

Petitioning for Palestine: Refugee appeals to international authorities

In the second half of the 20th century, stateless Palestinian refugees regularly submitted petitions to international authorities, particularly the UN. In these petitions, the refugees demanded their rights and invoked the UN's liberal internationalist discourse to assert the justice of their cause. This article explores what these petitions reveal about contentious politics among the Palestinian grass roots in the refugee camps. In so doing, it recasts Palestinian refugee camp communities as internationally engaged and politically savvy, showing that they were key actors in the nationalist struggle. By unpacking the petitions' internationalist aspects, the article also situates Palestinian refugee history within the broader context of post-war global governance. Finally, the analysis presented here challenges the state-centrism of existing historiography on petitioning, which examines the practice largely in relation to the growth of the state. By contrast, the case study of Palestinian petitioning shows that the practice can also be important in a setting of statelessness. This article therefore makes a series of contributions to understanding not only Palestinian political history, but also the practice of petitioning and the dynamics of post-war internationalism.

Keywords: petitions; refugee; Palestine; international; UN; stateless.

We repudiate all Israeli atrocities which... are in discord with all international conventions and Security Council resolutions and the United Nations Charter and the simplest of the rights of man... Our plea is that firm measures be taken to do away with violating international and human laws by calling for [Israel's] immediate evacuation from all occupied territories including Jerusalem'.¹

Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to UN Secretary-General U Thant, 20 May 1968

In 1968, a group of Palestinian refugees submitted a petition to the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General. Condemning the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, they contended that Israel's actions contravened UN conventions, and accordingly called on the UN to intervene. In appealing to Thant to act in this way, the petitioners not only recognised the UN's authority but also suggested its ability to effect change. Their petition is therefore instructive on several fronts. First, it illustrates the internationalisation of the Palestinian issue and the role of the UN therein. It also exemplifies the ways in which subaltern groups can appeal to and draw on dominant discursive codes as a way of promoting their interests. Finally and

most significantly, it provides a revealing example of Palestinian refugees appealing to international authorities, in this case the UN, in the absence of having their own state.

The 1968 petition to Thant was far from unique. In the decades after the Palestinians became stateless refugees in 1948, they frequently organised and submitted petitions to international organisations. The UN and its various agencies were most often the recipients, but Palestinian refugee petitioners also appealed to the League of Arab States (LAS), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), among others. While Palestinian engagement with international institutions in this period has been widely acknowledged, scholars have largely focused on such efforts at the leadership level, with regard to the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Palestinian Authority (PA) (Chamberlin 2012, Erakat 2019, Khalidi 2020). This article takes a different approach, by examining the petitions sent to international authorities, particularly the UN, by the grass roots in the Palestinian refugee camps. In so doing, it adds another layer to understanding contentious politics in modern Palestinian history, through a non-elite focus.

The practice of petitioning has received considerable attention from social historians. Many examine petitions as a tool by which subaltern groups can campaign for their interests in settings of structural disempowerment (Alozie 2019, Chalcraft 2005, Heerma van Hoss 2001, O'Brien 2018, Swarnalatha 2001). This setup is certainly true of Palestinian refugees, who are undeniably a disempowered subaltern group. Yet the historiography is heavily state-centric, focusing on such groups' relations with the state authorities to which they appealed. There is very little scholarship on the practice of petitioning among refugees – notwithstanding recent works by Nowak (2019a, 2019b) and Dowdall (2019) – and even less about stateless peoples like the Palestinians. By applying the paradigm of petitioning to the

Palestinian refugee case, this article therefore seeks to enhance understandings not only of Palestinian history, but of petitioning itself.

To do so, this article asks two interrelated questions: first, how does Palestinian history look different when examined through the lens of political petitioning? And second, how does the Palestinian case study complicate paradigms about petitioning? To investigate these questions, this study draws on a wide range of Palestinian petitions found in the archives of the UN Secretariat in New York, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) in Amman, the League of Nations in Geneva, and the UK government in London. Based on this evidence, I argue here that Palestinian petitions provide an insight into the nature of the refugees' grass roots struggle, showing it to be organised, internationalist, and rights-focused. The Palestinian case study thus shows that petitions can be an instructive source *outside* the state-centric settings that dominate much of the existing historiography.

These findings are particularly valuable in their contribution to the recent spate of scholarship on Palestinian international diplomacy in the later 20th century. While the latter is largely preoccupied with the strategies of the aforementioned Palestinian national leadership (Chamberlin 2012, Erakat 2019, Irfan 2020), the evidence presented here shows that the refugee grass roots also deployed the tools of international diplomacy. Their petitions to international authorities expressed their desire for recognition within the nation-state system that became normative after the Second World War. In the absence of having their own government, stateless Palestinians appealed to international authorities to protect and implement their rights – and they explicitly invoked internationalist discourse when doing so. In unpacking this history, this article thus also contributes to the burgeoning scholarship on refugee agency (Chatterji 2013, Gatrell 2013, Nowak 2019b, White 2017).

This article organised into three sections. The first looks at scholarly concepts of petitions, examining how they are defined in social history. It also uncovers the tradition of petitioning in Palestinian society before their dispossession and displacement in 1948. The remainder of the article shifts its focus to the practice of petitioning among post-1948 refugee communities, investigating what this reveals about Palestinian political history. Specifically, the article's second section looks at petitioning as a signifier of the refugees' political organising in exile, while the third examines the internationalist nature of the grass roots Palestinian struggle. The article concludes by considering the wider implications of these findings.

Petitions in social history: a 'weapon of the weak'?²

What makes a petition?

The practice of petitioning can be found throughout history. Petitions themselves comprise an example of what Martin Lyons (2015) calls 'writing upwards'; in other words, they constitute correspondence to a political, social, or economic superior. Transcending time and space, petitions have been used by a variety of social groups to lobby for their interests, protest existing policies, or request various changes. While Charles Tilly (1998) argues that petitions were a 19th century European invention, tied to the emergence of written national constitutions, the evidence belies this. Indeed, when abolitionists in the 19th century US were told that their petitions to Congress were illegitimate, they responded that the right of citizens to petition their legislature could be traced back to Magna Carta (Baptist 2014, p. 268). Thus far from being a phenomenon of 19th century Europe, petitions have a long history spanning multiple regions and contexts.

In historiographical terms, the study of petitioning has been commensurate with the drive to examine 'history from below'. Social historians have thus looked at how petitions record the voices of subaltern groups, such as women (Alozie 2019,

Schmidt Blaine 2001), Indigenous peoples (O'Brien 2018), and rural peasant communities (Chalcraft 2005, Ben Bassat 2013b). Studies have proliferated on the use of petitions to engage with and contest state policy in settings ranging from rural hinterlands (Chalcraft 2005, Doumani 1995) to colonised regions (Alozie 2019, O'Brien 2018, Swarnalatha 2001) to provincial governments (Schmidt Blaine, 2001). Yet of course, the sheer diversity of such case studies raises the question of whether it is meaningful to consider petitions as an analytical category at all. In short, given their wide-ranging variety, what is it that makes a petition a petition?

