Catholic Humanitarian Assistance for Palestinian Refugees: The Franciscan *Casa Nova* during the 1948 War

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The issue of the Palestinian refugees represents one of the most complex unresolved problems in contemporary global history. The situation originated when the war for Palestine was unleashed following the United Nations resolution of November 29, 1947 that provided for the partitioning of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. The battles between the Arab League and Israeli armies, and Tsahal's expulsions of populations of in the conquered villages and cities precipitated the flight of about 750,000 Palestinian refugees, who poured into the closest available Arab villages within the State of Israel itself, so constituting an *internally displaced people*. Part of the Palestinian refugee population then transited to the United States, Latin America, Europe, and other continents.

Twenty years later, the June 1967 War saw Israel defeat Egypt and annex East Jerusalem, the territory to the west of the river Jordan (the so-called "West Bank", previously under the control of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan), the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights. These new acts of war caused the flight of another 300,000 Palestinians. Today, the United Nations agency created in 1949 to provide humanitarian aid to the Palestinian refugees—the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Middle East (UNRWA)—registers 5 million Palestinian refugees.

Historically, the request to recognize the right of return for the Palestinian refugees has constituted one of the principal themes on which the two fronts have taken up positions around opposing interpretations and narratives. The Israeli government's refusal to recognize the right to return for refugees for reasons of security and on the grounds of its interpretation of the Palestine War as a Zionist war of defense against the Arab attack of May 15, 1948, has determined the absence of a solution. At the same time, Palestinian identity post-1948 has been redefined around the experience of refugee camps, and the national liberation movement has given the refugee question a position of central importance and has invested the refugee camps with the symbolism of *lieux de mémoire*, the liberation of Palestine, and resistance to the Israeli occupation.

From the research perspective, numerous volumes have explored these issues from the perspective of sociology, anthropology, world religions, refugee law, human rights law, and humanitarian law.¹ From the historiographical perspective too, the reconstruction of the Palestinian exodus and archival research on the question of military and political responsibility have opened a new page in the history of 1948. As has been noted, for several decades, the historical debate has polarized around two opposing narratives that have dominated Israeli and Arab historiographies. The one presents a nationalist pro-Zionist vision, with a weak Israel represented as the victim of an Arab attack from which it emerged unexpectedly victorious; and the other emphasizes the failure of the Arab leadership to take charge. Since the 1990s, the so-called “new historians” have deconstructed myths and analytical paradigms and interpretations of the conflict, exploring archives hitherto ignored by studies, identifying the problem of the Palestinian refugees right at the point of its creation and pointing out the absence of a solution, and its persistence as the most dramatic element in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, along with the lack of a definition for a shared arrangement with regard to Jerusalem.²

However, despite the crucial importance of these issues and the impetus provided by the work of the “new historians”, there are few historical analyses on the Palestinian refugees. Innumerable questions and crucial aspects regarding the reconstruction of the complex picture of events in Palestine in 1947 that remain to be clarified and analyzed by means of the tools and methodologies of historical research and its interface with other disci-

1 In the bibliography see at least Francesca P. Albanese and Lex Takkenberg, *Palestinian Refugees in International Law*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Luigi Achilli, *Palestinian Refugees and Identity: Nationalism, Politics and the Everyday* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015); Susan Akram and Terry Rempel, *Out of Place, Out of Time: Refugees, Rights and the Re-Making of Palestine/Israel* (London: Pluto Press, 2015); Are Knudsen and Sari Hanafi, eds., *Palestinian Refugees: Identity, Space and Place in the Levant* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Michael Dumper, ed., *Palestinian Refugee Repatriation: Global Perspectives* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).

2 Of the works by the Israeli so-called “new historians”, see in particular Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim, eds., *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006); Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (London: Allen Lane, 2000); Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947–1951* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1992); Avi Shlaim, *Collusion across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (New York: Pantheon, 1987).

plines.³ The volumes by Benny Morris and other Israeli authors have contributed decisively to reopening the inquiry on these issues, but they are limited in their interpretations, especially in light of the political re-reading proposed after the failure of the Oslo peace process, which Morris himself publicized in interviews and articles, sparking an international debate that has brought to light contradictions and biases in the historical approaches of other scholars.

Aside from ideology, another element must be taken into account: that of the sources and access to them. In the case of the Palestinian refugees, the question of archives, central to any historical research, has not yet been sufficiently examined and analyzed, with the exception of a few studies.⁴ This is perhaps a result of the high toll of politicization—especially by the Israelis, in their effort

- 3 Some studies constitute exceptions, including the research of Jalal al-Husseini, Riccardo Bocco, and Kjersti Gravelseter Berg. See Jalal al-Husseini, "Le statut des réfugiés palestiniens au Proche-Orient: Facteur de maintien ou de dissolution de l'identité nationale palestinienne," in *Les Palestiniens entre Etat et diaspora: Le temps des incertitudes*, eds. Jalal Al Hussein and Aude Signoles (Paris: IISMM, 2013), 67–94; Jalal al-Husseini, "The Evolution of the Palestinian Refugee Camps in Jordan: Between Logics of Exclusion and Integration," in *Cities, Urban Practices and Nation-Building in Jordan*, eds. Myriam Ababsa and Rami Daher (Beirut: Presses de l'Ifpo, 2011), 181–204; Jalal al-Husseini, "The Arab States and the Refugee Issue: A Retrospective View," in *Israel and the Palestinian Refugees*, eds. Eyal Benvenisti, Chaim Gans, and Sara Hanafi (Berlin: Springer, 2007), 436–464; Jalal al-Husseini and Riccardo Bocco, "Dynamics of Humanitarian Aid, Local and Regional Politics: The Palestine Refugees as a Case-Study," in *Palestinian Refugees: Identity, Space and Place in the Levant*, eds. Are Knudsen and Sari Hanafi (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 128–146; Riccardo Bocco and Lex Takkenberg, eds., "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees 60 years later," special issue, *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, nos. 2–3 (2009); Riccardo Bocco, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees: A History within History," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, nos. 2–3 (2009): 229–252; Kjersti G. Berg, "The Unending Temporary: United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the Politics of Humanitarian Assistance to Palestinian Refugee Camps 1949–2012" (PhD diss., University of Bergen, 2015); Kjersti G. Berg, "From Chaos to Order and Back: The Construction of UNRWA Shelters and Camps, 1950–1970," in *UNRWA and Palestinian Refugees: From Relief and Works to Human Development*, eds. Sari Hanafi, Leila Hilal, and Lex Takkenberg (London: Routledge, 2014), 109–128; Kjersti G. Berg, "Gendering Refugees: The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the Politics of Relief," in *Interpreting Welfare and Relief in the Middle East, Social, Economic and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia*, eds. Nefissa Naguib and Inger Marie Okkenhaug (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 149–174; Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 118–147.
- 4 The archival question in the research on the Palestinian refugees has been carefully considered in Salim Tamari and Elia T. Zureik, eds., *Reinterpreting the Historical Record: The Uses of Palestinian Refugee Archives for Social Science Research and Policy Analysis* (Jerusalem: Institute of Jerusalem Studies, 2001).

