Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon
Laboratory of Indocile Identity Formation

Sari Hanafi


“The camps are both the emblem of the social condition created by the coupling of war with humanitarian action, the site where it is constructed in the most elaborate manner, as a life kept at a distance from the ordinary social and political world, and the experimentation of the large-scale segregations that are being established on a planetary scale.”

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Introduction

The armed battle between the Lebanese army and Fatah al-Islām inside the Nahr al-Bārid refugee camp, north of Tripoli, lasted three months, resulting in the killing of over 40 Palestinian civilians, 167 Lebanese soldiers, and over 200 Fatah al-Islām militants, and the destruction of almost all of the camp’s premises and the flight of around 33,000 people to the other refugee camps. In Ayn al-Hilweh, many arguments develop into clashes between armed young men. Some other camps are besieged by the Lebanese army in an attempt to control human and arms flows into the camps. Fatah al-Islām (200 persons), Usbat al-Ansār (League of Partisans, 200-300 persons), and Jund al-Shām (Army of Greater Syria, 100 persons), are names of extremist Islamist organizations, thought to be franchises of al-Qā‘idah, which invest progressively in the space of the camp. What is interesting about these three groups is the rumors spreading like wildfire about their respective commander(s) and bankroll(s): serious hypotheses have pointed the finger at Syria, at Saudi Arabia, and at al-Qā‘idah as supporting these groups. It is also probable that the Syrian security apparatus has facilitated their entrance into the camps, rendering it a competition between Syria and Saudi Arabia to control and at least neutralize these groups, making the group dynamic go far beyond the original objective of these countries. Taking the case of Nahr al-Bārid, how come Fatah al-Islām installed themselves in this particular camp at the end of July 2007, and, after one year, became a very well armed 200-member Arab and Lebanese extremist group? Regardless of the authorities
behind them, they all know very well that the camp is a space of exception, a space out of place.

How have we reached this point? Why has the violence erupted in the Lebanese camps and not in the Jordanian or Syrian camps? This paper argues that for 60 years, the space of the refugee camps in Lebanon was perceived as “security islands” and treated as a space of exception and an experimental laboratory for control and surveillance. Exception is not promulgated by one sovereign; many actors involved in the different modes of governance have been contributing to the suspension of this space under the cover of the laws and regulations. I am thus taking the term “sovereignty” as Iow Ong defined it. It is not merely state sovereignty, but also involves supra-national entities and local actors controlling space. These actors, involved in the politics of space, are mainly the host authorities, and to a lesser degree the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), but also Islamist groups and different local political commissars.

From the onset of the construction of the camp, for these actors the camp has remained the most suitable spatial configuration for control and surveillance and it is an imposed form as the refugees themselves generally resist their confinement to this kind of space. According to the UNHCR, in 2002 only 38 per cent of the world’s refugees were camp dwellers while 20 per cent were urban zone dwellers. In the case of the Palestinians, the average proportion of refugees who live inside camps is fairly high at 29 per cent, though in Gaza and in Lebanon these rates rise to around 50 per cent (see Table 1). What is the impact of belonging to such dwellings on the inhabitants’ socio-economic situation and their political and national identities? Many studies I have conducted concerning the Palestinian diaspora demonstrate substantial differences in terms of socio-economic status, living condition, and identity formation among Palestinian camp dwellers and urban city dwellers. This paper develops this further. I start by presenting a comparative overview of the living conditions of Palestinian camp dwellers. I argue that there are major differences between closed and open refugee camps and that the camp setting as a closed space is not a “natural” setting but rather has its raison d’être in disciplinary power, control, and surveillance, and in deploying the state of exception. Contrary to those who consider the absence of refugee camps as a determining factor in diluting the refugees’ national identity with that of the host country, I argue that the relationship between national identity and residential setting is very weak; rather, the camps create a new, much more urban identity rather than a national one. I will argue also that while the right and the entitlement of the Palestinian refugees to return concern them all, the right to the city, to paraphrase Henri Lefebvre, is lacking specifically for camp dwellers among them.
### Table 1: Palestinian refugees registered at UNRWA (2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region or Country</th>
<th>Number of Camps</th>
<th>Refugees inside the Camps</th>
<th>Refugees Outside the camps</th>
<th>Total Number of Refugees</th>
<th>% Refugees Inside the Camps</th>
<th>% Refugees Compared with the Local Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>283,183</td>
<td>1,497,518</td>
<td>1,780,701</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>32.8*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bank</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>181,241</td>
<td>506,301</td>
<td>687,542</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>31.4**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaza Strip</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>471,555</td>
<td>490,090</td>
<td>961,645</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>78.4**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>210,952</td>
<td>189,630</td>
<td>400,582</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>10.7*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>112,882(^8)</td>
<td>311,768</td>
<td>424,650</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>2.4*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1,146,931</td>
<td>3,108,189</td>
<td>4,255,120</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Statistics dating from 2006
** Extrapolation based on the 1997 Census by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS)

While UN Security Council resolutions, human rights law, and international law, including the UN refugee convention have provided legitimate claims and rights for the Palestinian refugees for return or integration\(^10\), Israel and the host countries have not respected these rights. In addition to that, the demographic expansion and structural changes that have taken place in the camps since their establishment has brought them ever closer to being slum areas and under-developed urban sprawls.

This study is based on several years of fieldwork, including interviews with the population of the Palestinian refugee camps and those who lead the camps in Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territories, but also in Syria and Jordan. Modes of governance are one of the focuses for the interviews.

1. **Palestinians in Camps: Closed Versus Open Space**

Can space be a major factor in shaping the living conditions of a population? I will argue here that there are two chief factors contributing to creating endemic poverty in some Palestinian refugee communities: first, being in a slum-like urban area, and second, being discriminated against in the labor market.

Although Palestinian refugee camp dwellers by and large enjoy adequate health and education services, they are disfavored and overlooked in the socioeconomic plans of the host country. While differences between camp dwellers and refugee urban dwellers (off-camp dwellers) in Syria and to a lesser extent in Jordan are relatively minimal\(^11\), the gap between camp and off-camp dwellers in Lebanon and in the occupied Palestinian territories is enormous. This can be explained by the fact that the camps in Jordan and Syria constitute, by and large, open spaces regulated by the host state, while in Lebanon they are set in closed spaces. I define “open space” as both urban and societal. Open urban space is regulated by the host country to look like any residential low-income neighborhood, allowing it to be connected with the surrounding cities and villages. From the societal point of view, camp dwellers are relatively integrated socially and economically into the surrounding
neighborhood and labor market. A “closed space” does not meet at least one of these conditions; camps organized as “closed spaces” constitute urban enclaves or satellites located at the urban periphery, lacking in green spaces, and with poor access and poor housing.