Here too there is relevant historiography to draw on. Lex Heerma van Hoss (2001, p. 1) defines petitions as 'demands for a favour, or for the redressing of an injustice, directed to some established authority'. This could be amended slightly, as the 'favour' in question was rarely framed as such by the petitioners; instead, signatories of petitions usually implored authorities to grant their requests on grounds of entitlement, justice, or consistency with the norms of the time. Accordingly, this article defines a petition as an organised written appeal to authority, calling for change in the name of justice, rights, legitimacy, or some combination of the three. These appeals could be either individual or collective; this article, like many others, examines both, on the grounds that they often bear many of the same characteristics (Heerma van Hoss 2001, Lyons 2015).

Further developing the conceptualisation of petitions, social historians have identified several common characteristics in these texts. In appealing to an established authority, petitioners implicitly or explicitly affirm both the legitimacy of that authority and its ability to take action – as was the case with the aforementioned 1968 Palestinian petition to UN Secretary-General Thant³ (Chalcraft 2005, Doumani 1995, Lyons 2015). Moreover, petitioners nearly always frame their appeals in the dominant discursive codes of the time, manipulating hegemonic terms in order to promote their cause (Alozie 2019, Chalcraft 2005, Doumani 1995, Lyons 2015). The

state's positioning as arbiter of justice, order and rights is accordingly a key theme (Chalcraft 2007, Cronin 2008, O'Brien 2018); in some cases, this means that petitioners even appeal to its paternalistic codes (Dowdall 2019, Fitzpatrick 1996, Gatrell 2020, Nowak 2019a, O'Brien 2018).

In keeping with this, petitions tend to be premised on the notion of a direct relationship between the signatories and the recipient(s), disregarding or even undermining any intermediaries (Alozie 2019, Chalcraft 2005, Doumani 1995, Lyons 2015). Finally, whether written by an individual or a group, petitions regularly assert the existence of a collective or even an identity category (Doumani 1995, Heerma van Voss 2001, Tilly 1998). Importantly, these features can be all found in the numerous Palestinian refugee petitions examined here – further highlighting their broader significance as a historical source.

At their core, then, petitions are an example of what Jeremy Brooke Straughn (2005, pp. 1598-1599) calls 'consentful contention', whereby 'citizens openly contest official directives by appealing to the state's own dominant ideology... through nonradical practices of contention'. In other words, these practices enable citizens to voice their criticisms without taking the risks entailed by perceived disloyalty. John Chalcraft (2005) similarly writes that subalterns' use of petitions represents a 'third way', through which they neither submit to the state nor seek its overthrow. Instead, they manipulate, adapt and amend the status quo as a way of serving their interests and seeking to achieve their objectives (Cronin 2008). Petitioning thus engages with the state, and even employs it, rather than calling for its dismantlement. Accordingly, the displayed deference of many petitioners should not be taken at face value; in many cases it can be a performative tactic deliberately designed to increasingly the likelihood of an appeal's success (Cronin 2008, Dowdall 2019, Lyons 2015, Scott 1985).

These scholarly assessments are highly instructive in illuminating the Palestinian case of petitioning, as is explained below. Yet they also betray the state-centric nature of much of the historiography. Nearly all the above-cited works examine petitioning in relation to the growth of the state, be it in the context of the emerging nation-state (Tilly 1998); the growth of the public sphere (Zaret 2000); the implementation of colonial rule (O'Brien 2018, Swarnalatha 2001); or territorial expansion (Baptist 2014). Historians contend that as the state increasingly encroached on people's lives, petitions provided a tool through which they could engage with it. This was particularly significant in the absence of other available channels for popular engagement with high politics (Alozie 2019), meaning that petitions tended to decline in importance as other channels emerged through trade unionisation and democratisation (Heerma van Hoss 2001).

This notion of petitioning as an activity of 'proto-citizenship' has a particular pertinence for refugees, who by definition are outside their countries of nationality and thus seeking to assert their rights without the leverage of citizenship. In the case of the Palestinians, the situation is further complicated by their condition of statelessness. The fact that Palestinian refugees sought to deploy petitions as a tool in this context, is therefore revealing about both the political activity they pursued and its limitations. This has been regrettably overlooked amidst the state-centrism of the existing historiography. As this article will show, many of the features identified above also characterised petitions from stateless Palestinian refugees, thus calling into question this fixation on statehood.

Petitioning in pre-1948 Palestine

Historiographical state-centrism extends to the scholarship on Palestinian petitioning, which focuses on the period before 1948. While this article is concerned with the refugee petitions that came later, it is useful to also consider these historical antecedents, as a way of understanding how the practice functioned at the grass roots

level. In fact, there was a prevalent tradition of petitioning in historic Palestine – perhaps unsurprisingly, given that the practice was well-established in the Ottoman Empire, to which Palestine belonged for four centuries.

In fact, petitioning was so institutionalised in the Ottoman Empire that petition-writing was itself a profession, with illiterate or semi-literate petitioners hiring professional writers to compose the texts with appropriate language (Chalcraft 2005). Petitioning became increasingly prevalent in the Ottoman Empire over the 19th century, in line with how the *Tanzimat* reforms of that period expanded the role of the central Ottoman state. Combined with advances in technology and communications, this meant that an increasing number of petitions were sent to Istanbul from Ottoman provinces in this period. The content of these petitions was strikingly consistent with the themes identified in the historiography, as outlined above. Most notably, petitioners nearly always invoked the idea that they had a direct relationship with the central state, appealing to Istanbul to go over the heads of intermediaries by intervening in local disputes (Ben Bassat 2013b, Chalcraft 2007).

The same was true in Ottoman Palestine. Beshara Doumani (1995), Louis Fishman (2019) and Yuval Ben Bassat (2013a, 2013b) have all documented the extensive number of petitions sent by Palestinian peasant communities to Istanbul in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and their parallels with petitions elsewhere. Like so many others, Palestinian peasants made their claims by drawing on the dominant discourse of the era, in this case the liberal reformist ideology of the *Tanzimat*. They regularly appealed to *Tanzimat* notions of equal citizenship, for example condemning local rulers' alleged corruption on the grounds that no one should be above the law. They also framed their appeals in terms of their entitlement to state protection as tax-paying Ottoman citizens (Doumani 1995, Campos 2010).

Doumani (1995, p. 180) argues that Palestinian peasants' petitions to Istanbul at this time demonstrated 'a nascent class consciousness... against their own traditional leaders'. Yet as time went on, their petitions also came to reflect the fledgling nationalism taking hold in the Arab world. The latter was particularly significant in Palestine, where Arab nationalism was rendered distinctive by the context of the emerging modern Zionist movement (Khalidi 1997). Accordingly, communities in late Ottoman Palestine used petitions not only to negotiate their relations with the central state, but also to contest the encroachment of the Zionist campaign in Palestine (Ben Bassat 2013b, Fishman 2019). They thus invoked a political ideology that would become central to Palestinian petitions over the years: anti-Zionism.

