

Palestinian Refugees in the Arab Middle East and Beyond

Introduction

As one of the largest and long-lasting refugee communities globally, Palestinian refugee statelessness and protracted situation have largely been subjects of cross-national politics. Since 1948, a large population of Palestinian refugees has been hosted in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Egypt and Iraq also have hosted a decent number of Palestinian refugees. As it has been used, the term “Palestinian refugees” include three different groups of Palestinians 1) Palestinians who fled their country in 1948 as a result of the partition to form Israel, including their descendants who reside in other countries outside Palestine 2) Palestinians who fled Palestine in 1967 as a result of the war and expansion of the state of Israel to new territories previously belonged to Arab Palestinians, as well as their descendants 3) Palestinians who have been internally displaced within Israel or the occupied Palestinian territories since after 1948 and 1967 (American Friends Service Committee). Unlike other refugee groups who can lose the refugee status once get resettled in a third country or voluntarily returned to their country of origin, “It has been argued that Palestinian remain refugees even after accepting citizenship elsewhere and that Palestinian refugee status ends only with the implementation of the 194 Resolution” (Roberts, 2010:189). All Palestinian refugees who were once registered with UNRWA (UN Relief and Work Agency in the Near East), remain under the organization’s mandate and retain their refugee status even after obtaining citizenship elsewhere, this is in part done to retain their rights of return or being compensated as recommended under the UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (Roberts, 2010).

Legal Frameworks and Governance of the Refugee Regime

Resolution 194 is an important non-binding recommendation under the International Law which among other things, concerns durable solutions to Palestinian refugee situations. This resolution set forth voluntary return and compensation as durable solutions to the Palestinian refugee problem. It resolves that “all Palestinians who wish to do so should be allowed to return home, and those who do not should be suitably compensated” (Roberts, 2010:5). These solutions are by and largely different from those set forth by the international law for other refugee groups, these are “voluntary repatriations, assimilation, or resettlement to a third country” (Roberts, 2016:189). Besides approaches to durable solutions, legal frameworks for refugees, particularly those around assistance and protection, have set Palestinian refugees apart from other refugee groups. For example, unlike other refugee groups who are under the UNHCR’s mandate, Palestinian refugees are under the mandate of UNRWA. Unlike UNHCR that has the mandate to provide assistance and protection for the rights of refugees, UNRWA’s only mandate is to assist Palestinian refugees (Akram 2002; Roberts, 2010). This has left a “protection gap” for Palestinian refugees (Akram, 2002). Additionally, the prevailed contrast in refugee governance is

a result of the existence of a separate regime to govern the status of Palestinian refugees which is comprised of UNCCP (the United Nations Conciliation Commission on Palestine), UNRWA, and some provisions of the UNHCR statute and those of the 1951 Refugee Convention (Akram, 2002:38).

Due to the existence of the “protection gap”—inadequacies in the protection afforded to refugees due to inconsistency and non-existent in the existing provisions of the international law applicable to their situations—Palestinian refugees have been subjected to precarious conditions in some of their host countries in the region (Akram, 2002; Türk & Dowd, 2014). Akram (2001) provided that, “The actual rights and status of the refugees remain subject to political and security considerations of the Arab governments. There is no formalized legal status for Palestinians in most Arab states, their legal position depending primarily on administrative policies that change constantly” (44). This is also fueled by the fact that most Arab states are not signatories to the existing international norms on refugees and stateless persons including the 1951 Refugee Convention. This has led to differential treatment of Palestinian refugees depending on their host countries’ approach toward protection and regulation of their status.

Host Countries’ Approaches to Palestinian Refugee Management and Regulation.