to delegitimize the presence and operations of UNRWA—⁵ and, on the contrary, of the low degree of historicization that characterizes the debate on these matters. The extensive use of almost exclusively Zionist and Israeli military archives has sometimes constrained studies to a single documentary typology, and that too coming from just one of the parties involved.⁶

This chapter begins with a presentation of some archives—particularly ecclesiastical ones—that are still largely unpublished or have not yet been utilized by historians in studies on the Palestinian refugees. These archival reflections allow for a transition from a global overview to the local analysis of a specific case study: that of the Franciscan *casa nova* in Jerusalem. Originally a structure that hosted pilgrims, at the end of 1947 it became one of the places in which one of the most important institutions of the Jerusalem Church—the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land—performed its humanitarian aid work in the “torment” of 1948.⁷

1 Cross-Referencing the Ecclesiastical Archives

The identification, access, and analysis of numerous archives spread all over the world that have to do with the phenomenon of the Palestinian refugees, in different proportions and fashions, represents one of the first challenges in the revision of the current narratives and in the writing of new, historically documented studies on the history of the population in question. There are several projects underway, conducted by research centres and associations, aimed at finding and conserving documents produced by institutions or individuals, including collections of oral sources.

5 This is the case for Arlene Kushner, *UNRWA Supplemental Report: A Rigorous Review of Agency Practices* (Center for Near East Policy Research, 2004), available at www.israelvisit.co.il/BehindTheNews/pdf/SecondReport.pdf; Avi Beker, *UNRWA, Terror and the Refugee Conundrum: Perpetuating the Misery* (Jerusalem: Institute of the World Jewish Congress, 2003); Abraham Ashkenasi, “The International Institutionalization of a Refugee Problem: The Palestinians and UNRWA,” *Jerusalem Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 1 (1990): 45–75.

6 This is one of the arguments presented by Nur Masalha and Walidi Khalidi. See Nur Masalha, “A Critique on Benny Morris,” in *The Israel/Palestine Question*, ed. Ilan Pappé (London: Routledge, 2003), 211–220.

7 This expression is found in reportage following the events in a magazine published by the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, with particular reference to the humanitarian action mobilized for the refugee population by the Italian priest Antonio Vergani, Patriarchal Vicar for Galilee. See the article by Pierre Médebielle, “Mgr Antoine Vergani (1905–1960): In Memoriam,” *Jérusalem: Le Moniteur diocésain du Patriarcat latin* 26, nos. 3–4 (1960): 54–61.

At the same time, a vast amount of uninvestigated documentary material is already available within recognized archival institutions. Here, the most important archive is that of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the UN agency established in 1949 with the goal of assisting the Palestinian refugees. The difficulty of access and the political and economic difficulties that the UNRWA has experienced for decades have prevented a detailed cataloguing of the records and made it difficult even to discern the location and the size of its documentary and archival holdings, despite work on this front.⁸

Faced with the problem of consulting the UNRWA archives, important non-governmental organizations operating in Palestine have made funds available to researchers. This has been the case, for example, with the archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, and funds have been dedicated to the humanitarian action of the American Friends Service Committee, whose archives are housed in the AFSC's central office in Philadelphia;⁹ the latter have already featured in some studies.¹⁰

This reference to the Quakers introduces a broader reflection. From the first battles in the autumn of 1947, mobilization to assist the Palestinian refugees was not only achieved by international agencies and nongovernmental organizations but also involved the complex and variegated web of Christian institutions already historically present and active in the region. Convents, schools, and hospitals operated by religious congregations or directly by the local churches of various rites and denominations were among the first places to receive and aid the Palestinian refugees. This action also contributed to a profound redefinition of the visions and strategies of humanitarian activity after 1948.¹¹ This being the case, the ecclesiastical archives constitute a source that

8 Salim Tamari and Elia Zureik, *The UNRWA Archives on Palestinian Refugees: A Feasibility Study for Policy and Applied Research; Phase 1* (Jerusalem: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1996).

9 Julie Peteet, "The AFSC Refugee Archives for Palestine 1948–1950," in *Reinterpreting the Historical Record: The Uses of Palestinian Refugee Archives for Social Science Research and Policy Analysis*, ed. Salim Tamari and Elia T. Zureik (Jerusalem: Institute of Jerusalem Studies, 2001), 109–128.

10 Nancy Gallagher, *Quakers in the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict: The Dilemmas of NGO Humanitarian Activism* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2007).