Examples of this are plentiful. In the 1890s, the Bedouin community of al-Sitriyya petitioned Istanbul repeatedly in protest at the new Zionist colony of Rehovot, which they claimed had pushed them off the land they had cultivated for decades. Then in 1910, the villagers of al-Fula in northern Palestine submitted a petition complaining that absent landowners had sold their land to a Zionist organisation, namely the Jewish National Fund (JNF) (Ben Bassat 2013b, Fishman 2019). Three years later, more than 30 *mukhtars* and *imams*, representing dozens of villages in the Gaza sub-district, sent a petition to Istanbul in which they complained that Zionist settlers were assaulting Arab villagers and seeking to force them off their land (Campos 2010, Fishman 2019). Reflecting the changing times, these later petitions appealed to the liberal political discourse of the 1908 Constitutional Revolution, which had introduced democratic reforms to the Ottoman Empire. In keeping with these development, signatories invoked notions of governmental responsibility and citizens' rights, framed in the discourse of justice and equality (Ben Bassat 2013b).

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, Palestinians continued to use petitions to demand their rights, now appealing to the British who ruled the country for the next thirty years. The dominant discourse accordingly shifted from the political liberalism of the Tanzimat and the 1908 Constitutional Revolution, to the proclaimed objectives of the British Mandate of Palestine. The latter included the facilitation of Palestinian self-determination and the eventual establishment of an independent Palestinian state (The Council of the League of Nations 1922). Palestinian petitioners in this period thus frequently invoked Britain's Mandatory pledges when calling for the implementation of their national political rights (Erakat 2019). For example, in 1936 the Arab Feminist Union asserted in a UK-bound petition that 'the [British] state actually present in the Holyland [sic] does not conform to the promises dealt to the Arabs by Great Britain', referring to the latter's pledges around national self-determination.⁴

The Mandate period also saw an important shift in Palestinian petitioning; for the first time, petitioners appealed not only to national governments but also to international institutions. The reason for this was simple; Britain's Mandatory authority in Palestine had been ostensibly granted by the newly-created League of Nations, in its guise as international authority and arbiter. Thus after the League formally issued the Palestine Mandate to Britain in 1922, Palestinians increasingly appealed to it to support their national and political rights (Sayigh 2007). By the same measure, Zionist groups petitioned the League for their own cause for much of the Mandate era.⁵ This marked the beginning of a long-term theme in Palestinian national politics, whereby activists found that they needed to engage with international organisations in order to pursue their national rights.

On these grounds, 1926 saw the Executive Committee of the Palestine Arab Congress submit a petition to the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations, in which they contended that the British were unfairly biased towards

Jewish communities in Palestine. Their petition explicitly invoked the League's codes, attesting that British actions 'totally violated' the terms of the Palestine Mandate, and 'perverted the true spirit underlying article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations' (which stated that the Mandatory power should assist the governed population in achieving independence).⁶ The petitioners concluded by asserting that 'a national independent democratic government...should be established in Palestine', in line with the objectives of the Mandate system.⁷ This text thus illustrates Palestinian petitioners' ability to invoke and appeal to dominant discursive codes at an international as well as state level.

Petitions were far from the only tool used by Palestinians to contest the Zionist movement in the interwar period. During the Mandate, Palestinian communities also employed strategies of civil disobedience, as with the 1936 General Strike, or direct violence, as in the 1929 riots (Sayigh 2007). Yet it is striking that the 'consentful contention' of petitioning (Straughn 2005) was included alongside more overtly hostile forms of contentious politics in this period. This nuance demonstrates the multi-faceted nature of Palestinian activism in the earlier 20th century, and the long history of 'consentful contention' in Palestinian society. It also provides important contextual background for the petitions that were organised so frequently by Palestinian refugees after 1948.

Organising in exile: Petitions from Palestinian refugees

The impact of the Nakba

1948 was the defining rupture in Palestinian history. By the end of that year, the Palestinians had lost their land, their country, and their hopes of independent statehood, in events that became known in the Arab world as the *nakba* ('catastrophe'). The new state of Israel was established that year on 78% of Palestine, while the remaining 22% was either annexed by Jordan (the fate of the West Bank and East Jerusalem), or governed by Egypt (as happened in the Gaza Strip) (Khalidi

2020). Around three-quarters of the Palestinian Arab population – more than 750,000 people – were expelled by Zionist militias or fled the unfolding violence (Pappe 2006). Most sought shelter in the two parts of Palestine that were not absorbed by Israel – the West Bank and Gaza Strip – and the neighbouring Arab states of Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt (UN Economic Survey Mission 1949). The poorest ended up in refugee camps across the Levant, the majority of which still exist today. They received essential services from UNRWA, which began operations in 1950.

The Palestinians' dispersal and statelessness went hand-in-hand with their exclusion from formal political structures, both regionally and internationally. This created momentous obstacles to any hope of political organisation, made worse by the fact that many refugees were traumatised by the shock of exile, and struggling to survive amidst the poverty of the camps. Yet at the same time, the outcome of 1948 gave the Palestinians a clear shared political cause: the reversal of the Nakba and the restoration of their country. The paradox of 1948 was thus to divide the Palestinian people geographically while uniting them politically more closely than ever before (Khalidi 1997). Thereafter, Palestinian political discourse became focused around a small number of key goals: return to Palestine, independence, and national self-determination. These goals were reflected in the content and form of all subsequent petitions.

Scholars have long acknowledged the centrality of contentious politics to Palestinian refugee history (Baoni 2018, Chamberlin 2012, Heacock 2008, Jarrar 1996, Khalidi 2020). When considering the grass roots, historians tend to focus on two categories of contentious politics: violent resistance, and civil disobedience. The former features prolifically in discussions of the Palestinian nationalist movement, with examples ranging from the plane hijackings of the late 1960s and 1970s to the Gaza rockets of the 21st century (Baoni 2018, Schweitzer 2007). The latter is most

often associated with the widespread civil disobedience of the first *intifada* (King 2007, Chenoweth and Stephan 2011), and more recently the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement (Allen 2018). As shown above, both forms of contentious politics predated 1948, having been used by Palestinians to contest British and Zionist policies in the Mandate era.