Previous studies on refugee camps have shown correlations between the relative poverty rates of Palestinian refugees and the poverty rates among the respective local populations in different localities. Thus two factors are worth noting in this context: the discrimination of Palestinian refugees in the labor market and the type of residential area where they live. As one can clearly see from Table 1, it is only in both Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territories (mainly the West Bank) that the poverty rate is higher compared to the local population, despite the fact that in the OPT there is no institutional discrimination in the labor market. This discrimination certainly plays a partial role in the poverty rate as noticed in Lebanon. Therefore, the factor contributing to the production of a high poverty rate shared by refugees in Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories is the feature of “closed space”. This demonstrates how salient such a space is, in regards not only to refugees’ living conditions but also to their urban identity and their relationship to Palestinian nationalism, as we will see later on. This analysis by country does not in any manner suggest homogeneity inside each respective country, mostly because of the location of the camps. Some camps are located inside an urban context, while other camps are situated at the urban periphery, and a number of them are isolated camps within a rural setting. The differences between these camps are sometimes huge.

Table 1. Relation between the poverty rate, type of camp, and discrimination in labor market

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/region</th>
<th>Discrimination in labor market</th>
<th>Type of camp</th>
<th>Rate of poverty compared to local rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No camps</td>
<td>Similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Open space</td>
<td>Similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Open space</td>
<td>Similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaza Strip</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Semi closed space</td>
<td>Slightly higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bank</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Closed space</td>
<td>Higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Closed space</td>
<td>Higher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the various surveys conducted by the Norwegian Institute for Applied Social Science (Fafo) in Jordan and Syria, the living conditions of Palestinian refugees outside the camps is not much different from that of the general population in the host country. The situation of refugees living in camps, however, is worse than that of those living outside camps, and this is true in every host country. But even so the camp populations do not face the same rate of poverty and deteriorating living conditions, nor do they constitute the main poverty problem of the host countries. Only in Lebanon, all indicators surveyed by Fafo show that living conditions in the camps are worse than in any off-camp area.

UNRWA distinguishes some households as "Special Hardship Cases" (SHCs). These cases represent about 6% of the total registered Palestinian refugees.
in 2000. Proportionately, Lebanon has the highest percentage of SHCs (about 11% of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon benefit from the SHC program), while Jordan has the lowest percentage (about 3%). The rate of SHCs in the West Bank is 7.8%. This difference is explained by the fact that the level of socio-economic integration of refugees in Jordan is highest while in Lebanon it is the lowest of UNRWA’s areas of operation.

Even though education levels are generally good thanks to UNRWA, in Lebanon 60% of Palestinian youth aged 18-29 do not complete their basic education. In the occupied Palestinian territories, girls tend to drop out of high school before graduation due to early marriages, and, as a consequence, illiteracy rates for females are higher than for males. The incompatibility between the relatively high level of education and the low socio-economic status of camp dwellers arises from the fact that people whose economic status has improved usually leave the camps for the cities, where work is more readily available.

Over 60% of homes in Lebanese and Jordanian refugee camps lack proper sanitary installations for drinking water. Julianne Ivory reported that: “there is garbage and sewage scattered all over due to lack of proper infrastructure; the streets are so narrow and winding that they might more appropriately be called passage ways; everywhere you walk you are covered overhead by a blanket of electrical wires; most edifices are crumbling and riddled with bullet holes; the buildings are so close together that you don’t know where one ends and the other begins and when you turn a corner you might accidentally have stepped directly into someone’s living room.”

Yet the most serious problem concerns the density of population inside the camp: 30 to 40% of the homes have a density of three to eleven people or more, causing huge environmental problems. The buildings are often arranged in a labyrinthine maze of backstreets with no natural light, exposed to hazardous building material, inadequate temperature control, and poor ventilation. Infant mortality rates in the camps in Lebanon stand at 239 deaths per 100,000 births, and rates of chronic infant illnesses stand at twice or three times the Lebanese national average.

2. Palestinians in Lebanon

The story of the Palestinian presence in Lebanon is one of deep ethno-national divisions, political confrontation and, in the post-civil war years, ideological controversy. One hundred thousand people fled to Lebanon during the Israeli-Arab war in 1948. Many refugees I interviewed reported the brutality and oppressive nature of the control over the camps at that time by the police, army and Deuxième Bureau (Lebanese military intelligence). The majority of refugees gathered in camps and some of the camps (in the south) that acted as transit camps later became permanent, according to Jihane Sfeir.

Palestinian nationalism grew quickly from 1965 onwards. After the PLO in Jordan was crushed in 1970 and its leadership relocated to Beirut, the Lebanon camps became the centre for Palestinian resistance against the Israeli state. While UNRWA had already been set up to cater for the Palestinian refugees, providing education, health and social services, a sizable number of Palestinian institutions, including nurseries, vocational training centers, health clinics and various industries (textile, leather goods, ironwork, furniture, handicrafts) were also established and expanded immensely in the 1970s following the arrival of the Palestinian leadership. This allowed for the establishment of institutions and organizations to serve Palestinian
refugees and camp committees and a number of other organizations engaged in health, education, culture, and sports in and around refugee camps. At one point the largest part of the Palestinian labor force, perhaps up to two-thirds, was employed by the PLO and the resistance movement, including in political offices and armed units.\textsuperscript{24}

The Palestinian community in Lebanon took shape not only economically but also politically and spatially. The re-emergence of distinctly Palestinian nationalist politics in the mid-1960s followed the progress made by the scattered Palestinians in rebuilding their socio-political space. This progress, which was enhanced by the Palestinian resistance movement and the PLO, played a key role in promoting a collective political and national identity among the exiled Palestinians who until then had seen themselves merely as refugees. The camps played an important role, as the 1969 Cairo Agreement between the Lebanese government and the Palestinian resistance secured the Palestinians full control over the camps, which virtually became a state-within-a-state. To this day the camps make up enclaves out of reach of some Lebanese laws. Special arrangements with the prevailing local forces have been necessary to enforce some other laws. Jean Genet, the French writer and activist who advocated Palestinian rights criticized the PLO for the exterritorial jurisdiction of the refugee camps and PLO’s formation of a surrogate state within a state.