11 The categories of secular humanitarianism and humanitarian Christian—and particularly Catholic—thought cannot be superimposed and confused. The second is affected by the historical evolution of modern Catholic social doctrine. It is, however, true that in the course of the 20th century, and particularly in consequence of certain epoch-making events—the two world wars and, from an internal point of view, the shift brought about by the Second Vatican Council in bringing the poor into the centre of the ecclesiastical

is equally important but as yet hardly utilized in the research on these issues. Moreover, the study of the involvement of non-Christian and non-Western religious agency represents another frontier in the historiography of humanitarianism, in Palestine as elsewhere.¹²

In the Catholic environment, the centrality of the Holy See is also confirmed by the archives on these matters. The archives of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine (PMP)—the institution established by Pius XII in 1949 to aid the Palestinian refugees—are partially preserved in the Vatican archives, mainly in the Pius XII-era holdings of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches that were opened to scholars for the pontificate of Pius XII (1939–1958) in March 2020.¹³ Moreover, the plurality of the Catholic presence makes it possible to retrace many threads of inquiry in other ecclesiastical archives, in the Middle East and elsewhere. If the history of the Palestinian refugees is necessarily global and interconnected, characterized by migrations and transfers, the archives too must be researched on a broad scale.

In this discourse, Jerusalem was clearly central to the coordination of aid supply and distribution. The humanitarian machine dedicated to the Palestinian refugees suffered from the lack of a stable authority in charge of the local Church, the Latin Patriarchate. The death of Patriarch Luigi Barlassina on September 27, 1947, two months before the UN resolution and the beginning of the Palestinian-Zionist civil war, left a gap at the heart of the Latin Church due to Rome's failure to nominate a successor. The difficulty in maintaining contacts between the priests, and the transfer from Jerusalem to Amman of Gustavo Testa, the Patriarchal regent and Apostolic Delegate, because of his fear of the bombing in the Holy City, prevented the rapid deployment of an aid network. At the same time, the centrality of the Holy Land for

debate—Catholic social thought has changed in its categories and analysis from the lay version, in the adherence, for example, to the theory of human rights, albeit not without tensions and unresolved dilemmas. This paradigm shift was also favoured by the spread of humanist thought and of Catholic Personalism as formulated by philosophers and theologians, especially Jacques Maritain, and Emmanuel Mounier. See Daniele Menozzi, *Chiesa e diritti umani: Legge naturale e modernità politica dalla Rivoluzione francese ai nostri giorni* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012).

- 12 On the importance of extending the reflection about humanitarianism's moral and cultural basis beyond the Christian and Western ethics, institutions and agents, see Kevin O'Sullivan's considerations in Matthew Hilton et al., "History and Humanitarianism: A Conversation," *Past & Present* 241, no. 1 (November 2018): e25–e26 (online only).
- 13 As announced by Pope Francis during his address to the officials of the Vatican Apostolic Archive on March 4, 2019, the Vatican archives for the pontificate of Pius XII (1939–1958) opened on March 4, 2020.

Catholicism worldwide ensured the rapid mobilization of various groups, particularly in Europe and the United States.

From the United States, the Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA) led by Thomas McMahon requested that the Holy See establish an organization exclusively dedicated to the Palestinian refugees, the PMP. This explains why one of the most important documentary deposits is certainly that of the CNEWA, based in New York, whose archives were transferred to the archives of the Archdiocese of New York in 2018. Founded in 1926 by Pius XI with the intention of combining in a single entity various associations and initiatives committed to fundraising for the Christians of the Middle East, the CNEWA became one of the principal financers of the Congregation of the Oriental Church and, in turn, of the Latin Patriarchate and other institutions. Through an intense mobilization of various sectors of US Catholicism, in the period after the Second World War and especially during and after the battles of the 1948 Palestine War, the CNEWA raised huge sums of money for the Palestinian refugees. McMahon, one of the first foreign Catholic prelates to arrive in Israel and Jordan in 1948, also devoted his energy to proposing the formation of a Vatican agency to assist the Palestinian refugees, which was realized with the foundation of the PMP. As is the case with the archives of the CNEWA too that a detailed inventory is not currently available. However, there are dozens of boxes containing correspondence concerning the establishment of the PMP and its functioning in the following decades, including coordination with other entities and reports and statistics on the missions. A large photographic archive, also not yet organized and digitized, enriches this collection.

In Europe, private and diocesan archives, and those of episcopal conferences enable the reconstruction of the actions of clergy and laymen who were mobilized, and not just in favour of the internationalization of Jerusalem—the Holy See's proposal for the Holy City—but also to organize fundraising and aid missions during the fighting in 1948 and the following years. This is true of the archive of the orientalist Louis Massignon, who created the security committee for the Bethlehem area, and of the archive of the archdiocese of Paris, and also of the archive of the diocese of Liège, which was among the first to send volunteers and donations, focusing especially on the area of Nazareth.¹⁴

14 See the material on Louis-Joseph Kerkhofs, in particular nos. 22–24 “œuvres patronnées spécialement par l'évêque (la Palestine)” described in André Deblon, Paul Gerin, and Ludovic Pluymers, *Les archives diocésaines de Liège: Inventaires des fonds modernes* (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1978).

Returning to Jerusalem, a holy city three times over, the archives of the Latin Patriarchate, which was re-established in 1847 and has jurisdiction over Israel, the Palestinian Territories, Jordan, and Cyprus, are housed in the diocesan seat, within the walls of the Old City, near Jaffa Gate. There is no complete inventory for them, except for a list of the binders, reorganized at the end of the pastoral mandate of Patriarch Michel Sabbah in the early part of the first decade of this century but not according to any precise scientific criteria. The list registers the name of the box, the first and last dates contained in it, and the initials of the patriarchs under whose pastoral governance that chronological period falls. By means of this research instrument, as incomplete, unreliable and poor in detail as it is, it is possible to easily identify the Patriarchal files specifically dedicated to aid for refugees, especially through the coordination between the Latin Patriarchate and the PMP. Although not immediately evident on the title on the folders, the binders also contain other documentation to do with refugee schools and statistics, from correspondence with the dicasteries of the curia, and in the files on the parishes.

One of the most important archives in the city, for the history and documentation it contains, is that of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land. Unlike the Patriarchal archive, this archive covers more than 800 years and possesses a detailed, three-volume inventory.¹⁵ The archive has been the object of a transfer intervention, reclassification, and description, finished in 2012, with a subsequent process to update and complete the organizing and inventorying, which is still underway. Given the vast network of parishes, convents, sanctuaries, hostels for pilgrims, and schools in which the Custody received and housed thousands of Palestinian refugees, it is striking that the documentation available today on the Palestinian refugees is not particularly conspicuous. It is probable that a good part of the documents have been lost or lie as yet undiscovered in convents or other deposits. Another portion may be contained in binders currently inaccessible due to temporal limitations. The commissariats of the Holy Land and Franciscan provinces all over the world also collected other documentation from religious in the service of the Custody, although it is difficult to establish the locations and quantities of these papers.