“In 1948 approximately 750,000 Palestinians were displaced from their homes, going both to neighboring countries such as Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon and to the parts of Mandate Palestine that became the West Bank and the Gaza Strip” (Feldman, 2012:155). Among the three states—Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria—that had received the largest population of Palestinian refugees after the 1948 Arab-Israel War and after the 1967 War, there have been varied approaches taken to manage the Palestinian refugee population. When the influx of Palestinian refugees prompted the Jordanian government to extend Jordanian citizenship to the Palestinian population in the 1950s, and Syria to extend most of the Syrian citizenship rights to its Palestinian refugees without granting them citizenship officially, Lebanon took a completely different approach from the ones taken by Jordan and Syria by denying citizenship and impose heavy restrictions on healthcare, employment, and property ownership against its Palestinian population (Suleiman, 2010 cited in Gabiam, 2016:6). Moreover, the treatment and host government approaches to Palestinian refugees have varied depending on the refugees’ time of arrival to these countries, that is there is a distinction between the countries’ reception altitudes to the Palestinian groups that arrived in the aftermath of 1948, to those that arrived in the second wave in 1967.

Jordan

Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War that led to the expulsion of thousands of Palestinians after the creation of the new state of Israel, Jordan experienced an influx of Palestinian refugees. In response, the Jordanian government made several policies and laws to regulate and extend rights to its Palestinian population. Among these approaches include the

regularization and extension of Jordanian citizenship to Palestinian refugees who arrived in Jordan during and after the 1948 war. Even though the extension of Jordanian citizenship to Palestinian refugees was quite a constructive refugee management approach, rights to Jordanian citizenship have not been fairly extended to all Palestinian refugees. In the *2008 Human Rights Report* for Jordan, the U.S. Department of State categorized Palestinians with Jordanian passports into three categories: 1) Jordanian citizens of Palestinian descent who hold temporary passports that are valid for five years 2) "West Bank residents without travel documentation who are eligible to receive five-year passports that do not connote citizenship" 3) Palestinian refugees most of whom from Gaza Strip that were not qualified for Jordanian citizenship, some of who were able to receive temporary two-year passports "but which do not connote citizenship" (cited in Refugee Review Tribunal, 2009:2). In the interview with the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board's Research Directorate, UNRWA's representative in Jerusalem explained that "the pre-conditions for Palestinians to reside in Jordan is dependent both on the particular individual's date of entry to Jordan (example: 1948, 1967, post-January 2013)" as well as the place of residence where a refugee is fleeing from "(example: the legal status is different if a Palestine refugee fled from Gaza in 1967 or from the West Bank in 1967)" (2014).

In 1983, the Jordanian government introduced color-coded border crossing cards and implemented them in the Allenby/ King Hussein Bridge--a direct border crossing point located approximately between Amman and Jerusalem--for those Palestinians who sought to cross to and from the West Bank and Jordan via this crossing point (Canada Immigration and Refugee Board, 2014; Amman2Jerusalem). The Jordanian government issued both Yellow and Green cards. "Yellow cards were issued for those Palestinians who were residents in Jordan but visited the West Bank; Green cards were issued for those Palestinians who were residents in the West Bank but visited Jordan" (Canada Immigration and Refugee Board 2014). It was not until July 1988 when the color-coded cards "that had been used as a statistical device, became the criteria for determining the citizenship status" of a Jordanian citizen (Canada Immigration and Refugee Board, 2014). On 31 July 1988, the Jordanian government issued a decree declaring that "those who habitually lived in the West Bank, that is green card holders, on 31 July 1988 were "Palestinian citizens," while those who were living in Jordan or abroad were Jordanian. Put another way, over one-and-a-half million Palestinians went to bed on 31 July 1988 as Jordanian citizens and woke up on 1 August 1988 as stateless persons" (BADIL, 2010 cited in Canada Immigration and Refugee Board, 2014).