The 1982 Israeli invasion, however, forced the PLO to leave Beirut, and with the Palestinian leadership gone, scores of social and economic institutions disappeared, along with employment and income. The expulsion of the PLO coincided with falling remittances in the 1980s, particularly from the Gulf monarchies. Later, the diversion of foreign aid from Palestinians in Lebanon to the Palestinian territory in the wake of the Oslo Accords made the situation worse. After 1982, with the exception of a few organizations such as the Palestine Red Crescent Society, almost all PLO-created organizations collapsed and, as a result, the Palestinian refugees residing in the camps had only UNRWA to cater to their needs.\textsuperscript{25} But despite UNRWA’s efforts, with the other organizations, the conditions of the Palestinian refugees have gone from bad to worse. Housing problems have become more acute, the economy has deteriorated, and the social environment has reached an alarmingly unhealthy level. This environment led many institutions to extend a helping hand to the refugees. To date, there are 46 Arab and 20 foreign NGOs who assist the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Some provide multiple services; others are specialized in one sector. The role of the foreign NGOs is primarily one of funding, with the exception of a few who are involved directly with refugees. Arab NGOs are more involved in the actual provision of services.\textsuperscript{26}

At present there are in excess of 400,000 Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA.\textsuperscript{27} However, it is estimated that only about 200,000-250,000 refugees are actually residing in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{28} Of these, up to two-thirds live in refugee camps served by UNRWA, or in small communities adjacent to the camps where people have access to the services of UNRWA as well as Palestinian and other NGOs. The remaining third reside elsewhere in Lebanon and are generally thought to be better off than the camp population, although there are no statistics to support such a claim. Some of them are “naturalized” and have been granted Lebanese citizenship.\textsuperscript{29} Some 100,000 Palestinian refugees have left Lebanon, many to Europe, particularly the Scandinavian countries and Germany\textsuperscript{30}, especially after the Israeli invasion and the “War of the Camps,” fleeing the conflict but also social exclusion.

According to the Danish Refugee Council, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon can be categorized into three groups.\textsuperscript{31} The majority of them are “registered” refugees by both UNRWA and the Lebanese authorities, and benefit from the services offered
by UNRWA. They constitute approximately 10 per cent of the population of Lebanon. The second category (35,000) consists of “non-registered” refugees, as estimated by NGOs operating in the camps in 2004. These refugees fall outside the UNRWA mandate because they left Palestine after 1948, and took refuge outside UNRWA’s areas of operation. They were registered by the Lebanese government. UNRWA started to serve the non-registered population in January 2004. The third category (3,000) consists of the “non-identified” refugees, who are not registered with any agency in Lebanon or internationally and thus possess no valid documents. They do not have access to UNRWA’s assistance. They endure difficult socio-economic conditions as they lack stable income due to their ineligibility for work. They do not have access to health care, educational facilities, or other forms of humanitarian assistance, such as home refurbishment. Other local organizations, such as the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, provide health facilities accessible to non-ID refugees. However, in most cases they have to pay for these services.

Distrust between population groups appears to be a significant trait of the current Lebanese psyche, extending to the attitude of many Lebanese citizens, especially the Christians, vis-à-vis Palestinian refugees, who are often held responsible for the civil war. The majority of the Lebanese vehemently oppose the permanent resettlement of Palestinians in the country. Such tawtīn (resettlement and naturalization), is also strongly rejected by the Palestinians, the majority of whom insist on the “right of return” to Palestine. The Lebanese position on resettlement is sometimes used to justify discriminatory policies against the Palestinian refugees, whose legal status even after 60 years is that of foreigners. This has resulted in restrictive policies with regard to the social, economic, and civil rights of the Palestinians.

**Tawtīn as Scarecrow**

Tawtīn is the scarecrow which has been used to generate a public phobia against the basic rights of the Palestinians. Any debate about civil and economic rights starts by affirming that the objective should not be tawtīn and ends with the same melody, to the point that rights come to be substituted with quick humanitarian or security solutions. The only common ground between the various Lebanese political parties is the use of tawtīn as taboo. Just by browsing the headlines of the main Lebanese newspapers (*al-Nahār*, *al-Akhbār*, *al-Safir*, and *L’Orient-Le Jour*), one notices the recurrence of a pattern of one Lebanese political group opposing another by portraying it as the promoter of tawtīn, which is regarded as tantamount to treason. “The program of al-Bārid Camp reconstruction is the beginning of tawtīn,” read the front-page headline of *al-Akhbār*, on 2 July 2007. Others (including religious authorities) consider the mere talk of the Palestinians’ right to work as being the first step towards tawtīn.

Throughout this debate the individual Palestinian is invisible. The deployment of bio-politics by humanitarian organizations (regarding Palestinians as bodies to be fed and sheltered, bare life without political existence) is one end of the spectrum and the tawtīn discourse is the other end. For those participating in such a discourse, the Palestinians are mere figures, demographic artifacts and a transient political mass waiting for return. Between humanitarian discourse in the zones of emergency on the one hand, and the tawtīn discourse on the other, the rights-based and entitlement approach for the Palestinians as individuals and collectives, as refugees but also as citizen-refugees with civil and economic rights, as well as the right to the city, is lost.
Accounts from Palestinian camp dwellers in Lebanon show that they refer to themselves as the “forgotten people,” feeling that they live in a hostile environment where basic human rights, including the right to work, have no effective means of representation or protection. Before dealing with the refugee camps as a space of exception, the refugee camps will have their exceptionality compared to any urban area, which can be regarded as a humanitarian space.

3. Camps as Humanitarian Space

The bio-power\(^{37}\) exercised by humanitarian organizations has created categories for those in need with the effect of depoliticizing them. Refugees are transformed into bodies to be fed and sheltered while being deprived of their political existence. Humanitarian law used to refer to “protected people”, but current humanitarian practices focus mainly on “victims” or, at times, on “survivors” in order to sound more positive. By classifying people as victims, the basis of humanitarian action is shifted from rights to welfare. In disaster areas—the space of exception—values of generosity and pragmatism obscure any references to the rights and responsibilities of the people concerned (refugees, humanitarian organizations, international community, etc.), which would endow them with their own agency. However, throughout the years, the activities of refugee organizations (the list is long: Nansen Bureau for Russian and Armenian Refugees in 1921; High Commission for Refugees from Germany, 1936; Intergovernmental Committee for Refugees, 1938; International Refugee Organization of the United Nations, 1946; UNRWA, 1950; and up to the present UN High Commission for Refugees, 1951), has been limited according to their statutes to “humanitarian and social” issues, while excluding political issues.\(^{38}\) Often stripped of their political existence and identity and reduced to their status as individuals in need of shelter and food, this bare-life, as well as the entire refugee question, has been transferred to the hands of the police and military forces, on the one hand, and to apolitical service organizations like UNRWA on the other hand.\(^{39}\)

When reconsidering the emergence of the urban identity of the camp, it becomes clear that the identity and political status of camp dwellers are related to the very nature of the camp and to its segregation and isolation as a distinct and enclosed spatial unit. Refugees who are non-camp dwellers tend to establish a good relationship with their host society quickly and escape the status of “victims.” As a closed space the camp forms the conditions that facilitate the use of bio-politics by the host countries and by UNRWA, as refugees are gathered in a centralized and controlled place where they can be under constant surveillance. This “care, cure and control” system has transformed refugee camps into disciplinary spaces.\(^{40}\) On the pretext of facilitating the provision of services, the camp is conceived as the only workable possible form of space, as if outside the camps, the distribution of food and other services to the refugees would have become almost impossible. In the Palestinian context, however, the problem does not lie only with the spatial nature of the camp, but also with the mandate of UNRWA, the main provider of services in the camp.