While this does not represent a huge amount of documentation, it does make some clarifications possible. In particular, the facts gleaned from the Franciscan *casa nova* in Jerusalem, which experienced a flood of refugees from

15 Andrea Maiarelli, ed., *L'Archivio storico della Custodia di Terra Santa (1230–1970)* (Milan: Terra Santa, 2012).

the very first weeks of the conflict, enable us to shed light on some of the mechanisms and phenomena of the aid operations of the Catholic Church during the first Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The events and personalities that define the events in the *case nove* of Palestine, and in particular of Jerusalem in 1948, belong to an unwritten story. These are events as yet unexplored in the historiography, primarily because of the fragmentary nature of the available sources, but also because of a broader historiographical gap regarding the humanitarian action set in train by the churches—including the Catholic Church—upon the outbreak of the Palestine War in the autumn of 1947.

There was not just one *casa nova* that received refugees during the conflict; in fact, the most notable case was that of Nazareth, which received thousands of persons fleeing from Galilee and from all over Palestine. Other sources for this story are to be found in the Custodial archives, in the archive of the General Curia of the Little Brothers at Rome,¹⁶ and in the archives of the CNEWA. References to the dramatic living conditions of the refugees hosted by the *casa nova* of Nazareth can also be found in the correspondence of American prelates, who feared that the difficult living conditions could favour the spread of communist ideals or incentivize a transition to other Christian denominations that offered more economic aid. McMahon, the secretary of the CNEWA, wrote to Archbishop Francis Spellman in December 1948 that “the Casa Nova [in Nazareth] is full of refugees, who wanted to hoist the Commie banner over it”.¹⁷

In any case, the documentation available on the Jerusalem *casa nova* allows for some specific reflections on the population that had moved into these places hitherto reserved for pilgrims, on the troubled relations between the refugees and the friars of the Custody, and on the phase immediately after the conclusion of the battles of 1947–1949 and the difficult effort to resettle the displaced people elsewhere.

16 See in particular the General Secretariat collection, in the files regarding the correspondence with the Custody of the Holy Land.

17 AANY, ACNEWA, McMahon to Spellman, s.l. (December 10, 1948).

2 From Pilgrims to Refugees: The Entangled History of the Jerusalem *Casa Nova*

Historically, the Franciscan Custody was the most important institution for the reception of pilgrims who came to the region to visit the Holy Places.¹⁸ From the seventeenth century onwards, this activity led the Franciscans to open specific spaces devoted to hospitality; the so-called *case nove* came into existence, the first of which was built in Jerusalem, beside St Saviour's convent, the headquarters of the Franciscan Custody, followed by similar structures at Ramle, Emmaus, and Acre.¹⁹ In 1634, the Custos, Father Paolo da Lodi, requested the permission of the Minister General of the Friars to construct a new building in which to host pilgrims, thus relieving the convent of the "calumnies" that were circulating concerning "cohabitation and excessive familiarity with various races, to the offense of religious decorum", especially as regarded women.²⁰ A space was found in Jerusalem for this building outside the walls of the convent, both on account of the lack of available space inside, and because of the Ottoman authorities' opposition to the expansion. It was used not only to receive pilgrims but also, for example, to house friars sick with the plague so as to prevent the spread of the disease to other religious in the convent, according to some sources from the beginning of the 18th century. The *casa nova* was known as a place for healing the sick through the 19th century, when a proper infirmary was established.

The chronicles attest to the uninterrupted arrival of pilgrims and travelers of various nationalities, European, American, and Eastern, divided in two areas in different *case nove*. These were clergy and laity of various Christian

18 On the history of the Franciscan presence in Palestine, see Giuseppe Buffon, *Les Franciscains en Terre Sainte (1869–1889): Religion et politique, une recherche institutionnelle* (Paris: Cerf; Éditions franciscaines, 2005); Paolo Pieraccini, *Cattolici di Terra Santa (1333–2000)* (Florence: Pagnini, 2003); Andrea Giovannelli, *La Santa Sede e la Palestina: La Custodia di Terra Santa tra la fine dell'impero ottomano e la guerra dei sei giorni* (Rome: Studium, 2000).

19 See Narcyz S. Klimas, "Casa Nova di Gerusalemme: L'ospizio dei Pellegrini," *Frate Francesco* 81 (2015): 197–218; Narcyz S. Klimas, "Pellegrini a San Salvatore di Gerusalemme: L'ospitalità francescana," *Frate Francesco* 80 (2014): 96–125; Narcyz S. Klimas, "Itinerari, guide, racconti, tradizioni o abitudini dei pellegrini in Terra Santa," *Antoniano* 87 (2012): 93–144.

20 Memorandum from Father Fr. Paolo da Lodi to Rev. mo P. Generale of the Serafic Order, where he asks that the pilgrims no longer be hosted in our convent in Jerusalem, but rent private houses, as they have done at other times, in F. Verniero da Montepeloso, *Croniche ovvero Annali di Terra Santa*, III, 1632–1637, (Florence, 1930), 188–192, cited in Klimas, *Casa Nova di Gerusalemme*, 199.

denominations. During the 19th century, the growing influx of visitors into an ever-more cosmopolitan Jerusalem²¹ made expansion necessary. Giuseppe Valerga resided there too, the first Patriarch of the newly re-established Jerusalem Latin diocese. The travellers who passed through in the course of the 19th century remarked on the grand dimensions of the structure “laid out like a convent, where there are corridors in a square with the respective rooms both for men and for women”, a courtyard, two refectories capable of accommodating 400 persons, and a large terrace with a broad view of the city. A lower level was added in 1895, with 50 rooms, adding to the existing 116. The following year, 527 pilgrims were accommodated. The travelers could stay for a maximum of 15 days; in that year, there were 6,326 days of occupancy.

