abeyance. According to Bell, Palestinian refugees who

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<sup>209</sup> Report on Conference on the Middle East Refugee Problem, held at Beirut, Lebanon, 1-8 May 1951, written by AFSC member Colin Bell; file (Country – Israel: Proposed Gaza Project), Foreign Service 1951, Country-Indonesia (STA – General) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>210</sup> Report on Conference on the Middle East Refugee Problem, held at Beirut, Lebanon, 1-8 May 1951, written by AFSC member Colin Bell; file (Country – Israel: Proposed Gaza Project), Foreign Service 1951, Country-Indonesia (STA – General) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>211</sup> A Palestinian refugee told a journalist in 1949: "The Palestine affair is no longer a matter of liberating a country. It has degenerated into a humiliating problem – that of feeding and sheltering refugees," (IFRC, A0410-1), *Refugee Lives*, "Visit to the South Lebanon Camps," n.d. in Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief*, 232.

spoke “brazenly about returning to their home” in front of crowds and “utterly eschewed the idea of anything but repatriation” tended to speak much more moderately and in somewhat different terms when they spoke to Bell privately. The AFSC member believed that a significant number of individuals and village groups were “very ready” to resettle, but “it would be very dangerous for them express such willingness.” Influential leaders in Palestinian refugee camps were typically land or property owners who wanted to return to regain their lost capital in Israel. Consequently, there was a perceived risk to speak out in favour of resettlement outside of Israel. It was also noted that urban dwellers had much less incentive than rural landowners to return to Israel. As such, it was argued that there was a higher willingness to resettle within Palestinian refugee communities. Yet it was often missed due to the public nature of the conversations that took place on the matter.<sup>212</sup>

This waning view of the United Nations cultivated the fading trust of the former Gaza Unit workers who resigned amidst UNWRA’s failure to prioritize listening and learning in reciprocal ways, as previously favoured under the Service Committee.<sup>213</sup> When the United Nations shifted focus and resources towards other matters, such as the Korean War, Palestinian refugees felt overlooked by the international body. They openly wondered why they were forced to watch the United Nations “spring to battle in Korea for the sake of arbitrary frontier, when nothing was done to establish the partition lines in Palestine which were decided upon by the UN itself?” Palestinian refugees detected that the United Nations should not shirk its responsibility to

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<sup>212</sup> Report on Conference on the Middle East Refugee Problem, held at Beirut, Lebanon, 1-8 May 1951, Colin Bell, *AAFSC*.

<sup>213</sup> Holtz, former Gaza Unit member, resigned from UNWRA effective 1 October 1950 over conflict with UNWRA chief Keen. Holtz also mentioned that Vern Pings recently transferred out of the area into Lebanon following “a phony case of “homosex” [sic] on him” in which UNWRA was going to fire him without proof or a hearing. Read: Letter from Alwin Holtz to Corrinne, November 1950; file (Country – Israel: Proposed Gaza Project), Foreign Service 1951, Country-Indonesia (STA – General) series, *AAFSC*.

amend Palestinians since the international body played an instrumental role in facilitating their exile. The United Nations' move away from Palestinians and towards other refugee situations internationally was also noted by Holtz, who left his position with UNRWA in October 1950. While Korean refugees needed help, the former AFSC Refugee Camp Director felt that they removed the "limelight off our still-needy Palestinians friends." Humanitarian work with Palestinians was incomplete.<sup>214</sup>

Palestinian refugees astutely recognized, in conversation with AFSC members, that the United Nations' focus on repatriation changed. As Palestinian refugees grew increasingly frustrated by the United Nations' continued inaction, they appealed to the Cold War zeitgeist and took advantage of broader Cold War divisions to garner support in their pursuit to return home. During conversations with visiting diplomats, Palestinian refugees invoked the global Cold War and made "veiled references to Russia in the form of a challenge that if the western democracies refused to recognise the justice of their case, they would turn to others who would be very happy to help them."<sup>215</sup>

Like Palestinian refugees, former AFSC Gaza Unit members doubted UN leadership in the so-called refugee problem. Holtz opined that the international body's plan hinged upon the success of "cocktail parties" and "lavish entertainment."<sup>216</sup> An agreeing Julia Bronson petitioned Clarence Pickett about the AFSC's ethical responsibility to continue to help Gazan refugees. Bronson explained that UNRWA's director had "completely sold out to the Egyptian Army."

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<sup>214</sup> Report on Conference on the Middle East Refugee Problem, held at Beirut, Lebanon, 1-8 May 1951, written by AFSC member Colin Bell; file (Country – Israel: Proposed Gaza Project), Foreign Service 1951, Country-Indonesia (STA – General) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>215</sup> Report on Conference on the Middle East Refugee Problem, held at Beirut, Lebanon, 1-8 May 1951, Colin Bell, *AAFSC*.

<sup>216</sup> Letter from Alwin Holtz to Corrinne, 6 January 1951; file (Country – Israel: Proposed Gaza Project), Foreign Service 1951, Country-Indonesia (STA – General) series, *AAFSC*.