Yet the historiography rarely considers another form of Palestinian grass roots contentious politics that also transcends the watershed of 1948, but does not fall into either of these categories. The petitions that were a key Palestinian tactic in both the Ottoman and the Mandate periods belong to a third category, seeking to engender political change by appealing to dominant discursive codes – the aforementioned ‘consentful contention’ described by Straughn (2005). There is ample historiographical discussion of how this strategy has been employed by the Palestinian national leadership, first the pre-1948 elites and then their eventual *de facto* successors in the PLO and PA (Chamberlin 2012, Erakat 2019, Khalidi 1985, Sayigh 2007). Yet consentful contention as practised by the Palestinian grass roots after 1948 has received comparatively little scholarly attention. This historiographical oversight belies the frequency of petitioning among Palestinian refugee camp communities, and disregards the myriad ways in which this history illuminates the complexity of grass roots political activism after the Nakba. The remainder of this article seeks to redress these oversights, by centralising petitioning within an analysis of contentious politics in Palestinian refugee history.

Collective campaigning in exile

Palestinian refugees began organising petitions from the early aftermath of the Nakba, targeting both the former British Mandate power⁸ and the newly-created UN (Jarrar 1996). That they did so may be attributed in part to the established custom of petitioning in pre-1948 Palestine. Indeed, some features of the refugees’ petitions show considerable continuity with what had gone before, despite the upheaval of

the Nakba, and indeed also show continuity with other petitions across social history. After 1948, Palestinian petitioners continued to recognise, legitimise and defer to the authority to which they were writing; they still invoked dominant discursive codes; and they asserted the shared voice of a collective group. Their appeals were also underpinned by many of the same political themes as in the pre-1948 period, such as opposition to Zionism, and the assertion of Palestinian political rights.

Some of these continuities are relatively straightforward, such as those regarding the petitions' format, phraseology, and style. The use of rigid formality and protocol can be found across Palestinian refugee petitions, regardless of whether they were sent by *mukhtars*, individuals, or groups. In keeping with standard diplomatic parlance, for instance, refugee petitioners consistently addressed the Secretaries-General of the UN and the LAS as 'Your Excellency'⁹ – just as their Palestinian predecessors had done when writing to the leadership of the League of Nations.¹⁰ Petitioners' deference to authority, and to its moral standing, also remained. Thus a 1950 petition to the British Prime Minister began, 'God has chosen you from His human beings to give each person his right [sic]¹¹ – with striking similarities to how earlier Palestinian petitioners had addressed the Ottoman Sultan (Doumani 1995). Across the decades after the Nakba, petitioners continued to express their faith in the recipient's conscience, morals, and dedication to justice. As late as 1981, a petition from Palestinian refugees in Jordan to the UN Secretary-General stated:

Your Excellency, we trust in your neutrality, your honesty, and your live conscience. We appeal to you in the name of suffering humanity, of justice, of the civilisation values and principles which you uphold through the UN in order to root and diffuse them among people...¹²

There is an obvious parallel here with earlier petitions to both the Ottoman Sultan and the League of Nations, which had struck a similarly deferential and flattering tone (Ben Bassat 2013a, Campos 2010, Doumani 1995).

Of course, this deference should not be taken at face value. As explained above, petitioners' deference could often be performative, a deliberate tactic calculated to increase the chances of an appeal's success (Cronin 2008, Lyons 2015, Scott 1985). That Palestinian refugees may have used such a tactic demonstrates their manoeuvring skills, political consciousness, and tactical awareness – all of which is entirely consistent with recent findings about refugee political history elsewhere (Dowdall 2019, Gatrell 2020, Nowak 2019a, Nowak 2019b). The fact that Palestinian refugees also shared a widespread suspicion of both the British government and the UN further suggests that their apparent deference may have been a performative tactic (Al Hussein 2010, Erakat 2019, Farah 2010).

If petitioning was a tactic, then, what was the objective? In this respect it is possible to identify both continuity and change with the pre-1948 period. While refugee petitioners continued to raise complaints about a range of political and social issues after 1948, they now nearly always grounded them in the underlying problem of Palestinian exile and statelessness. This was in marked contrast to earlier petitions, which had largely focused on the immediate issue at hand, often discussing it in a localised context. Even the aforementioned anti-Zionist petitions of the early 20th century tended to discuss Zionism's perceived threat to the local community – such as the al-Fula villagers' complaint in 1910 about the loss of their land – rather than to the Palestinian nation as a whole.

By contrast, after 1948 Palestinian refugee petitioners nearly always framed their grievances within the overarching context of *national* dispossession. While they appealed to authorities over a wide range of issues – inadequate service provision in

the camps, poor living conditions, the low wages of Palestinian UNRWA staff – their political situation was always the underlying theme, even when it came to ostensibly unrelated issues. For example, in 1960, Zaki El Tamimi, the Head of the Palestinian Arab Higher Committee (AHC) Office in Syria, submitted a petition to the Syrian government in which he protested reports that UNRWA was planning to discontinue its provision of lower secondary education, and restrict access to its schools. El Tamimi criticised these reported plans on the grounds that education ‘kindles enthusiasm in [Palestinian] hearts to return to their usurped homeland and liberate it from its usurpers... [without education] the blazing spirit of patriotism will be extinguished.’¹³ In other words, El Tamimi saw the issue at hand – UNRWA’s provision of schooling – as inseparable from the Palestinian struggle for their collective rights, and the underlying problem of their dispossession.

In some ways, El Tamimi was atypical; his position within the AHC distinguished him from much of the Palestinian refugee grass roots. Yet his political framing of a particular grievance had much in common with grass roots petitions in the same period. Indeed, similar themes can be found throughout Palestinian refugee petitions. In 1979, for example, the *mukhtar* of Balata refugee camp in the West Bank submitted a petition on behalf of the camp community to the UNRWA Commissioner-General, in which he protested inadequate service provision. Again, the complaint was grounded in the underlying condition of Palestinian dispossession.¹⁴ Two years later, a group of Palestinian refugees in Jordan similarly referred to the context of Israeli occupation and Palestinian statelessness when petitioning the UN Secretary-General to reform UNRWA.¹⁵ Strikingly, this nationalist and collective framing can be found in Palestinian refugee petitions regardless of whether they came from groups¹⁶ or individuals.¹⁷ Put simply, it was rare for Palestinian refugees to compose petitions without referring to the plight of their people as a whole.¹⁸

All this is in clear contrast to Palestinian grass roots petitions before 1948, which rarely connected specific local grievances to national-level issues. This shift illustrates the Nakba's aforementioned impact in increasing the cohesiveness of Palestinian national identity; the shared experience of dispossession bound the people much more closely together *as Palestinians* (Khalidi 2006). In keeping with this, petitioners' regular references to national dispossession were paired with their strong tendency to claim that they were speaking for the Palestinian people as a whole. When lobbying authorities to disallow Israeli policies, implement Palestinian refugee repatriation, and, after 1967, dismantle the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (hereafter the Occupied Palestinian Territories or OPT), refugee petitioners consistently spoke of these issues' importance for all Palestinians *as a collective identity group*.