Over the decades, it hosted sovereigns and princes, intellectuals and simple pilgrims. The *livre d'or* with the signatures of guests of the *casa nova* attests to the variety of provenances, languages, professions, and motivations to travel to Jerusalem over the centuries.

It also became a refuge for displaced families, as during the two world wars. With the deterioration of the situation in Palestine at the end of 1947 and the outbreak of the civil war between Jewish Zionists and Palestinian Arabs, refugees began to pack the rooms of the *casa nova*. Already in December, part of the structure had been transformed to make space for the refugees. The administrative lists of the Jerusalem *casa nova* preserve a trace of those heady and dramatic weeks; included among the pages are notations of payments made for “porters to clear out the basement for Refugees” (2,590 Palestinian pounds)²² and bills for payments, as well as requests for help on the part of the “Committee of the Christian quarter (*harat al-Nasara*) in the Old City”.²³

21 Vincent Lemire, ed., *Jérusalem: Histoire d'une ville-monde* (Paris: Flammarion, 2017).

22 Archivio storico della Custodia di Terra Santa (Historical Archive of the Custody of the Holy Land, ASCTS), Casa nova, Gerusalemme, subfile 1, Contabilità: entrate e uscite della casa nova (January 1923–December 1956), Amministrazione, December 1947. This document shows that operating the building for that month required the Custody to spend 21,326 Palestinian pounds. Items of expenditure in the first half of 1948 also included a payment of 300 pounds to the Arab Committee.

23 This is a manuscript page in Arabic, signed by Peter Rock and dated May 8, 1948, in which reference is made to a list of people hosted by the *casa nova* who expect their allocations of kerosene, cereals, and other goods to be distributed by Mr Jamil Atallah, whose family was also housed in the *casa nova*. Written on the margin in the same hand is: “P.TO” (probably “pagato” in Italian, paid). ASCTS, Casa nova, Jerusalem, Carteggio, “Rifugiati di guerra presso la casa nova di Gerusalemme (January 1, 1947–October 20, 1952),” subfile 5.

The friars' desire to make order out of the growing chaos is shown by the publication of a regulation, dated December 29, 1947.²⁴ This document, a typescript text in Italian and French, is particularly interesting for an understanding of life within the *casa nova* in the first months of the conflict. It makes clear that the refugees had been accepted through the mediation and intervention of priests, as had already been the case for many pilgrims in previous centuries. It is highly likely, then, that most of them were Catholics from the villages and quarters of Jerusalem that had been occupied by the Zionist troops. The accommodation was not free; every refugee pledged to contribute a small monthly sum for each room occupied. The French text adds that every refugee promised to leave the *casa nova* as soon as the fighting was over. In order to avoid conflicts, it specifies that this offer was "identical to that made to the Polish refugees" that had lived in the Franciscan hostel some years previously.²⁵

This source also provides information on the characteristics of the rooms in which the refugees lived; they had one chair per person, one bed, running water—provided for two hours a day from April to November—and a light. The refugees could have the use of a radio for 15 piastres monthly, but it could not be played in the evenings. The *casa nova* did not provide food, and the refugees could not use the electricity to cook or to iron. The regulations also stipulated that every tenant should provide for the repairs and the cleaning of their rooms, while the *casa nova* administration would take care of the corridors and baths, which was probably done by nuns. The refugees could only receive visitors for three hours a day and were to return to their rooms by seven in the evening. Finally, every resident was to sign a declaration that they accepted these conditions.²⁶ At the moment, documents showing how these rules were enforced

24 ASCTS, Gerusalemme, S. Salvatore, Carteggio, Miscellanea, "Annunci, locandine e volantini legati ad attività e iniziative parrocchiali," subfile 9, *Regolamento per i rifugiati in Casa Nova—Gerusalemme durante i torbidi 1947–1948* (Regulation for the refugees in the Casa Nova—Jerusalem during the troubles 1947–1948) (Jerusalem, December 29, 1947). The document bears a manuscript signature—it is not clear whether it is an autograph—"Il Padre Custode". The same regulation was also adopted for the refugees staying at the Flagellation.

25 As has been noted, during World War II, Palestine was one of the principal destinations for tens of thousands of Polish refugees. A part of these refugees were housed in Franciscan buildings, particularly in the *casa nova* of Ain Karem.

26 The ASCTS preserves some typescript declarations on the *casa nova* letterhead dated "1 Gen. 1947" but to be assigned to January 1, 1948, which read: "Il Sottoscritto, accetta in pieno il Regolamento del 29 dicembre 1947 della Casa Nova per i rifugiati durante i torbidi 1947–48 e s'impegna a versare la somma mensile di L.P. 3 ("1 one" cancellato) per la (le) stanze che occupa, e lasciare la (le) quando appena cesseranno i torbidi" (ASCTS, Casa

are missing, but papers from the following years show that the friars were dissatisfied with the level of respect for these rules on the part of their refugee guests.

The documentation also contains the “statement of the account owed by the Arab refugees from the troubles of 1947” and the “statement of collections made in December 1948” on account of the *casa nova*. The list of debts to be paid was posted inside the *casa nova* itself, as is indicated in one of the notices that was printed in both English and French.²⁷ At the end of December 1948, the refugees housed in the *casa nova* owed the friars 620,515 Palestinian pounds, while the amount paid for that month was 54,650 Palestinian pounds. In March 1949, the total debt had risen to 810,515 Palestinian pounds. A fixed monthly quota of 1,000 Palestinian pounds was assigned to one “Joseph le Russe” (“Joseph the Russian”), perhaps a middleman who operated some of the services, while the rest was consigned to the leadership.

3 Between Micro and Global History: Itineraries of the *Casa Nova* Refugees

Who lived in the rooms of the *casa nova*? The “list of refugees at the *casa nova*” dated September 27, 1949²⁸ mentions 250 persons comprising 70 families hosted in Franciscan premises. This document supplies important data; it notes the number of persons within each room and their “place of residence before the troubles”. Many refugees came from quarters of Jerusalem occupied by the Haganah, particularly Katamon,²⁹ Musrara,³⁰ Rom-

nova, Gerusalemme, Carteggio, “Rifugiati di guerra presso la casa nova di Gerusalemme (January 1, 1947–October 20, 1952),” subfile 5).