UNRWA, which was created in 1950 as a relief organization specifically dedicated to the Palestinian refugees was established as a service provider. Its UN mandate included neither de jure protection of refugees nor their return to their homes. Despite its very strict mandate, in the past fifteen years there have been cases
in which the organization acted beyond the letter of its mandate, for example when it provided “passive protection” for Palestinian refugees during the first Intifada. After a donors’ meeting in Geneva in 2004 the organization has started linking service provision to advocacy and recently a rights-based approach to its humanitarian mandate is emerging. One can notice relatively strong language used in UNRWA publications to attract the attention of the international community to the continuing plight of Palestinian refugees. However, taking into account housing, children’s and women’s rights, and other rights does not mean that the right of return has become part of UNRWA’s advocacy strategy. In spite of the importance of UNRWA publications in mobilizing the international community, the very concept of refugees as an artifact of the victimization discourse obstructs the possibility of advocacy that seeks to advance their return and statehood. The United States and some of UNRWA’s European donors consider that if UNRWA goes in the direction of looking for a durable solution (like settlement and return), it will undergo a dangerous politicization, although UNHCR’s case has shown that being involved in the search for durable solutions does not conflict with an essentially humanitarian mandate. As new UNRWA discourse appeared, Karen Koning AbuZayd, Commissioner-General, subtly revealed the tension between what is political and what is humanitarian in her statement at the Host and Donors Meeting held in Amman on 11 December 2006:

I refer to the issues surrounding the tension that frequently appears between the preoccupations of States on the one hand, and humanitarian questions on the other. This tension is manifested in a variety of ways. One of its most striking manifestations is the contrast between the readiness of states to fund emergency responses, compared to their failure to address the questions of international law and politics that cause these emergencies. That tension is clear in the way in which the urgency to resolve underlying questions of justice and peace for Palestinians is somehow divorced from the challenge of providing for their human needs. We believe that these tensions and contradictions can--and should--be avoided, particularly in the Palestinian arena where political, security, humanitarian, development and refugee issues are often virtually indistinguishable. The issues are too tightly interwoven to allow the luxury of a fragmented approach. An approach in which security and political questions are deemed to supersede or override humanitarian and protection issues is unrealistic and simply not sustainable... These questions recall an important aspect of UNRWA’s evolving role. I am referring to our role as a global advocate for the care and protection of Palestinian refugees. This role is implicit in our mandate and in our identity as an Agency that ultimately derives its authority from the General Assembly and the Charter of the United Nations... We do not assume this role lightly. We are fully aware that the legitimacy of our advocacy role rests on remaining within the boundaries of our humanitarian mandate. We are cognizant of the fact that the boundaries that separate the humanitarian from the political are indistinct at best, but nevertheless real. We have no illusions about how high the costs would be if we were to stray too far, and we have no desire whatsoever to jeopardize the international credibility we have worked so hard to create and maintain. That would be a price we are not prepared to pay.”

While UNRWA has played a very important role in empowering Palestinian refugees by providing education, health and sometimes work, this has not been sufficient to get the Palestinians beyond the threshold, i.e. to become integrated into
the host society. UNRWA has sometimes submitted to the will of the host authority of keeping the camps as temporary spaces. While the tents disappeared from refugee camps in Syria after one year, in Lebanon they lasted ten years. With coercive measures (deprivation of the elementary rations), the camp dwellers in Lebanon from the 1950s to the 1970s were obliged to construct a roof from zinc instead of concrete. A problematic cooperation under the pretext to “better” manage a resourceless population and to keep the camps as temporary space has as one major consequence the further marginalization of this population. Furthermore, since the 1950s, one of its indirect consequences was emigration, not only to the Gulf area but also to North America. The result of maintaining refugees in camps so as to keep them operational in the political struggle and ready for their return was relocating them farther from their place of origin and keeping them in a state of double alienation: both from their place of origin and from the urban and social domains in the host country’s society. Here we come to the initial problematic of the emergence of the urban identity of the camp dwellers which is related to the very nature of the camp, the very reason why non-camp dwellers are able to quickly establish a good relationship with the host society and escape the status of “victim.” This double alienation is related not only to spatial suspension but also to temporal suspension. These refugee camps, characterized by what the French anthropologist Michel Agier calls “frozen transience,” are an ongoing lasting state of temporariness. As in the prisons and “hyperghettos” scrutinized by Loïc Wacquant, camp dwellers “learn to live, or rather survive, in the here-and-now, bathed in the concentrate of violence and hopelessness brewing within its walls.”

4. Closed Camps: Between Space of Exception and Space of Void
Contrary to the camps in Syria and Jordan that function as open spaces, the closed camps in Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territories are spaces of exception. They are subjected to bio-power and the use of the state of exception, put into play by different actors, including the Lebanese authorities, the Israeli ruling apparatuses, the PLO and UNRWA, among other emerging actors, who act as different sovereigns over the camp. The sovereign, according to the German philosopher Carl Schmitt, is the one who proclaims the state of exception. He is not characterized by the order that he institutes through the constitution but by the suspension of that order. My argument is that the politics of exception has been bluntly or subtly exercised against these urban places since the establishment of these camps. But how exactly has this occurred?

While the Lebanese state is present in the public space by the rule of urban laws, it has abandoned the camps and allowed them to become spaces devoid of laws and regulations. The urbanization process takes on a wild nature, stemming from the absence of planning policies and, in particular, the non-enforcement of construction laws. Everyone builds as s/he sees fit, and the result is hundreds of illegal buildings spreading in all directions. The process of the urbanization of the unregulated camps has resulted in a large population suffering from poverty, living in slum areas surrounding the cities.

In this situation nothing is legally defined. Everything is suspended but upheld without written documents concerning this suspension. The camps had been under the PLO authority since the 1969 Cairo Agreement, but the expulsion of the PLO in 1982, has led to them being governed by a web of complex power structures composed of two popular committees (one pro-Syrian and the other pro-PLO), a security committee, a committee of camp notables, the local committee, political factions,
Islamist non-Palestinian groups, imāms, PLO popular unions and syndicates (workers, women, engineers, etc.), NGOs, and UNRWA directors. These camp leaders have imposed measures which are as changing as the balance of power between these different groups. The interviews we conducted in different camps showed how camp populations have lived with the disarray caused by this state of exception. According to an old woman refugee expressing her anger: “Who can I complain to when my neighbor builds a second and third floor without leaving any proper space for my apartment?” Many interviewees used the word “chaos” to describe the situation in the camps.