This assertion of the Palestinian collective can be found in petitions throughout the later decades of the 20th century, and across various geographical locations. As early as the 1950s, it underpinned a petition from Palestinian refugees in Jordan to the Arab League, in which they protested Jordanian naturalisation on the grounds that it risked undermining their Palestinian national identity (Jarrar 1996). Two decades later, in 1977, a group of Palestinians in the West Bank submitted a petition to the UN Secretary-General protesting Israeli moves to streamline policies in the OPT. In it, they stated:

While declaring our refusal of the latest [Israeli] measures, we, the people in the occupied territories, declare that... out of adherence to our national rights to land, state and self-determination we reject the [Israeli] settlement policy [in the OPT].... [which] we consider a serious violation of our national existence... we, the people in the occupied territories raise our voices aloud, condemning such measures...against our people.¹⁹

Such framing, with its repeated use of the first person plural and assertions of collective identity, can be found throughout Palestinian petitions in the later decades of the 20th century.²⁰ Inherent to such petitions was the notion that Palestinian

refugees had rights – not just individual humanitarian rights, but collective political and national rights *as a people* (Erakat 2019).

Such assertions show that it was not only the Palestinian elite leadership that claimed to speak on behalf of the people in the 20th century. Post-Nakba petitions overwhelmingly came from the grass roots; when any leader was involved, it was usually the camp *mukhtars*, representing their communities²¹ or joining together on issues of regional interest.²² While they were acting in a leadership capacity, the refugee camp *mukhtars* could hardly be described as elites. They were themselves from the poorest strata of the Palestinian refugee population, and were certainly separate from the national leadership of the PLO. The fact that non-elite Palestinians were invoking the same discourse around the collective Palestinian people is indicative of the multiple layers that characterised the national struggle. It also demonstrates the potential value of petitions in unlocking non-elite collective histories (Nowak 2019a).

The practice of petitioning thus helped form the Palestinian refugees' collective voice and identity in exile. Petitions were used to channel Palestinian political expression in a setting of statelessness, and were employed by refugees as a means of lobbying for their demands. In other words, petitioning formed part of refugee politics *within* exiled Palestinian communities. Yet this is only one aspect of their history. The petitions ultimately had an external target, usually the international organisations to which they appealed. As a historical source, they can therefore be just as revealing about Palestinian refugee communities' *external* relations, and specifically, their engagement with internationalism. This provides the focus of the next section.

The internationalist grass roots

The internationalist nature of the Palestinian national struggle after 1948 has received increasing scholarly attention in recent years, with a particular focus on the PLO's diplomatic strategy at the UN (Chamberlin 2012, Erakat 2019, Irfan 2020). However, Palestinian refugee petitions show that it was not only the PLO engaging with the international sphere in the later 20th century. In their many petitions, grass roots Palestinians also appealed to international institutions – chiefly the UN – to recognise and implement their collective rights. Indeed, the content and frequency of their petitions to the UN show that Palestinian refugees saw their plight as internationally-centred, with both its causes and its possible resolution grounded in the global sphere. This section accordingly examines the internationalist elements of Palestinian refugee petitions, from two angles: their appeal to the UN as a *de facto* state; and their invocation of 'international' norms to legitimate their cause.

International authorities as de facto state

Social historians have regularly argued that petitions facilitated the growth of the state, by fostering the sense of a close and direct relationship between central authorities and communities in the hinterlands (Ben Bassat 2013a, Chalcraft 2005, Doumani 1995). In his study of Ottoman Palestine, Doumani (1995) even draws on peasant petitions to argue that the Ottoman state's increasing centralisation in the 19th century was driven by pressure from below as much as by top-down reforms. Yet in the case of the Palestinian refugees, the petitioners in question were not tax-paying citizens appealing to their central government, but stateless refugees writing to international authorities. How, then, should we understand the relationship between Palestinian refugee petitioners and the authorities to which they appealed?

Strikingly, the nature and content of Palestinian refugee petitions were characterised by many of the same features found in petitions to states. In addition to the deference described above, Palestinian refugee petitioners frequently invoked the UN's obligations and responsibilities towards them. Just as numerous subaltern

groups have used petitions to lobby for state intervention in local affairs (Ben Bassat 2013a, Chalcraft 2005, Doumani 1995), so Palestinian refugees regularly called for the UN to take action. For example, the 1968 petition quoted at the beginning of this article called for the UN to send a delegate to the OPT, ‘to lay his finger on the whole truth’.²³ The following decade, Palestinian petitioners regularly appealed to the UN ‘to take all steps to ensure that [Israeli] aggressive measures against our people are checked and annulled’,²⁴ and to ‘stop these [Israeli] actions’ in the OPT.²⁵ While the precise issues being discussed could vary – including anything from the actions of the Israeli army to the conditions in the refugee camps²⁶ – the appeal for UN intervention was recurrent.

In calling for UN action in this way, Palestinian refugee petitioners fostered a direct relationship between themselves and the international organisation, in the same way that other subaltern petitioners have done with states throughout history. On these grounds, it could be said that the petitions sent by stateless Palestinian refugees served to implicitly position the UN as their *de facto* state. In so doing, they helped drive the internationalisation of the so-called ‘Question of Palestine’, and the UN’s particular involvement in the Palestinians’ fate (Allen 2016, Chamberlin 2012, Erakat 2016, Erakat 2019, Khalidi 2016). Again, this is an example of how such interventionist dynamics are the product of not only top-down initiatives but also bottom-up pressures.

This is not unique to the Palestinian situation. Across the 20th century, other refugee communities also saw their situations ‘internationalised’. As early as the interwar era, for example, the League of Nations mandated the issuing of the Nansen passport as an internationally-recognised travel document for denationalised Russian and Armenian refugees (Gatrell 2013, Mazower 2013). The international League was accordingly positioned as these stateless peoples’ *de facto* government. Thereafter, various refugee communities continually drew on the notion of international

responsibility in their appeals. For instance, European refugees in interwar France petitioned the League for more provisions on the grounds of its *obligations* towards them, rather than any notion of generosity (Dowdall 2019). Nowak (2019b) identifies similar themes in Polish refugees' petitions to the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) and the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) after the Second World War. Thus just as Doumani (1995) argues that bottom-up pressures drove the growth of the Ottoman state, so the same could be said for the rise of the global refugee regime in the 20th century.