27 “The reading of the clause of Casa-Nova’s Regulations about the offers fixed, is warmly recommended because there is a real slackness on the part of the refugees. In case of infringement, an overdue detailed list will be posted” (ASCTS, Casa nova, Gerusalemme, Carteggio, “Rifugiati di guerra presso la casa nova di Gerusalemme (January 1, 1947–October 20, 1952),” subfile 5, Notice, undated, but probably from the first half of 1949.

28 ASCTS, Casa nova, Gerusalemme, Carteggio, “Rifugiati di guerra presso la casa nova di Gerusalemme (January 1, 1947–October 20, 1952),” subfile 5, Liste des réfugiés à Casa Nova.

29 The families of Victor Tannous (7 persons), Elie Marroum (7 persons), Jabra Araich (6 persons), Jabra Murad (7 persons), Elias G. Yasmineh (7 persons), Artine Poshoglian (4 persons), Andréa Srna (2 persons), Moubarak Saad (6 persons), and Mrs Atallah, “sister of Habesh”.

30 The families of Hossep Kechichian (5 persons), Georges Taal (4 persons), Antoine Frangieh (6 persons), Elias Morcos (4 persons), Farid Morcos (2 persons), Bechara Morcos (4 per-

ema,³¹ Baka'a,³² the German Colony,³³ Beit Hakerem,³⁴ and Talbieh.³⁵ In some cases, the street is specified (Jaffa Road,³⁶ Bezalel Street³⁷), or a reference-point building ("Commercial Centre"³⁸). Unfortunately, no information is provided on professional status or religious denomination.

Most refugees were in families, but there were also some singles. The document records the first and last names of the refugees being housed—for families, the name of the father is indicated—the room number, the total paid or owed, and miscellaneous comments. Some of the most frequently recurring last names are Morcos, Sabella, Atallah, Koury, Seraphim, Safieh, Ayoub, Saad, Nesnas, Karam, Habash, and Calia. Some of the listed refugee residents were also of European or US origin, having arrived in Jerusalem before the conflict,³⁹ as well as a few Polish refugees.⁴⁰

Furthermore, the marginalia note late payments as well as the monthly itineraries of some of the guests; it appears that there were refugees who only spent a few days per month at the *casa nova*. Others would then use the room to store furniture. Another source, the "list of rooms whose occupants are absent from Jerusalem",⁴¹ indicates the places to which 29 families housed in the *casa nova* had transferred: 10 of them to Jericho, 5 to Amman, and the rest to 'Ayzariyyah, Bethlehem, Salt, and Beirut.

sons), Antoine Safieh (7 persons), Nazar Karjian (5 persons), Hanna Dibsi (7 persons), Bermans Tabri (6 persons), Rosalie Farwagi (2 persons), Hanna Safieh (4 persons), another sister of Atallah, two sisters Salah, Karime Morcos, and Matilda Nassar.

31 The families of Michel Aboushanab (7 persons), Elias Salah (5 persons), and Antoine Dessimeni (6 persons).

32 The families of Antoine Morcos (5 persons), Georges Abdelmessih (3 persons), Nagib Frangieh (4 persons), Rodolphe Habesh (6 persons), Joseph Sabella (2 persons), a certain Mrs Khoury, and Antoine Carmi.

33 The families of Jean Kort (2 persons) and Hanna Izhak.

34 The families of Joseph Nesnas (4 persons), Daoud Carmi (4 persons), and Jamil Nesnas (2 persons).

35 The families of Joseph Habesh (2 persons), Joseph Calis (6 persons), Towfick Ayoub (5 persons), and Marroum Tarsha.

36 The families of Ventura Hallac (2 persons) and Mlle Bahjajian.

37 The family of Jamil Atallah (7 persons).

38 The families of Antoine N. Sabella (6 persons), Ibrahim Nahas (5 persons), Elie Karam (5 persons), Georges Yoakim (4 persons), Margueritte Abcarius (2 persons).

39 And the case, for example, of the names of Bart Frank, Madame Harrington, Edouard Michel, and Tomanova.

40 Merjinsky and Horein.

41 ASCTS, Casa nova, Gerusalemme, Carteggio, "Rifugiati di guerra presso la casa nova di Gerusalemme (January 1, 1947–October 20, 1952)," subfile 5, Liste des chambres dont les locataires sont absents de Jérusalem, undated.

4 Leaving the St Saviour Compound

With the approach of the war's end, the friars tried to re-take possession of their building, ever more insistently encouraging the refugees to find other accommodation. Numerous notices were distributed and posted in the rooms announcing that it would not be possible to take up permanent residence in the *casa nova*, nor to hand over the key to someone else, nor to depart for long periods without communicating with the directorate or the nuns who took care of running the building.

At the same time, checks were carried out as to the concrete possibility of paying a contribution based on the real condition of the family and on the occupation of one or more of its members, with remarks deploring cases where refugees were unwilling to contribute economically despite drawing a fixed salary.⁴²

In September 1949, the directorate of the *casa nova* announced that it would no longer be possible to change rooms, but especially that it was necessary for every refugee to prepare to vacate the building as soon as possible, as the friars intended to restore it to its exclusive function: that of a lodging for pilgrims.⁴³ The declaration of 1950 as a holy year by Pius XII and the will of the Custody to host the pilgrims who were about to flock to the Holy Land on the occasion of the Holy Year and thus reinaugurate the religious travel interrupted by the fighting of 1947–1949 made it every more urgent for the Franciscans to clear their space, which meant that they increased pressure on the refugees.

Given this growing conflict with the friars responsible for the *casa nova*, the residents created an internal organization to coordinate their relations with the Custody and to try to delay their departure. In 1950, a committee was organized to calm relations with the friars, to ensure that the residents within the building contributed regular rent payments, and to improve sanitary conditions, “order and discipline” within the residence.⁴⁴ Jamil Bey Nisnas was nominated president of the committee and Negib Frangie was secretary.

