

literature about Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, which began as far back as 1979 with the venerable contributions of Rosemary Sayigh. Sayigh's groundbreaking *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (reissued by Zed Books in 2008) charted the process by which Palestinians were dispossessed and later mobilized in the camps of Lebanon. What Roberts's book shows is the extent to which political demobilization has led to abjection and misery, and what seems like an intractable helplessness. This is something to which I shall return at the end of this review.

The book can be squarely placed within the disciplines of refugee studies or development studies, as it deploys sociological methods—such as household studies and semi-structured interviews—to engage Palestinian refugees from three geographically dispersed camps. These are Burj al-Barajneh in Beirut, Burj al-Shamali in the south, and Nahr al-Barid outside Tripoli in the north. The primary object of the study is to discover Palestinian coping mechanisms, given crumbling camp infrastructures, tense relations with Lebanese neighbors of the camps, economic malaise, declining household living standards, and deteriorating education and health services.

Roberts is particularly qualified to have conducted the study, as she has extensive field experience as an international development consultant and her formal education—with degrees in Arabic and postwar recovery—prepare her well to produce technically complex studies of refugee populations' reactions to their conditions.

The findings of her research indicate that “informal social structure and resilient psychological attitude are the most important coping mechanisms for the Palestinian camp communities” (p. 155). These and other conclusions drawn from the material form the basis of a series of policy recommendations that require the Lebanese government to relax economic, construction, and educational restrictions on the refugees and UNRWA to become more accountable. More problematically, Roberts suggests that “reducing the power of the political parties . . . would also improve prospects for development” (p. 183).

This conclusion points to the particular character of this book as a technically accomplished and sympathetic reading of the Palestinians' lot within a fairly uncritical “development” framework. *Palestinians*

## LEBANON'S CAMPS

**Palestinians in Lebanon: Refugees Living with Long-Term Displacement**, by Rebecca Roberts. London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2010. xix + 196 pages. Appendix to p. 205. Notes to p. 218. Bibliography to p. 233. Index to p. 241. \$92.00 cloth.

### *Reviewed by Laleh Khalili*

Rebecca Roberts's *Palestinians in Lebanon* is a new addition to the growing

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*in Lebanon* does not question the political economy of aid or the politics of being a *Palestinian* (rather than a generic) refugee, nor does it situate the refugees in the broader Israel-Palestine conflict. The book does not engage with the growing body of critical literature on the problematic nature of aid and development specifically in the Palestinian context, never mind beyond it. Such work would include, inter alia, Benoit Challand's *Palestinian Civil Society: Foreign Donors and the Power to Promote and Exclude* (Routledge, 2009); Sahar Taghdisi-Rad's *The Political Economy of Aid in Palestine: Relief from Conflict or Development Delayed?* (Routledge, 2011); Michael Keating, Anne Le More, and Robert Lowe's edited *Aid, Diplomacy and Facts on the Ground: The Case of Palestine* (Chatham House, 2005); and more than a dozen such critical articles in various academic journals, including this one.

This means that the solutions the book offers are a further depoliticization of Palestinian subjects so that they could be more effectively made objects of aid and humanitarian intervention. The process recommended herein essentially entails a transformation of Palestinians from revolutionaries (à la Sayigh, above) to refugees, already well under way in Lebanon. To improve the lot of Palestinians should not require them to become depoliticized, hopeless and helpless objects of international aid. Perhaps more, rather than less, political mobilization offers the best hope for a regeneration of Palestinian refugees' lives in the camps of Lebanon.