While the Palestinians were evidently not the only refugees active in this process, they were among the most prominent. Their importance in this regard can be explained, at least partly, by the UN's particularly interventionist role in Palestinian affairs. The internationalisation of Palestine dates back to the interwar period, when the League of Nations granted the aforementioned British Mandate. After the UN superseded the League in 1945, it maintained a direct role in Palestinian affairs, most notably proposing in 1947 that the country be partitioned into separate Jewish and Arab states (UNGA 1947). Even long after the Nakba, the UN retained its peculiar involvement in the Palestinian situation through its multifaceted roles in diplomacy (Allen 2016, Erakat 2016, Falk 2016), development (Khalidi 2016, Turner 2016), and humanitarianism (Al Hussein 2016). Such interventionism compounded the UN's positionality as the Palestinian refugees' *de facto* state. At the same time, many Palestinians held the UN culpable for their plight, on the grounds of its role in the 1947 Partition Plan and its failure to protect their rights during the Nakba²⁷ (Farah 2010). Palestinian petitioners therefore regularly spoke of the UN's particular responsibility towards them and their situation when calling for it to intervene.²⁸

Another element was also at play in the distinctive nature of the Palestinian refugees' relationship with the UN: UNRWA. Created at the end of 1949, UNRWA

is mandated by the UN to provide services to registered Palestinian refugees in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank, and Gaza (UNGA 1949). It is therefore unique as an international organisation with exclusive responsibility for one group of people. As a result, UNRWA has come to comprise the stateless Palestinian refugees' *de facto* government in a way that has never been replicated (Hanafi 2014, Peteeet 2007, Schiff 1995, Turki 1994). Riccardo Bocco (2009, p. 274) even dubs it 'the Blue State', although this formulation is questionable in view of UNRWA's highly limited capacities; Sari Hanafi's conceptualisation of UNRWA as a 'phantom sovereign' (2014, p. 129) may be more accurate. Regardless of the specificities, it is widely agreed that UNRWA has functioned as a quasi-government for the Palestinian refugees, with all the resulting baggage – and, most importantly, this is also how the Palestinians have seen it.

Such perceptions are clearly reflected in the language of refugee petitioners both to and about UNRWA. In 1979, for example, Abdullah Bishawi, the *mukhtar* of Balata camp, sent a petition to the UNRWA Commissioner-General, calling for greater investment in the camp's infrastructure and services:

You have reduced relief and cut down the food of the poor and miserable people who have become street beggars.... We are approaching a hard winter and where is the relief which is mentioned in the very name of your agency? Instead it has become the agency of starvation, destitution, bankruptcy, injustice and tyranny.... We are your responsibility and you should provide us with relief, care and services.²⁹

Bishawi's closing sentence is particularly revealing here, as he draws on the notion that UNRWA's services are the refugees' right and the organisation's responsibility. There are striking parallels with the language used by tax-paying citizens when petitioning their states. These commonalities demonstrate not only the assertion of refugee agency but also their formulation of UNRWA as a quasi-state authority rather than a welfare organisation.

The same notion of rights and responsibility was continually present in internal communications from Palestinian refugees employed by UNRWA. In 1970, UNRWA teachers' committees in the West Bank submitted a petition protesting the Israeli-induced withdrawal of textbooks from UNRWA schools. Emphasising the issue's importance, they sent the petition to the UNRWA Commissioner-General, the UN Secretary-General, the UN Middle East Envoy, and the Chair of the UN Human Rights Committee. In it, they complained about the difficulties of teaching without the textbooks, and demanded that the latter be returned immediately, invoking UNRWA's dual responsibility towards them as both employees of the Agency and Palestinian refugees themselves. They closed by explicitly calling on UNRWA to 'carry out its duty'.³⁰

These petitioners' invocation of UNRWA's duty is instructive on numerous counts. For one thing, it illustrates the Palestinian refugees' refusal to accept the global refugee regime as it was structurally constituted. Peter Gatrell (2013, p. 285) observes how the relationship between refugees and aid agencies was structurally asymmetric, with the latter's assistance often serving to 'disqualify [refugees] from expressing an opinion of their own'. Yet the Palestinian refugees, like many others, resisted constructions of themselves as mere passive recipients of top-down humanitarian policies (Irfan 2019). Instead, they positioned themselves as political agents, with their petitions clear evidence of their agency and activism on this front (Gatrell 2013, Kibreab 1993, Nowak 2019b). As such, Palestinian refugee petitioning can also be seen as part of a broader subaltern challenge to international aid systems in the later 20th century, whereby debates about the politics of humanitarianism fed into calls for greater aid accountability (Fassin 2007, Feldman 2018, Hyndman 2000, Tabar 2016). Calls for democratisation on these lines have become central to the discourse around UNHCR in recent decades (Sandvik and Jacobsen 2016, Turk and Eyster 2010), but these petitions show that refugees also resisted structural exclusion when it came to UNRWA.

Importantly, the refugees' resistance was not anti-systemic, but rather comprised 'consentful contention' (Straughn 2005). This in turn shows how contentious politics at the Palestinian grass roots level was not limited to violence or civil disobedience, but also took more nuanced forms. Strikingly, the refugees exercised their 'consentful contention' with regard to international institutions, particularly the UN. That they did so is further indicative of the fact that internationalist engagement was not solely the preserve of the Palestinian national leadership after 1948. In fact, petitions sent by the refugee camp grass roots showed these communities to be internationally conscious and outward-looking in their political ideas. This was further manifested in the petitioners' regular appeals to international norms.

Palestinian petitions and internationalist discourse

As explained above, petitions are often characterised by the invocation of 'official' discourse, usually that of the state in question. Accordingly, Palestinian petitioners before 1948 regularly appealed to the discursive codes of the Ottoman Tanzimat, the 1908 Constitutional Revolution, and the British Mandate, consecutively. Thereafter, their dispossession and statelessness led them to turn instead to international authorities at the UN, and accordingly to invoke the dominant codes of post-war liberal internationalism. It followed that in the second half of the 20th century, Palestinian refugee petitioners drew on a wide range of international conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),³¹ the UN Charter,³² articles of the Geneva Conventions,³³ articles of the Hague Convention,³⁴ and various UN Resolutions.³⁵

Again, this was not new. Dowdall (2019) observes a similar theme in European refugees' petitions to the League of Nations after the First World War, in which they frequently adopted the language of the new international regime as a way of

legitimizing their claims. This included explicit invocation of the League's favoured concepts of universal brotherhood, humanity, and peace. As such, these refugee petitioners were active in shaping the development and widespread adoption of such language in the interwar period. Nowak (2019b) makes a similar argument about Polish refugees' invocation of universal human rights in the petitions they sent to the IRO in the late 1940s.

In the same vein, Palestinian refugee petitioners regularly framed their cause in the liberal internationalist discourse of human rights, dignity, and equality.³⁶ More specifically, in their appeals to the UN they often referred not only to broad concepts but to specifically codified norms. Thus over the years, Palestinian petitioners contended that Israeli actions were 'inconsistent with the United Nations' resolutions',³⁷ and 'in discord with all Security Council resolutions and the United Nations Charter',³⁸ while 'the rights of our Palestinian people [are] affirmed by various United Nations resolutions.'³⁹ At its core, the discourse of Palestinian refugee petitions held that their cause was consistent with UN values. If only the UN were to implement its own norms, the logic followed, then justice would be administered to the Palestinian people.