Following the 1988 order, the Jordanian government implemented the issuance of temporary passports based on the pre-existed color-coded cards to Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Thus, in post-1988, Yellow and Green cards connote temporary passports to Palestinians in Jordan, with the former being valid for 5 years and the latter for 2 years (Refugee Review Tribunal, 2009:10). Refugee Review Tribunal (2009) explained that both Gazan and West Bank Palestinians who have sought refuge in Jordan since the passage of the

1988 order are only eligible for temporary Jordanian passports and residence, hence lack the entitlement to "full citizenship rights such as the right to vote and employment with the government" (Refugee Review Tribunal, 2009:1). Gabbay (2014) provided that, "Before 1988 all Palestinian refugees entering Jordan, except for 1967 refugees from Gaza, were granted full Jordanian citizenship" (1). Palestinians from Gaza Strips are not eligible for Jordanian citizenship or citizenship rights, rather the Jordanian government has been granting them temporary protections and temporary passports that are considered valid for two years and can be renewed afterward (Refugee Regime Tribunal, 2009; Gabbay, 2014; Canada Immigration and Refugee Board, 2014). This is different from both the West Bank Palestinians who are eligible for the five-year Yellow passports and the Palestinian refugees who arrived prior and were granted the rights to naturalize.

The Minority Rights Group International explains that "Citizenship for Palestinians in Jordan is a complicated issue. Although most Palestinians have Jordanian citizenship and many have integrated, Jordan still considers them refugees with a right of return to Palestine." As of December 2019, UNRWA reported a total of 2 million registered Palestinian refugees living in Jordan and clarified that even though many Palestinian refugees in Jordan have some form of legal status, not all have full Jordanian citizenship. Besides the distinction in the legal status of Palestinian refugees and Jordan-born Palestinians, in the last two decades, the Jordanian government has passed several policies that counter its earlier generous approaches to its Palestinian refugee population. "Since the mid-2000s, the Jordanian government has engaged in a policy of stripping some Palestinians of their Jordanian citizenship, often on apparently arbitrary grounds" leaving these individuals stateless (Minority Rights Group). Human Rights Watch (2010) reported that, in the period between 2004 and 2008, the Jordanian government withdrew its citizenship from over 2,700 citizens of Palestinian origin (1). This denaturalization policy has been carried out even though it violates the 1954 Jordan's Nationality Law that upholds citizenship rights to Palestinian refugees (Human Rights Watch, 2010:2). "Without nationality, individuals and families find it difficult to exercise their citizenship rights, including obtaining health care; finding work; owning property; traveling; and sending their children to public schools and universities" (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

Syria

Pre-war Syria is another Arab country that had received a large population of Palestinian refugees after both the 1948 and 1967 War. The 1948 Arab-Israel War led to the uprooting of approximately 90,000 Palestinians from present-day Israel to Syria (Erakat, 2014:598). "By the start of the Syrian uprising in 2011, the Palestinian refugee population in the country had grown up to 500,000; they constituted almost 3% of the population of Syria and 10.5% of the Palestinian refugees falling" under UNRWA's mandate (UNRWA, 2014 cited in BADIL, 2014:2). "Sixty percent of these refugees (Palestinian Refugees Syria (PRS) have been displaced at least once since the start of the conflict in 2011 and more than 4,000 have been killed. Three

Palestinian refugee camps have been destroyed and more than 77,329 Palestinians are estimated to have been born since the start of the war into highly vulnerable and deprived communities” (McCloskey, 2020:5).

Following the influx of Palestinian refugees in Syria after the 1948 Arab-Israel War, the Syrian government took on a constructive approach that allowed for the extension of rights including the right to work and movement to its Palestinian population. On January 25, 1949, the Syrian government created the Palestine Arab Refugee Institution (PARI), a department within the Syrian Social Affairs and Labor Ministry, whose role was to attend to the affairs of Palestinian refugees, organize aid to them, assist them with obtaining employment, and determining measures potential to promote their self-determination (Erakat, 2014:599; BADIL, 2014:2; Gabiam, 2016:23). In 1974, PARI’s name was changed to GAPAR and was considered to be under the wings of the Syrian Ministry of Interior (Gabiam, 2016:23). Since this change, “GAPAR has served as an interlocutor with UNRWA and has officially managed the refugee camps” in Syria (Erakat, 2014:599).