Chaos, however, is not based on the absence of law but on the exclusion by the sovereign(s) of the population from the space where the law is supposed to operate: “Camps are not under the responsibility of the Lebanese State,” says a senior officer in the Lebanese security forces. This means that the camp dwellers are excluded from the sphere of the city while at the same time included with respect to security and taxes. This flexible use of law and its suspension justifies the use of the space of exception in understanding the relationship between the space of the camps and that of the cities. At times, however, the situation comes closer to a state of void, filled in a very ad hoc way as the result of the architecture of the power structure. Thus we are in double ambiguous situations of exception and of void: exception, because the real sovereign suspends the laws in the camp area to make it a quasi-lawless area to the point that it becomes hardly controllable by this sovereign. Other local actors/sovereigns will compete in order to rule the camp, but in many cases, my fieldwork suggested the state of void because it showed how social, economic, urban and political conflicts inside the camps were very difficult to be resolved because of the destructive competition of these actors.

The state of exception, according to Agamben, is the suspension of law whenever possible by one sovereign. However, in the case of the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, we have a tapestry of multiple partial sovereignties: real sovereigns like the Lebanese government or the PLO, but also phantom sovereignties like UNRWA, in addition to a web of actors who contribute to the state of exception and suspension of laws.

At this point it is noteworthy to understand UNRWA as a phantom sovereign. What is important, Foucault reminds us, is not the power that stems from the exercise of sovereignty but rather the effects of power that a governmental technology generates. While UNRWA was not intended to, nor does it pretend to govern the camps, it is ascribed the status of a sovereign by many camp dwellers. Many among our interviewed camp dwellers consider UNWRA responsible for the disorder in the camps. UNRWA calls its representatives in the camps “camp directors,” a title which may be interpreted to carry symbolic violence, the violence of occupying a ruling position without acting accordingly. This confusion is not due to the refugees’ cognitive disorder but rather stems from the historical role played by UNRWA directors in not merely providing services but also in administering and coordinating many aspects of the refugees’ lives.

However, this state of exception is not only exercised by the sovereign, but also by the actors themselves. Agamben fails to account for the agency of the actors resisting the “total institution” of the camp. He conceives the camp as a paradigmatic place of modernity and modern politics, using concentration camps such as the Nazi camps as an emblematic example. Agamben conceives the camp as a zone of indistinction between the public and the private, fact and norm, or law and life, where inmates are nothing but submissive subjects who follow a myriad of orders and
regulations into which the sovereign decision on the exception is disseminated. However, the Palestinian refugee camps are places of resistance and transgression, where agency does not only express itself by the action of resistance, but also by the use of the same mode of power: the state of exception.

Discursively, many actors, often the political commissars of these camps, and what I call the local sovereigns, insist on the exceptional status of the camps while refusing to submit them not only to the Lebanese power. This is a power strategy used by these political commissars to keep their authoritative power without any sort of elections. This refusal comes from the need to keep the status quo where the majority of the camps’ popular committees are nominated by the various Palestinian factions. However, does the political commissar’s position reflect the position of the entire camp population? Many interviews we conducted in the al-Baddāwī and Burj al-Barājneh camps, show the growth of a pervasive, often angry disillusionment with any kind of politics, either secular or mainstream religious, especially with the onset of factional strife in Gaza and the destruction of Nahr al-Bārid.

Before 1970, the camps had been governed by the state of emergency where Lebanese security forces (gendarmes and Deuxième Bureau) had suspended the laws that applied outside the camps. After 1970, the police have not been able to penetrate the camps without negotiating with the powerful actors who decide whether to cooperate or not, on a case by case basis. The camp population would resort to imāms, local notables (wujahā’), and local security leaders in any quarrels or problems before going to the police. While such conflict resolution methods have been rather successful in the past, refugee camps no longer enjoy harmonious communitarian structures headed by local notables. This transformation has become more critical after 60 years of exile, as the situation is very different from that prevailing in the 1980s. Julie Peteet provides a seminal contribution that describes the use of different conflict resolution methods during that period: the Palestinian resistance accommodated traditional authority structures by building upon the customary forum and procedure of dispute settlement and by implementing customary outcomes. For a considerable period of time, the camps witnessed the emergence of a new elite whose legitimacy was based on the Palestinian national struggle. However, this situation changed after 1982, as participation in the struggle was no longer sufficient for someone to become a powerbroker.

Recently collected anecdotal evidence shows that the presence of multiple actors governing the camp without the constitution of a legitimate unified body (like the popular committee) raises major problems for the camp population. In one of the camps in south Lebanon, a girl was raped in 2007 by two young men belonging to an influential family affiliated with Fatah. When the girl’s parents reported the rape to the Fatah leader, he interrogated the perpetrators until they admitted the crime and were imprisoned. Two weeks later, they were released. The victim’s family addressed Fatah, who controls the camp, threatening to sue the boys under Lebanese law, but Fatah warned the family. In this case, the informal justice system provided by the Palestinian factions hides class and gender conflict. Another example occurred in 2005 at the al-Baddāwī camp where an alleged spy for the Lebanese Deuxième Bureau, his wife, and one of his children were shot dead by armed members of a Palestinian military faction. While Hamas denounced the action, other factions kept silent. My interviewees criticized the silent position of some of the factions and reported a growing feeling of insecurity in the camp. Contrary to that, we find a different situation in the al-Bass camp, studied by Dorai, and Burj al-Shamālī camp near Tyre where strong security committees appointed by the PLO are present. These
two camps have enjoyed social peace and they are relatively human spaces, less crowded than the other camps. These two committees were able to negotiate with UNRWA and the Lebanese authorities to improve the situation of the camps. This is an example of the importance of the presence of a legitimate governing body in the camp, alleviating the hurdles of the state of exception.

Living in a space of exception proclaimed either by the real, phantom or local sovereigns has serious consequences for the living conditions of the camp dwellers but specifically for the urbanization of the camp, and on its relation to the surrounding urban or rural environment. The most salient example is that of Ayn al-Hilweh camp near Sidon. Operated by different Palestinian factions as well as Islamist non-Palestinian groups, this combat zone and forbidden place is spatially and administratively modeled on prisons as its entry is guarded by Lebanese Army checkpoints. Four checkpoints serve 45,967 inhabitants of the camp. Severely overcrowded, this camp has become a fertile recruiting ground for jihadists and for the evolution of radical Islamist movements and conservative religious forces. It is a conflict zone on the verge of spilling out into the neighboring Lebanese city of Sidon, as radical jihadists return from wars in Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Iraq imbued with Islamist extremism that is drawing more recruits and changing the complexion of the once secular Palestinian movement in the camp.