42 For example Bermans Tabri “Professeur à Terra Sancta. Touche son salaire comme d’ordinaire. Il n’a rien payé depuis son entrée. Son compte s’élève à LP: 52.000” (ASCTS, Casa nova, Gerusalemme, Carteggio, “Rifugiati di guerra presso la casa nova di Gerusalemme (January 1, 1947–October 20, 1952),” subfile 5, Possibilité d’exiger les offrandes des chambres occupées, unsigned manuscript document).

43 ASCTS, Casa nova, Gerusalemme, Carteggio, “Rifugiati di guerra presso la casa nova di Gerusalemme (January 1, 1947–October 20, 1952),” Avis, September 24, 1949.

44 ASCTS, Casa nova, Gerusalemme, Carteggio, “Rifugiati di guerra presso la casa nova di Gerusalemme (January 1, 1947–October 20, 1952),” Frangie to Bellorini, Jerusalem, July 15, 1950.

Despite the requests to vacate, in February 1952 there were still 210 people from 58 families living in the *casa nova*, occupying 94 rooms. In March 1952, some members of the committee appealed to the heads of the Roman Catholic Church in the Holy Land and to the superior of the *casa nova* against the decision to evict the 50 families still hosted in the *casa nova* to make room for the arriving pilgrims. The appeal exhorted them to demonstrate the charitable nature of the Custody and not let economic considerations take precedence over humane ones.⁴⁵ It bemoaned the supposed favouritism toward the Polish refugees⁴⁶ and highlighted the impossibility of the refugees to find accommodation given the high rents in the market.⁴⁷ Finally, confronted with the possibility that the “inhumane work” of trying to hound the families from the *casa nova* would be realized, it insinuated that the Custody was now using donations from the PMP for purposes other than aid for the refugees.⁴⁸

45 “Nous en sommes bien sûrs que cette institution [the Franciscan Custody] est une institution charitable au mot et non commerciale. Et les pèlerins qu'on voudra installer au Casa Nova saurons que cette place été [sic] réservé à eux après avoir chassé des réfugiés, refuserons de l'occuper.” (We are quite certain that this institution [the Franciscan Custody] is truly a charitable and not a commercial institution. And the pilgrims that they wish to install in the Casa Nova knowing that this place has been reserved for them after having chased out the refugees, will refuse to occupy it.) (ASCTS, Casa nova, Gerusalemme, Carteggio, “Rifugiati di guerra presso la casa nova di Gerusalemme (January 1, 1947–October 20, 1952),” subfile 5, Committee of the Casa Nova—Jabra Araich and two non-legible signatures—to the Patriarch, the Apostolic Delegate, the Custos, the “Synod” of the Franciscan priests and the Superior of the *casa nova*, Jerusalem, March 13, 1952). This letter is also preserved in the archive of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem (ALPJ), Jerusalem (1848–1974).

46 “Les réfugiés Polonais ont habité le Casa Nova pendant huit ans lors de leur arrivée en Palestine et n'ont été pas traité de même, et ne l'ont pas quitté qu'après qu'il était décidé qu'ils quitteraient la Palestine pour leur pays. Et ceux-ci ne lui ont rendu aucun service aux Pères Franciscains comme le peuple de la Palestine l'a fait envers eux.” (The Polish refugees have inhabited the Casa Nova for eight years since their arrival in Palestine and have not been treated the same, and have only left after it was decided that they would leave Palestine for their country. And these people have not rendered any service to the Franciscan fathers the way the people of Palestine have done for them.) (Ibid.).

47 “Les réfugiés occupant le Casa Nova n'ont pas le nécessaire pour louer une chambre au dehors, car tout le monde connaît que des habitations n'existent pas dehors et s'il en existe les propriétaires en demandent des prix exorbitants entre 150 à 200 dinars.” (The refugees occupying the Casa Nova do not have the necessary means to rent a room outside, since everyone knows that there are no rooms outside, and if there are any, their landlords demand the exorbitant price of between 150 and 200 dinars.) (Ibid.).

48 “Nous n'oublierons pas des centaines des milliers des dollars que la Mission Pontificale a envoyés et ne cesse d'envoyer, les habits et les vivres pour cette pauvre communauté. Et

After some negotiations, an accord was reached in April. Those wishing to continue to occupy their rooms had to comply with new rents, that varied from 250 and 750 Jordanian dinars per month depending on the size of the room.⁴⁹ A certain number of those who had intended to leave the *casa nova* would instead be able to request a free room if they were without the means to pay.

Meanwhile, the future of the refugees hosted in the *casa nova* at Nazareth would also be at the centre of a negotiation, this time political, between the Custody and the Patriarchate on one hand and the Israeli government on the other. Internally displaced people originally from the parish of Mujeidel were still living in the Franciscan hostel for pilgrims at the beginning of the 1950s, and Patriarch Alberto Gori appealed to the Israeli authorities for authorization for them to return to their homes.⁵⁰

The case of the Franciscan *case nove* of Jerusalem is clearly just one of the innumerable threads in the story of Catholic aid for the Palestinian refugees, a microhistory that is interwoven with the bigger historical picture. It represents events and processes that, to a large degree, await investigation, and whose analysis would deepen understanding of Palestinian history in important ways.

nous remarquons avec regret que tout cela n'a jamais été distribué avec justice et sagesse. Nous demandons des autorités responsables, la formation d'un comité de six membres, 3 membres du Respectable institution et 3 des réfugiés, dont les 3 membres seront choisis par nous, pour étudier le moyen de distribution de ces sommes, et aussi de savoir en détail l'emploi des ces fonds dans le passé." (We do not forget the hundreds of thousands of dollars that the Pontifical Mission has sent and continues to send, the clothing and food for this poor community. And we note with regret that none of this has ever been distributed with justice and prudence. We demand that the authorities responsible form a committee of six members, three members from the respectable institution and three refugees, with those three members to be chosen by us, to inquire as to how to distribute these sums and also to find out in detail how they have been used in the past.) (Ibid.).

