

Abstract—Ilana Feldman, George Washington University

Livable lives in a world in crisis: The refugee as a political figure for our time

In 1943 Hannah Arendt published an essay entitled “We Refugees,” a reflection on the position shared by herself and other Jewish exiles from Europe as they lived with displacement. In 1995 Giorgio Agamben published a short piece with the same title, commenting both on Arendt’s earlier piece and on the configurations of borders, movement, and population control that were defining the post-cold war European landscape. In 2017, as the last few years have been marked by tremendous population movement and incredible anxiety in refugee receiving countries (in the Middle East and Europe) and relatively non-receiving countries (such as the United States), the moment is apt to consider again the refugee as a political figure. Drawing from the Palestinian refugee experience, this paper explores the refugee as an enduring figure, one central to the existing, and persisting, political order. It also considers refugees as political actors, who struggle within and against this political order to create livable lives.