Finally the state of exception is not only applied against the camps but also against the whole Palestinian refugee community. As Julie Peteet argues, the Palestinians in Lebanon live in a legal void as they lost their status as citizens in Palestine and have not acquired genuine refugee status in Lebanon, as formulated by international refugee conventions. Peteet summarized the situation of the camp as lying within three parameters: spatially, confinement through the ever-present threat of violence in a tightly bounded camp; institutionally, the exclusion from the public institutions of social life; and finally economically, extremely restrictive employment regulations. As scapegoats, Palestinians, in the public eye, “were troublemakers and the prime cause of Lebanon’s woes, and thus a presence to be managed, quarantined, and moved at will.”

5. Epilogue: Camps as Laboratories

The space of the camps has four principal functions: a place of habitat, economic space, a space of memory and identity affirmation, and a space for exercising power. These functions render the camp a laboratory of Palestinian society/state-in-the-making, but also an experimental laboratory for control and surveillance, and a technical model of repression developed by its sovereigns’ know-how, implemented and deployed in other parts of the world that do not “behave.” The camp was always a space of interaction with the world. The work of Laleh Khalili about the commemorative practices in the 1970s is related to transnational ideologies and world events. At that time, the PLO was a liberation movement connected to other liberation movement organizations around the world. From the 1990s onwards, the collapse of the communist bloc and the concomitant rise of human rights and Islamism interacted with the fragmentation of the Palestinian national movement to modify commemorative themes. The guerrilla hero melts into martyr, and heroic battles are replaced by massacres, with different audiences and contexts evoking different representations.

The camps have undergone a major ideological transformation, along with the surrounding Lebanese cities, emerging as a sort of laboratory or microcosm for the vast range of thought relating to politicized Islamism, as formulated by Bernard
However, compared with other Islamist groups, they do not represent the emergence of a new ideology for al-Qaeda but new modes of action and tactics. My interviews with the Palestinian refugee camp dwellers in Syria who have gone to fight with al-Qaeda in Iraq show clearly that they are fighting against the American project in the region and not against Western values. These marginalized, educated, (lower) middle class individuals, not of the disenfranchised poor, are mainly loosely tied to al-Qaeda or sympathetic to its ideas. In other words, a protracted defeated context intertwined with a conservative Islam widely disseminated through Saudi channels, the role of the mosques, the political discourse of Islamist groups, including Hamas and Jihad, constitute a backdrop that enables an easy shift from regular citizen to insurgent for a global cause, fighting Israeli-American domination in the region. In addition, the Islamic charity organizations play an active role in the lives of poor camp dwellers, replacing the traditional role of Fatah and PLO organizations. However, as the work of Janine Clark shows the provision of food, health care, and services by the Islamic and Islamist groups does not directly lead to recruitment. Rather, the creation and strengthening of intricate social networks indirectly binds their members ever more closely to Islamist movements. Having said that, the camp becomes an urban ecology of the jihadist Islamist not because the poor camp dwellers adhere ideologically to the new global jihadist ideology but because of this very complex backdrop.

By examining the politics of slums and militant Islamism in the Middle East Asef Bayat put it eloquently by saying that “the key to the habitus of the dispossessed is not anomie or extremism but “informal life”—one that is characterized by flexibility, pragmatism, negotiation, as well as constant struggle for survival and self-development. The relationship between the urban dispossessed and radical Islamists tends to be both contingent and instrumental.” What is going on in some refugee camps in Lebanon is a dynamic which can be reversed by addressing the labor market restriction and the mode of governance inside the camp.

The portrait I paint, though seemingly dark and threatening, does not concern all the refugee camps in Lebanon at the same level. However, it is time to ring serious alarm bells about what is going on in the specific space of refugee camps, as exemplifying the state of exception and the politics of void.

For Mohamed Kamel Doraï, the different functions which the camps serve have created a Palestinian socio-spatial dynamic based on three aspects: territorial permanence (a place of stability and continuity), communitarian space (a place of ongoing social interactions), and space of contact and conflict with the surrounding communities. However, while few camps are economically integrated with their surrounding areas, they are largely disconnected from the urban fabric. Contrary to many researchers who conflate economic integration of the camp with urban and social integration, the difference is huge. The camps are not different in this respect from ghettos and other enclaves that have been traditionally integrated with their cities economically but not socially.

While looking at the refugee camps as an extreme case located on the legal margin, which in some times and places exists as a state of exception and in others as a state of void, I have done so by applying a distinction between open and closed camps. The closed camps are zones of exception, albeit under different modalities ordered by various types of phantom-like sovereignty—national, international and local. Where Palestinian refugees are constituted as bare life and subjected to extreme legal conditions, by revolting and resisting these conditions they express their agency
and transgress the role assigned to them by their oppressors and the many sovereigns which oppression has made possible.

The dominant Palestinian and humanitarian organizations’ imaginary discourses and industry of representation, to put it in terms used by Sayigh, have narrated the conflict in terms of human suffering and victimhood. Portraying closed camps as museums has enabled such narratives. Moreover, these spaces are considered the primary units for constructing and reproducing the refugees’ identity as Palestinians in Arab host countries. As a result, the camp as a quasi-political entity has been investigated by social scientists, journalists and experts and has been shown to reproduce the structure of pre-1948 Palestinian society, including the reproduction of the place of origin inside the camps, as if Lübyah, Safad, and so on, could be reproduced in the ʿAyn al-Hilweh or Yarmūk camps. This ethnicization of the refugees’ history overlooks the importance of the economic, social, and cultural relationships with the host countries, to which very few ethnographic studies have paid adequate attention.

The image of the refugee in the Arab region is thus confined to those who dwell in miserable camps and not necessarily those who have been uprooted and dwell outside their country and region. The assumption, in popular thought and within the scholarly community was that the more miserable the camp, the less people would want to settle in the host countries and would ultimately insist on returning to their home in Palestine. The discourse of misery revolves around stagnation, control, and the silencing of camp dwellers. Yet, the relationship between Palestinian national identity and belonging and the type of residential area is very loose. There is no relationship between place of residence and taking a clear political position in favor of insisting on the right of return.