She received “continuous reports about how very bad the administration” of UNWRA was.<sup>217</sup>

Bronson maintained that the AFSC’s previous involvement in Gaza meant they had a “moral obligation” to continue working towards “some solution to the problem” by “doing something to make it possible for one of the Arab lands to absorb comfortably a group of refugees.” It was apparent to her that UNWRA could no longer be trusted. As such, any new U.S. Quaker initiatives should exclude UNWRA involvement.

Internal tensions emerged between former Gaza Unit members and AFSC leadership in Philadelphia. Bronson identified hesitation within the U.S. Quaker central executive to work towards a solution. This made her “uncomfortable” because she felt that the AFSC was “overlooking this section of the world.” While problematically linking the lack of progress in resettlement to “Arab governments for being ‘wholly unreliable’,” Bronson thought the AFSC was better positioned to negotiate as a private, non-governmental organization—“a private organization could come nearer working something out than a governmental one could.”<sup>218</sup> In her mind, the AFSC did not need the United Nations to help resettle Palestinian refugees. The international body was an obstacle to its work, not an ally. As a result of these issues and the related loss of confidence from Palestinian refugees, Branson, Holtz and other U.S. Quakers lost faith in the UN capabilities and started working on a separate plan to resolve the Palestinian refugee crisis without the United Nations.

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<sup>217</sup> Additionally, Branson accused UNWRA of smearing the AFSC’s reputation writing that “a great many derogatory details” were being spread in Gaza about their work and that this would make it “extremely difficult” to work with UNWRA going forward. See: Memorandum, Julia Branson to Clarence Pickett, 5 January 1951; file (Country – Israel: Proposed Gaza Project), Foreign Service 1951, Country-Indonesia (STA – General) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>218</sup> Memorandum, Julia Branson to Clarence Pickett, 5 January 1951; file (Country – Israel: Proposed Gaza Project), Foreign Service 1951, Country-Indonesia (STA – General) series, *AAFSC*.

The AFSC was not devoid of UN criticism. UN officials commonly accused the “Friends” of being “undiplomatic,” lacking the proper procedures to guide their work, being closed minded to outside criticism, and being an “intimate group living in their own world.”<sup>219</sup> The U.S. Quaker practice of working alongside Palestinian refugees, instead of in charge of them, was scoffed at by a UN Finance Officer charged to review AFSC’s Gaza operation. The UN finance officer conceded that while the U.S. Quakers were “most popular” amongst refugees, their tendency to rely upon the “nucleus of Palestinian employees” made it “difficult to discern who was actually in charge, the international UN members or the privileged group of refugee employees.” Paternalistically, they alleged that the AFSC tendency to work alongside Palestinians disrupted the preferred power structure that denied refugees from being in a “privileged position.”<sup>220</sup> The former AFSC Gaza Unit’s divergent approach likely played a key role in UNWRA denying its members leadership positions within their organization. From the perspective of the international agency, U.S. Quakers were a liability that often-overlooked essential bureaucratic procedures.

The AFSC’s tendency to overlook vital administrative duties was not unfounded. In fact, it was perhaps best exemplified by and within a plan to resettle refugees from Gaza to Syria. Proposed by Holtz to UNWRA director James Keen, the U.S. Quaker plan proposed that the

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<sup>219</sup> According to Quaker Elden Mills, the “very nature of this sort of humanitarian services tends to attract folk who are equipped with a liberal supply of individualism, conviction and vigor, and when combined under tension, in close quarters, with successive problems constantly arising... life tends to become thick.” It seems the Quakers understood that their “conviction and vigor” may have come across harsh to outsiders and this criticism may not have been entirely unexpected. Read: Report, Elden Mills to Emmett Gulley, 20 June 1949; file #126, Foreign Service 1949, Country-Palestine series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>220</sup> Review and Assessment of AFSC Operation, 14 October 1950; file #247, Foreign Service 1950, Country-Palestine series, *AAFSC*. According to UNWRA director, James Keen, the report was by a Norwegian who was the UN’s current “Financial and Administrative Officer in Gaza.” See: Report on UNWRA, James Keen to Clarence Pickett, 15 November 1950; file #247, Foreign Service 1950, Country-Palestine series, *AAFSC*.

AFSC move “village by village” in Gaza, then transport Palestinian refugees by sea via the newly established Syrian port of Latakia into a “land with nothing on it but a few [bedouin].” Upon arrival in Syria, U.S. Quakers would help set up wells and schools. While Holtz contended that he shared this plan with Keen on multiple occasions, the plan never left port. The lack of administrative planning and general preposterousness of the proposal was showcased in Keen’s response: “yeah, it’s a good idea, but did you ever try talking to the Syrians about it?”<sup>221</sup> Unsurprisingly, there is no evidence that Holtz or any other U.S. Quaker discussed this plan with Syria, let alone Palestinian refugees.