49 ALPJ, Casa nova, Gerusalemme, Carteggio, "Rifugiati di guerra presso la casa nova di Gerusalemme (January 1, 1947–October 20, 1952)," subfile 5, typescript document with no addressee, signed by "The Committee" and dated April 17, 1952. In the committee's view, this was not cheap rent, given that one month earlier in the letter already cited, they had deplored the shortage of rooms and the "prix exorbitant entre 150 à 200 Dinars" that "font tressaillir les habitants du Casa Nova qui ont besoin du secours urgent dans ces jours des épreuves." (exorbitant price of between 150 and 200 dinars [that] makes the inhabitants of the Casa Nova shudder, who are in urgent need of relief in these testing days.)

50 ALPJ, AG-GB 2.1, Gouvernem. Israël—Minist. Cultes 1950–1967, letter n. 788, Gori to Colbi, Jerusalem (November 20, 1953), also available at the Israel State Archives, file 5826/13-1.

FIGURE 11.1 Jerusalem *casa nova*, early 20th century, ASCTS

The historical appraisal of the displacements and expulsions of the Palestinian Christian population after 1948, as well as the actions and relations and the local functioning of the system of assistance and the international aid network being mobilized is still an open field of research.

The complex dynamics between “assisted” and “assisting”, the forms of control and discipline exercised by operatives of religious entities on those they

were assisting, and the relations of the kind generated by enforced co-existence, are some of the other themes still to be explored. Finally, the transformation of the religious spaces and the modality of appropriation on the part of families and single refugees, the multiplicity of operations and motivations—humanitarian, religious, economic, political—that make up the complex substrate that enlivened Catholic culture in the provision of aid, and then too, the forms of organization of the refugees themselves with respect to the Catholic hierarchy and, more generally, the mode of politicization that the refugees experimented with, not only in the context of the camps, but also in relation to other structures that accommodated them, such as convents, parishes, and hostels, represent further avenues of research. Through these new sources, to be researched on a transnational scale, the question of the Palestinian refugees itself continues to be at the same time both national and global.

TABLE 11.1 List of the refugees at Jerusalem Casa Nova (1949)

No de la chambre	Nom & prénom	Nombre de personnes	Lieu d'habitation avant les troubles
7s.	Michel Aboushanab	7	Romema
3s.	Victor Tannous	7	Katamon
4/5s.	Elie Marroum	7	Katamon
6s./46	Antoine N. Sabella	6	Commercial Centre
2s./11/12	Yousseif Abdelmessih	6	Jorit-el-ennab
8s.	Ibrahim Nahas	5	Commercial Centre
9s.	Elie Karam	5	Commercial Centre
Moteur	Hossep Kéchichian	5	Musrara
6	Ventura Hallac	2	Jaffa Road
7/8	Georges Kaal	4	Musrara
9	Manuel Chomikian	2	Transféré de l'Ecole
10/45/52	Jabra Araich	6	Katamon
14	Matilda Nassar	1	Musrara
17	Bart Frank	1	Ancien occupant
22/22bis	Antoine Frangieh	6	Musrara
25/26	Jamil Atallah	7	Bezalel Street
24	Atallah Sœur	1	Musrara
29	Georges Yoakim	4	Commercial Centre
33/39/51	Jabra Murad	7	Katamon
35	Madame Harrington	1	Ancienne résidente
36/53/65	Elias G. Yasmineh	7	Katamon

TABLE 11.1 List of the refugees at Jerusalem Casa Nova (1949) (*cont.*)

No de la chambre	Nom & prénom	Nombre de personnes	Lieu d'habitation avant les troubles
37	Jacob Sabella	2	Saad-es-said
38	Merjinsky	1	Réfugié polonais
40	Salah Sœurs	2	Musrara
41/43	Elias Morcos	4	Musrara
42/64	Jean Messih	6	Transféré de l'Ecole
50	Horein	1	Réfugié polonais
55	Marroum Tarsha	1	Talbieh
56	Farid Morcos	2	Musrara (absent)
57/58	Antoine Morcos	5	Upper Baka'a
62	Bishara Morcos	4	Musrara
66	Artine Poshoglian	4	Katamon
67/97	Antoine Marta	6	Transféré de l'Ecole
69/70	Andréa Srna	2	Katamon
71	Umberto Bussadori	4	Jorit-el-ennab
72	Edouard Michel	1	Commercial Centre
73/78	Jean Kort	2	German Colony
74	Joseph Codrich	2	King David Hotel
76	Elias Salah	5	Romema
Salon	Antoine Dessimeni	6	Romema (absent)
77	Georges Abdelmessih	3	Upper Baka'a
80	Mlle Bahjajian	1	Jaffa Road
81/82	Mme Démerdjian	2	Transférée de l'Ecole
83	Mlle Julia Damian	1	Transférée de l'Ecole
84/86	Antoine Safieh	7	Musrara
88/89	Nagib Frangieh	4	Upper Baka'a
85/96/93	Joseph Nesnas	4	Beit Hakerem
87/90	Rodolphe Habesh	6	Upper Baka'a
92/91/28	Daoud Carmi	4	Beit Hakerem
94	Antoine Carmi	1	Baka'a
95	Joseph Habesh	2	Talbieh
98	Michel Abdelnour	2	Transféré de l'Ecole
99	Karimeh Morcos	1	Musrara
99bis	Joseph Sabella	2	Baka'a
Salon	Joseph Calis	6	Talbieh
101/102	Nazar Karjian	5	Musrara

TABLE 11.1 List of the refugees at Jerusalem Casa Nova (1949) (cont.)

No de la chambre	Nom & prénom	Nombre de personnes	Lieu d'habitation avant les troubles
103	Antoine A. Sabella	3	Saad-es-said
105	Tomanova	1	Ancienne résidente
105/121	Hanna Dibsi	7	Musrara
106	Margueritte Abcarmus	2	Commercial [Centre]
107	M.me Atallah (Sœur de Habesh)	1	Katamon
108	Bermans Tabri	5	Musrara
109	Rosalie Farwagi	2	Musrara
110	Hanna Safieh	4	Musrara

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