Although the right of return movement was initiated by West Bankers linked to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and started out with a meeting in Farrā camp near Hebron, it has flourished in Europe and North America rather than in the Arab world. We therefore do not need to be members of a closed refugee camp to maintain the right of return and the Palestinian identity. Contrary to the popular belief that the camp nurtures Palestinian national identity, the camps, where radical national movements mingle with religious conservatism, have produced a new in-docile urban identity rather than a national one. ʿAyn al-Hilweh, which has a long history of resistance to the Israeli colonial system, has today become disconnected from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and from Palestinian nationalism, reaching out to a broader world of Islamist activism, with frightening consequences for the camp dwellers, the Lebanese population, and perhaps the whole region. Bernard Rougier has had the merit since 2004 to caution us about this radical transformation inside of the camp project. We may be witnessing a definitive rupture between the camp and its roots in Israel/Palestine, while remaining ideologically and financially connected to a network of Salafī or Wahhābī support for the camps, carried through specific clerical figures from Saudi Arabia and sometimes Iran.

While the PLO is currently pushing for cooperation between the Lebanese and Palestinian authorities in governing the camp, as has been clear from the declarations of the Palestinian Ambassador in Lebanon ʿAbbās Zakī on many occasions in 2007, many local pro-Syrian and Islamist actors have refused this and pressed to keep the
status quo of the state of exception. Many scholars, in the name of supporting the Palestinian national movement, are unaware of the form of authoritarian nationalism being cultivated in the camps. In addition, our observations of school pupils a decade ago showed that less than a third wore the Islamic headscarf, whereas today, virtually the sweeping majority do so, some covering the face too. New emerging discourse, like that of Khaled Hroub\textsuperscript{72} and Oraib Rantawi, argues that the “right of return,” as a key political demand, should not contradict the “right of survival.” They allude to a form of camp nationalism based on an abstract discourse of the right of return which is threatening the survival of the Palestinian national movement and even the Palestinians as a nation.

The success of the Al-Awda movement (the Palestine Right to Return Coalition) derives from its capacity to organize many activities, such as meetings, peaceful demonstrations, and information campaigns. By dint of this movement, many Palestinian communities in the various western countries began to organize themselves. However, this movement seems not to be interested in the improvement of living condition of the Palestinians in host countries alongside their advocacy for the right of return. Al-Awda Network has stated unequivocally: “Our advocacy includes the right of Palestinians to return to their homeland, and to full restitution of all their confiscated and destroyed property.”\textsuperscript{73}

With the growing presence of different forms of radical and conservative Islamists in some Lebanese cities (especially Tripoli and Saida), refugee camps are indeed part of this cultural and sociological transformation. However, these places become more problematic with protracted stigmatization and discrimination. There is a real need to empower camp dwellers by giving them civil and economic rights, recognize the transnational character of their identity, and radically improve the urban conditions of their space. This will not be possible without connecting these spaces to the urban tissue of the neighboring cities and creating a transparent mode of governance based on local elections.

I am not advocating a \textit{tabula rasa} approach but rather the rehabilitation of the refugee camps and their design as an urban space. This rehabilitation should be carried out not only with reference to the camps' political and social status, but also with regards to their becoming part of the city and not an oppositional element in relation to it, as in the Yarmūk refugee camp near Damascus\textsuperscript{74} or the al-Wahdāt camp near Amman. An urban master plan based on rehabilitation should take into account the physical, socio-economic, and cultural fabric of the concerned spaces. A bottom-up participatory approach should be used to outline the differentiated needs of the Palestinian refugee population: women, men, children, working class, middle class, and so on.\textsuperscript{75} A solution grounded in the right of choice (between return, settling in the host land, Palestinian territory, or in other countries), and close cooperation (not competition) between the PLO, the Palestinian National Authority, UNRWA and the host country, is the first step in alleviating the problems of the refugees. Alleviation would form the basis for empowering the refugees as transnational subjects. Some efforts are being made in Jordan and to a lesser extent in Syria to include the camps in the state's urban infrastructure but nothing has yet been initiated by the Lebanese authorities. In this perspective, such authorities should recognize the transnational and flexible nature of the identity and citizenship of the refugee community.\textsuperscript{76} There is no opposition between rehabilitation of a place where a refugee lives and the ardent desire of some of them for their return. A refugee is able to place him or herself in a succession or a superposition of many temporalities or spaces of reference.
In spite of the resilience of the camp dwellers and their agency, many refugee camps are on the verge of catastrophe and no security solution can stop this degeneration. It can only be helped by engaging in a serious process based on the following elements: allowing the Palestinian refugees to have full access to the labor market, including liberal professions; allowing the Palestinians the possibility to possess land and property; establishing an elected popular committee in each camp, a quasi-municipality, to be in charge of the camp administration; establishing Lebanese police centers in each camp with the help of the Palestinian popular committees; and, finally, the ending of the space of exception status of the camps by submitting the camps to Lebanese laws in their entirety.

Palestinians play a minor part in the “new” Lebanon. Politically, economically and socially marginalized, they constitute a minority sect without a recognized place in a sectarian system, no longer a vanguard of the revolution. However, to cite Alessandro Petti, the problem of this sect is that it is almost spatially enclaved. We live in a world where enclaving undesirable, risky groups and confining them in the space of exception is seen as the very condition for the “free” circulation of “civilized” people in the global fortressed archipelago (the smooth space of flows). But the undesirables resist. In addition to that, in case this enclave becomes dangerous, it can be destroyed. The destruction of the Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank by the Israeli army projects the image of Agamben’s concept of homo sacer. These camps have become a “sacred” space or space “sacer,” in the sense of spaces that can be “eliminated” by anyone without being punished though internal and external mechanisms or without even proper attention from the Palestinian public sphere.

Notes

1 I would like to express my grateful thanks to readers of earlier versions of this paper and those who discussed these ideas with me, especially Muhammad Ali Khalidi, Diane Riskedahl, Ray Jureidini, Ronit Lentin, Michal Givoni, Yael Barda, and Marwan Khawaja.


3 Beyond this human cost is the extensive destruction of houses, businesses, and physical and social infrastructure. Preliminary estimations put the economic cost of the conflict at US$320 million, including US$180 million of losses in gross income and profits (value added). The cost of reconstruction is estimated at US$221 million and the fiscal cost of higher military expenditures at US$140 million. Disbursed or identified relief expenditures amount to US$27 million while other emergency expenditures could amount to US$64 million. The reconstruction and the activity it
would generate, projected over two years, would in total amount to US$500 million and would help compensate for the negative effects of the conflict.

4 In an article in the *New Yorker* magazine, respected investigative journalist Seymour Hersh accused the Sunni-dominated Lebanese government of funding the rise of Sunni militant groups in north Lebanon, as a bulwark against the Shi'a Hizbullah, a charge the government denies. S. Hersh, “The Redirection,” *New Yorker*, 5 March 2007.


