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'I Must Be from Somewhere. I'm Not from the Moon': Navigating the Politics of Labelling for Stateless Palestinian Refugees from Syria

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origins and previously, arguably, inseparable nature, it is only recently that the relationship between the contemporary categories of statelessness and refugeehood have been the subject of significant interest.⁴

Understanding this relationship is important for several reasons. First, there are a significant number of people who have been, or could be labelled, as stateless refugees under international law. In 2016 the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ('UNHCR') reported that there were 22.5 million refugees globally, of which at least 6.5 million were believed to have been stateless.⁵ Second, where research has been undertaken on this relationship, it has generally been from a legal or policy perspective that has tended to uphold the categories as clearly distinct.⁶ Third, the growing body of research exploring this relationship from a range of disciplinary backgrounds and perspectives is proving to be empirically and theoretically rich.⁷

This article seeks to build upon this research and further address the gap in our understanding of this relationship by exploring how Palestinian refugees from Syria ('PRS') in Sweden conceptualised their categorisation as either stateless, refugees, both of these or some variation thereof. The narratives of how the participants' experienced these labels before, during and after their flight from Syria to Sweden were considered to cast as wide an analytical net as possible, as

- ¹ *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, opened for signature 28 July 1951, 189 UNTS 150 (entered into force 22 April 1954) ('1951 Refugee Convention'); *Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons*, opened for signature 28 September 1954, 30 UNTS 117 (entered into force 6 June 1960) art 1 ('1954 Convention').
- ² Michelle Foster and Hélène Lambert, *International Refugee Law and the Protection of Stateless Persons* (Oxford University Press 2019) 1.
- ³ See, eg, Giulia Scalettaris, 'Refugee Studies and the International Refugee Regime: A Reflection on a Desirable Separation' (2007) 26(3) *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 36.
- ⁴ Jason Tucker, 'The Statelessness of Refugees' in Tendayi Bloom and Lindsey N Kingston (eds), *Statelessness, Governance, and the Problem of Citizenship* (Manchester University Press 2021) 61.
- ⁵ Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion, *The World's Stateless* (Wolf Legal 2014) 125, 132.
- ⁶ See, eg, *ibid*; Eric Fripp, *Nationality and Statelessness in the International Law of Refugee Status* (Hart Publishing 2016); Foster and Lambert (n 2).
- ⁷ See Megan Bradley, 'Rethinking Refugeehood: Statelessness, Repatriation, and Refugee Agency' (2014) 40(1) *Review of International Studies* 101; Elena Fiddian-Qasbiyeh, 'On the Threshold of Statelessness: Palestinian Narratives of Loss and Erasure' (2015) 39(2) *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 301; Jinan Bastaki, 'The Meanings of Citizenship between Resettlement and Return: The Case of Displaced Palestinians' (2020) 24(2) *Citizenship Studies* 154; Thomas McGee, and Haqqi Bahram, 'Kurdes syriens: après l'exil, l'apatridie en Europe' (2021) 128(1) *Plein Droit* 15.