Often, petitioners made this argument by referring to particular UN conventions. In 1978, for example, a group of petitioners in the West Bank made their case for Palestinian self-determination by 'recalling the commitment of the world to the United Nations resolutions, especially General Assembly resolution 3236',⁴⁰ which had recognised the PLO as the 'sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people' (UNGA 1974). Elsewhere, Palestinian petitioners cited Resolution 194, which affirmed the refugees' right of return (UNGA 1948),⁴¹ and Resolution 242, which called for Israel's withdrawal from the OPT (UNSC 1967).⁴²

At other times, Palestinian petitioners tied their calls for UN action explicitly to the international organisation's own conventions. In 1972, for example, more than 200 Palestinian refugees petitioned UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim as follows:

Every year, since we were forced out of our country in 1948, the United Nations General Assembly has reaffirmed our right to return. After Twenty-three years, we are still waiting and a whole new generation has been born in exile. When will the United Nations decide to implement its own decisions? How long will the consecutive Secretaries-General accept Israel's defiance of these decisions? [sic]⁴³

This text is a clear example of petitioners adopting and invoking hegemonic codes. In this case, the refugees highlighted the fact that all they were seeking was for the UN to implement its own conventions. Elsewhere, Palestinian petitioners referred to other international agreements. Later in the 1970s, for example, a group of more than 16 signatories petitioned the UN, among other international organisations, to 'help apply the provisions of the Geneva Convention to [Palestinian] political prisoners.'⁴⁴ In this guise, Palestinian petitioners could even present themselves as enforcers of liberal internationalism, seeking for it to be put into effect.

That being said, it is important to note that such appeals did not necessarily indicate a full acceptance of these international conventions. As Lyons (2015, p. 328) observes, 'writing upwards was *always* able to express insubordination', even when it appeared superficially deferential. Certainly, Palestinian petitioners' apparent deference to authority could easily be juxtaposed with signs of defiance, as they called on the UN to implement its own conventions, and on UNRWA to 'do its duty'. Palestinian refugees' adoption of hegemonic discourse should therefore not be taken at face value; it is arguably more likely that they were, in the words of Gatrell (2020, p. 3), 'play[ing] by the rules of the game', with the game in question being the norms of the post-war global refugee regime.

In his study of Algerian appeals to the League of Nations, Arthur Asseraf (2018, p. 125) writes that ‘knowing about the League was not the same as buying into liberal internationalism’. By the same measure, Palestinians’ consciousness of the UN’s role, and their ability to manipulate its code to their own ends, did not mean that they automatically endorsed that code. Indeed, the likelihood of full endorsement is particularly doubtful in view of Palestinian refugees’ aforementioned suspicion of the UN, and their widespread conviction that it was culpable for their plight (Al Hussein 2010, Farah 2010, Irfan 2020). Its failure to protect their rights over the post-Nakba decades only served to reinforce this (Allen 2013).

An obvious question remains. If the Palestinian petitioners’ use of internationalist codes should not be taken as evidence that they endorsed liberal internationalism, then what *is* its significance? In fact, it is instructive on several counts. The refugees’ invocation of this discourse exhibits their deployment of nuanced and tactical diplomacy, alongside more overtly hostile forms of contentious politics. It also shows the refugee camp communities’ ability to act in ways that were internationally engaged and outward-leaning, despite the closed nature of the spaces in which they lived. Finally, it reveals some interesting parallels between the strategies employed by both the national leadership and the grass roots, suggesting that Palestinian politics in this period was both more multi-faceted and more popularly-based than has often been assumed.

Conclusion

Despite its omission from much of the historiography, petitioning was a common practice among the Palestinian refugee grass roots in the second half of the 20th century. In a way, this is unsurprising. Social historians have shown that the importance of petitioning is inversely proportional to the availability of other channels for political engagement. For the stateless Palestinians, these other channels were extremely limited, and at times non-existent. As a people they were

structurally disempowered, politically marginalised, and highly vulnerable. As such, Palestinian refugee communities, and particularly those in the camps, were a natural fit for petitioning. The petitions they produced are highly instructive in demonstrating the complexity of Palestinian political activism after the Nakba. In particular, their content and form demonstrates a high consciousness of international politics at the grass roots level – a finding that adds new layers to conceptualisations of the Palestinian national struggle in this period.

This article has shown how historical analysis of Palestinian refugee petitions can enhance the existing scholarship in myriad ways. First, it challenges historiographical state-centrism regarding the practice of petitioning. While the growth of the state is a useful analytical framework for many historical case studies, it should not be the only one. Palestinian history after 1948 provides an example of petitioning in a context of statelessness, which nevertheless maintained many of the same features. This finding points to new potential frameworks for analysing contentious politics, particularly in the post-Second World War era when international institutions gained a new significance in global governance.

In keeping with this, the evidence of Palestinian refugee petitions shows that the process of internationalisation over the 20th century was not only top-down but also bottom-up. In other words, the presence of international norms and organisations in people's lives was driven by popular pressure as well as institutional initiatives. This is a formulation that has previously been applied to the growth of the state, but Palestinian refugee history shows that it can be relevant to internationalism too. Finally, the petitions examined here illustrate the political agency of grass roots refugee communities, and the multi-faceted tactics they employed. As such this article contributes to the burgeoning sub-field of refugee history, with its particular focus on recasting refugees as political actors. It also helps

build the foundations for future research that re-examines historical and political paradigms through the lens of displacement and statelessness.

Word count: 9,978

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Professor John Chalcraft, Professor Peter Gatrell and Dr Katarzyna Nowak for their helpful remarks and suggestions on the subject of petitioning in subaltern history; and Dr Lex Takkenberg for his invaluable assistance in navigating the UNRWA Central Registry in Amman.

¹ Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to UN Secretary-General Thant, 20 May 1968, 1968, S-0667-0006-03, United Nations Archive [UNA], New York, USA.

² The term ‘weapon of the weak’ is taken from James C. Scott’s ethnographical study of peasant resistance in rural Malaysia (1985).

³ Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to UN Secretary-General Thant, 20 May 1968.

⁴ Petition from *L’Union Feministe Arabe* to Mrs Corbett Ashby, President of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, 28 May 1936, Document 668, Dossier 3324, File 6A, Box R4066, United Nations Office at Geneva [UNOG] Library, League of Nations Archive, Geneva, Switzerland.

⁵ See for example: Petition from the General Council of Women Workers in Palestine to the League of Nations, n.d., 1934, Document 668, Dossier 3324, File 6A, Box R4066, UNOG; Memorandum from Irgun Zvai Leumi to the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), n.d., 1947, File 2, Box 69, Collection GB165-0161, Middle East Centre Archive [MECA], University of Oxford, UK.

⁶ The relevant section of Article 22 reads: ‘Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognised subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone. The wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of the Mandatory’ (League of Nations, 1920).