6 Ong conceives of sovereignty as flexible since globalization “has induced a situation of graduated sovereignty, whereby even as the state maintains control over its territory, it is also willing in some cases to let corporate entities set terms for constituting and regulating some domains while weaker and less desirable groups are given over to the regulation of supranational entities.” A. Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logic of Transnationality*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999, p.66.


8 Although there are in excess of 400,000 Palestinian refugees registered with the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, it has become increasingly common to suppose that only half that many, perhaps up to 250,000 refugees, are actually residing in Lebanon. J. Pedersen, “Population Forecast of Palestinian Refugees 2000-2020,” in Laurie Blome Jacobsen (ed.), *Finding Means: UNRWA’s Financial Crisis and Refugee Living Conditions: Socio-economic Situation of Palestinian Refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip*, Fafo Report 427 (2003), vol. 1, Fafo: Oslo.

9 This figure does not include the dwellers of Yarmūk camp which is the biggest Palestinian camp in the world, as it is not considered an official camp by UNRWA.
In Syria and Jordan, refugees enjoy access to free education, relatively egalitarian job opportunities, and can cross national borders for work abroad with relative ease.

Of course what I am describing here is true on one level, but not on another. It holds when comparing the camp populations in Jordan and Palestinian territory to the country average. However, in both places there are large population groups with even poorer living conditions. See M. Khawaja and Å. A. Tiltnes (eds.), *On the Margins: Migration and Living Conditions of Palestinian Camp Refugees in Jordan*, Oslo: Fafo, 2003.


M. Arneberg, *Living Conditions among Palestinian Refugees and Displaced in Jordan*, Fafo report 237, Fafo, Oslo, 1997. Actually, the difference in living conditions of the Palestinian refugees between those who are camp dwellers and those who are not is more important than what is mentioned in the Fafo surveys. I am basing my estimation here on my anthropological observations as well as statistics from the Syrian and Palestinian Central Bureaus of Statistics. Fafo usually conducted its surveys in the refugee camps or in Palestinian gathering sites. However, Palestinian refugees also live in cities, where they integrate with the local population, and where it is usually very hard to identify them.

According to UNRWA, the SHCs are the “most disadvantaged and vulnerable refugees, such as women whose husbands have died or whose husbands have divorced or abandoned them, the elderly, the chronically ill, refugees with disabilities, or the very young, are provided with direct material and financial assistance under the ‘special hardship’ programme.”


20 R.R. Habib et. al., “Paid Work and Domestic Labor.”


25 Before 1982, the PLO and UNRWA were two major employers for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. While the PLO recruited professionals of all categories, UNRWA employed professionals such as teachers, nurses, and doctors. The 1982 eviction of the PLO changed the situation dramatically, and the PLO was reduced mainly to one institution, that is, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, which depends on the PLO. During the same time period, UNWRA has dramatically reduced its recruitment because of the extreme strain on its resources.


28 Pedersen, “Population Forecast.”

29 There were supposedly at least 25,000 Palestinians, the majority Christian, among those who received Lebanese citizenship in 1994. S. Haddad, “Sectarian Attitudes as a Function of the Palestinian Presence in Lebanon,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 22 (2000), pp.81-100.


32 Ibid. For more details see the Frontiers Center report, 2005.


34 Hanafi and Tiltnes, “The Employability of Palestinian Professionals in Lebanon.”

35 See also Khalidi and Riskedahl, “The Road to Nahr al-Barid.”

36 Under such a heading, Ambassador Khalīl Makkāwī, the head of the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee, argued against what he called “tawtīn business.” (*al-Akhbār*, 4 December 2007)


39 Finally, it is interesting to note that “refugee studies” are mainly conceived of as a study of the humanitarian condition of refugees, which usually ignores their political condition. As Malkki has noted, “refugee studies” has uncritically imported its main theoretical ideas, often on an ad hoc basis, from other scholarly domains, especially


41 For instance, see as sign of this positive change in the discourse of the UNRWA the presentations of Lex Takkenberg and Anders Fange at the International Conference organized by Al-Quds University in Jerusalem on “The Palestinian Refugees: Conditions and Recent Developments,” held on 25-26 November 2006.


44 Doraï, Les Réfugiés Palestiniens au Liban.

45 Hanafi, Entre Deux Mondes.


The only regulations concerning construction and urban planning enforced by the Lebanese authorities in southern camps are those restricting entry of building materials into the camps.

The organization of the Palestinian population started in 1974 when the PLO organized the popular and security committees to govern the camp. Before 1982 al-Kifāh al-Musallah al-Filastīnī (Palestinian Armed Struggle) was responsible for resolving the conflicts in the camp.

In Burj al-Barājneh, the majority of the camp population does not trust the Popular Committee. While collecting monthly fees from the population, “it doesn’t provide any service to the camp.” Interviewed people reported that as theft.

For instance, in al-Baddāwī camp, the security committee was formed in 1989 from all the Palestinian factions (pro-Syrian coalition and PLO faction) but without Fatah. This major faction wasn’t represented at that time because of the Syrian military presence. Nowadays, there is a Popular Committee and the presidency of this committee is by rotation. Each month a representative of a different faction becomes its head.

The social structures of the camps are very different. In Burj al-Barājneh and Nahr al-Bārid, there is a clan-based structure because the camp is divided into quarters, each one inhabited by refugees from a specific village. This is not the case for al-Baddāwī, for example.

In many camps, the social role of NGOs is much more important than that of the political factions. However, some of these NGOs are connected to the political factions. Interviewees reported a climate of mistrust towards the NGOs. Meanwhile, Hamas is increasingly playing a social role in the camps.


Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.


Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair,* p.15.


Zureik, “Theoretical and Methodological Considerations,” p.159.

Rougier, *Everyday Jihad.*

See also the Palestine Declaration published in Beirut on 1 January 2008. The PLO officially for the first time apologized for the mistakes committed during the Lebanese civil war.


See [http://www.al-awda.org/faq-al-awda.html](http://www.al-awda.org/faq-al-awda.html). This movement should learn from the work done in Lebanon by ʿAʿidūn, a right of return advocacy group, which forged a connection between the two demands.
Concerning the rehabilitation of the refugee camp in Syria, the example of Neirab camp is very compelling. See UNRWA, *Neirab Rehabilitation Project: Project Briefing*, March 2003 (unpublished document).

One should salute the impetus that UNRWA has currently given to improvement of the camp situation in all their areas of intervention. See UNRWA, *Housing and Camp Improvement Unit Concept Paper: Executive Summary* (unpublished document, Amman 2004). See also the UNRWA project led by the German architect Philipp Misselwitz regarding the rehabilitation of the refugee camps.


Agamben, *Homo Sacer*. 