Throughout 1951, U.S. Quakers remained known in Gaza as having a "heart for people in trouble." A tension between “ethical obligation” and “humanitarian trap” resurfaced. Paul Johnson, the original leader of the Gaza Unit, believed that the AFSC was in a unique position to assist Palestinian refugees given that the United Nations and other groups were “stuck and getting nowhere” when it came to resettlement. Johnson pushed for a fresh AFSC humanitarian intervention in Gaza and beyond, as continued UN efforts would lead to an “international failure of tragic proportions.” The United Nations, at this time, contemplated inhumane alternatives to the status quo. Johnson particularly opposed UN discussions to hinge international aid on Palestinians accepting undesired resettlements. Distressed, he noted that the United Nations

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<sup>221</sup>Holtz statement was eerily reminiscent of a popular Zionist phrase, “a land without people for a people without land,” in AFSC, Oral History Interview #604, Narrator Alwin Holts, Interviewer: Joan Lowe, 19 September 1992, *AAFSC*, 76-78.

For information on how “a land without people for a people without land,” has been misused as a justification for colonizing Palestine see: Adam M. Garfinkle, "On the Origin, Meaning, Use and Abuse of a Phrase," *Middle Eastern Studies* 27, 4 (1991): 539-50.

planned to achieve this by “WITHDRAWING THEIR RATIONS.” In Johnson’s mind, “this is no joke.”<sup>222</sup>

Turning over Palestinian relief to Arab governments was another undesirable option from Johnson’s perspective because Arab countries did not want the “refugee problem solved on its merits,” unless “their price [was] met.”<sup>223</sup> Holtz similarly noted: “All of us felt very keenly about what the Arab countries were doing politically, using [refugees] as a political football and not helping at all. It was their fault to start with. They were the ones that said, ‘You don't have to worry. We'll run them into the sea and then you'll come back, and everything will be peachy.’”<sup>224</sup>

Notwithstanding ongoing criticism of regional Arab governments and a fracturing connection to United Nations, the AFSC did not stop pursuing its ‘moral obligation’ to end Palestinian humanitarian plight via resettlement. On that precedent, some members believed that if the “Friends are unable to find a way to help bring about a move towards voluntary resettlement... no power [whatsoever] can do it under present political circumstances.”<sup>225</sup>

Johnson went so far as to plea that the AFSC appeal to the entire Quaker community and send its “broadest-gauge and most influential international Quaker delegation” to garner more power. He would “happily carry their briefcases” if they were willing to lend their influence to solving the Palestinian refugee crisis.<sup>226</sup> Despite Johnson's appeal, the AFSC never sent the delegation he requested. Similarly, other plans for resettlement failed to come to fruition. A humanitarian trap imprisoned Gaza.

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<sup>222</sup> Letter, Paul Johnson to ‘Friends,’ 20 November 1951; file General Administration, Foreign Service 1951, (General to International Centers) series, *AAFSC*.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> Oral History Interview #604, Narrator Alwin Holts, Interviewer: Joan Lowe, 78-79.

<sup>225</sup> Letter, Paul Johnson to ‘Friends,’ 20 November 1951; *AAFSC*, 1-4.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

## CONCLUSION

The AFSC time in Gaza provides compelling insights into the history of the hazards of modern humanitarianism, especially the potential danger it wielded when "aid recipients" and "aid givers" were disconnected from each other. Working alongside Palestinian refugees led U.S. Quakers to question the ethics of their work and ultimately withdraw from Gaza in 1951. A clear link surfaced between the AFSC evasion of the forming humanitarian trap and the quality of their relationships with Palestinian refugees. As connections with Palestinian refugees waned, former AFSC members quietly became involved in the United Nations' humanitarian apparatus and their "rehabilitation" efforts. Alternatively, others became so outspoken and critical of the United Nations that they started to forfeit their influence and, along with it, their opportunities to assist Palestinian refugees in resolving their displacement.

The U.S. Quakers' novel practice during their aid mandate in Gaza was ahead of its time. The AFSC's work with Palestinian refugees provides a historical example of an aid organization withdrawing for moral reasons. While the AFSC created space for Palestinians' perspectives to be heard outside of the Gaza Strip, their eventual refusal to participate in aid programs that had "no end in sight" distanced the two groups. Persistent bouts of paternalism ended up severing this critical connection. Moreover, shifting focus away from direct aid towards political aims such as "rehabilitation" or resettlement left the AFSC pushing against the common will of Palestinian refugees and their shared desire to return to their homes.

It is difficult not to wonder what may have transpired if the AFSC could have swayed UNWRA to maintain the relational elements of their humanitarian approach in Gaza. If UNWRA chose to work alongside Palestinian refugees from its inception, perhaps the organization could

have been temporary as first intended leading them to circumvent the grip of the emergent humanitarian trap.

One element of the humanitarian history in Gaza from 1948 through 1951 that remains notably persistent was the ingenuity and determination of Palestinian refugees themselves. Whether it was finding creative ways to increase the often-meagre rations for their families, sharing coffee and tea with the Quakers while sharing stories about their lives and displacement, to refusing to resettle in undesirable locations, Palestinian refugees impacted humanitarian actors and humanitarian action in Gaza.

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