⁷ Petition from the Executive Committee of the Palestine Arab Congress, signed by Jameal Hussein, to the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations, 9 May 1926, Document 51962, Dossier 2413, Box R18, UNOG.

⁸ See for example: Petition from Ali Ahmed El Abed to Clement Attlee, 21 June 1950, FO 1018/73; Petition from U. E. Ammar to British Consul in Beirut, 10 June 1950, FO 1018/73, both The National Archive [TNA], London, UK.

⁹ Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank (22 signatories and seals, including municipalities and organisations) to UN Secretary-General, 8 August 1977, S-1808-0101-0006; Petition from Palestinians (18 signatories and seals, including municipalities and organisations) to LAS Secretary-General, 1 November 1977, S-1808-0101-0006, both UNA.

¹⁰ Petition from the Executive Committee of the Palestine Arab Congress to the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations, 9 May 1926.

¹¹ Petition from Ali Ahmed El Abed to Clement Attlee, 21 June 1950.

¹² Petition from Palestinian refugee representatives in Irbid, Amman and Balqa [General Committee of the Palestinian Refugee Gatherings] to UN Secretary-General, n.d., 1981, S-0354-0002-11, UNA.

¹³ This petition was reprinted in: *Al Ayyam* newspaper, 6 September 1960, File RE230(S) I, Box RE21, UNRWA Central Registry Archive [UCRA], Amman, Jordan.

¹⁴ Petition from Abdullah Jibril el Bishawi, *mukhtar* of Balata refugee camp, to UN Secretary-General, n.d., 1979, S-0364-0002-0011, UNA.

¹⁵ Petition from Palestinian refugee representatives in Irbid, Amman and Balqa to UN Secretary-General, n.d., 1981.

¹⁶ See for example: Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to UN Secretary-General Thant, 20 May 1968; Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank (more than 90 signatories and seals, including organisations) to UN Secretary-General, 30 January 1978, S-1808-0101-0006; Petition from the ‘Palestinian women in the Occupied Lands’ to UN Secretary-General, PLO, LAS, Ayatollah Khomeini, all Islamic countries, the Pope, UN Human Rights Office, 25 March 1979, S-1808-0094-08, all UNA.

¹⁷ See for example: Petition from Tahseen Shafik El Qishawi to Head of UNRWA Education, Beirut, 11 September 1967, Ref. ED/303, Box RE27, UCRA;* Petition from Abdullah Jibril el Bishawi to UN Secretary-General, n.d.,

1979; Petition from Mufeed Ramahi to UN Secretary-General, 14 March 1979, S-1808-0094-0008, UNA. See also examples in n7.

*With thanks to Sherif Mohamed for his help in translating the handwritten text of this petition.

¹⁸ Nowak (2019b) observes a similar phenomenon in Polish refugee petitions to the IRO in the late 1940s.

¹⁹ Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank to UN Secretary-General, 8 August 1977.

²⁰ See for example: Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank to UN Secretary-General, 30 January 1978; Petition from Palestinians in Gaza to the Office of the Chief Coordinator of UN Peacekeeping Missions in the Middle East, 26 March 1979, S-1808-0094-0008, UNA.

²¹ The petition is referenced in: Letter from UN Secretary-General to Permanent Representative of Israel to the UN, 25 July 1968, S-1066-0065-0006, UNA.

²² See for example: Petition from Abdullah Jibril el Bishawi, *mukhtar* of Balata refugee camp, to UNRWA Commissioner-General, 22 October 1979, File RE410(WB) II, Box RE65, UCRA; Petition from Palestinian refugee representatives in Irbid, Amman and Balqa to UN Secretary-General, n.d., 1981.

²³ Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to UN Secretary-General, 20 May 1968.

²⁴ Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank to UN Secretary-General, 8 August 1977.

²⁵ Text of petition dated 30 March 1976 from General Federation of Palestinian Women, included in UN Report 'Women Demonstrators Stage sit-in at the UNDP office', 31 March 1976, S-1808-0101-0006, UNA.

²⁶ Petition from Abdullah Jibril el Bishawi to UN Secretary-General, n.d., 1979.

²⁷ Palestinian hostility towards the UN was noted in UNRWA's first annual report. See: Report of the UNRWA Director, A/1905, 28 September 1951,

<https://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/8D26108AF518CE7E052565A6006E8948>

²⁸ Petition from Palestinian refugees (more than 200 signatories) to UN Secretary-General Thant, sent via Iraqi mission to the UN, 3 January 1972, S-0442-0239-0003; Text of petition dated 30 March 1976 from General Federation of Palestinian Women, 31 March 1976; Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank (16 signatories and seals) to UN Secretary-General, LAS Secretary-General, ICRC, UN Commission on Human Rights, all General Consulates in Jerusalem, and the Arab Bar Association, n.d., late 1970s, S-1808-0101-0006, all UNA.

²⁹ Petition from Abdullah Bishawi, to UNRWA Commissioner-General, 22 October 1979.

³⁰ Petition from Teachers Committee and school headteachers of Nablus Area to UNRWA, n.d., 1970, File RE230 (1) J I, Box RE27, UCRA [UNRWA translation, original Arabic not preserved].

³¹ Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank to UN Secretary-General et al, n.d., late 1970s.

³² Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to UN Secretary-General Thant, 20 May 1968.

³³ Petition from Palestinian women's societies and associations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to 'UN Defence Minister', 6 February 1968, S-0667-0006-03, UNA.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to UN Secretary-General Thant, 20 May 1968; Petition from Palestinian refugees to UN Secretary-General Thant, 3 January 1972, S-0442-0239-0003, UNA; Text of petition dated 30 March 1976 from General Federation of Palestinian Women, 31 March 1976; Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank to UN Secretary-General, 30 January 1978; Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank to PLO Executive Committee, n.d., late 1970s; Petition from Palestinian refugee representatives in Irbid, Amman and Balqa to UN Secretary-General, n.d., 1981.

³⁶ Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to UN Secretary-General Thant, 20 May 1968; Petition from Palestinian women's societies and associations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to 'UN Defence Minister', 6 February 1968; Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank to UN Secretary-General, 8 August 1977; Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank to UN Secretary-General, 30 January 1978.

³⁷ Text of petition dated 30 March 1976 from General Federation of Palestinian Women, 31 March 1976.

³⁸ Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to UN Secretary-General Thant, 20 May 1968.

³⁹ Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank to UN Secretary-General, 30 January 1978.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ UNRWA Translation of Article in *Journal de Genève*, 6 March 1956; 'The Palestinians in Lebanon' statement 'We are returning', 29 November 1962, both File RE150 1, Box RE3, UCRA.

⁴² Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank (18 signatories and seals, including organisations) to PLO Executive Committee, n.d., late 1970s, S-1808-0101-0006, UNA.

⁴³ Petition from Palestinian refugees to UN Secretary-General Thant, 3 January 1972.

⁴⁴ Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank to UN Secretary-General et al, n.d., late 1970s.

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