Taking on measures that would facilitate the socioeconomic welfare of its Palestinian refugees, in 1956, the Syrian government adopted Law No. 260 that recognized Palestinians in Syria “as Syrians with regard to the stipulations of the law and executive regulations relating to the rights of employment, commercial activity, and education *all while retaining their original nationality*” (GAPAR 2002:26, translation and emphasis by author, cited in Gabiam, 2016:23). Detailing the status of Palestinian refugees in Syria, GAPAR’s official manual provide that “Law 260 is based on two principles: 1) Palestinians must be treated exactly like Syrians 2) The Syrian government opposes the resettlement of Palestinians [in Syria] “in the shape or form and under any circumstances”” (2002:47 translation by author, cited in Gabiam, 2016:23). Even though it seems to counter one of the durable solutions to Palestinian refugees—integration—the second principle of Law No. 260 aligns with the Palestinian refugees’ political struggle for justice, which is their commitment to the right to return to their homeland. At large, “Palestinians in pre-war Syria seemed to be content with this state of affairs, which gave them citizenship rights without formal citizenship, and which they had never, as a collective, demanded” (Gabiam, 2016:24).

To promote Palestinian refugees’ rights to movement, Syria adopted Law 1311 in October 1963. This law granted Palestinian refugees travel documents known as *Laissez-passer*—a government-issued travel document permitting travel outside Syria but lack the same status that citizens’ passports have (Erakat, 2014:598; Gabiam, 2016:24). Erakat (2014) provided that, “Palestinians do not need a re-entry permit to return to Syria, unlike in Egypt, for example. Moreover, like their Syrian counterparts, Palestinian refugees can change or obtain new travel documents from any Syrian representative office abroad” (599). Moreover, Syria implemented the 1965 Casablanca Protocol to uphold the certain right of Palestinian refugees it hosted

(BADIL, 2014:3). Also known as the Protocol for the Treatment of Palestinians in the Arab States, the Casablanca Protocol “called upon member states to take the necessary measures to guarantee to Palestinians full residency rights, freedom of movement within and among Arab countries, and the right to work on a par with citizens” (Human Rights Watch, 2002).

At most, in pre-war Syria, Palestinian refugees and their descendants were afforded the same rights that Syrians were except for the right to vote (BADIL, 2014; Gabiam, 2016; McCloskey, 2020). However, like in Jordan, there was a differential treatment of Palestinian refugees based on their time of arrival to Syria. Gabiam (2016) explained that those Palestinians who arrived after 1948 were treated favorably compared to those that groups that arrived later in 1967, after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Even in light of pre-war Syria’s recognition of different rights that Palestinian refugees on its soil had, that did not mean that refugees were always able to access or make the most of those rights in practice, this was evinced with the persistence of poverty in Palestinian refugees’ camps (Gabiam, 2016:9).

Lebanon

The 1948 Arab-Israeli War led to the uprooting of around 1 million Palestinians, approximately 100,000 who fled to Lebanon (IPS, 1998:1; Gorokhoff, 1984:314 cited in Robert, 2010:76). In 2019, UNRWA reported to have registered a total of over 470,000 Palestinian refugees and estimated a presence of 180,000 more Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Unlike Jordan and Syria, over 45% of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon live in the country’s 12 refugee camps—most of these deteriorating and characterized by persistent poverty (UNRWA, 2019). “The experience of Palestinian in Lebanon differs from that of Palestinians in Syria, Jordan, the West Bank, and Gaza who have been able to access a wider range of human rights and receive assistance from the host government or authority (IPS, 1998; Shiblak, 1996; UNRWA, 2008; USCR, 1999 cited in Roberts, 2010:7). For example, even though Palestinian refugees have been living in Lebanon for about 7 decades, their right to citizenship has by and large been inexistent—this applies to even those who were born in Lebanon. The exception to this has been Christian Palestinians who were initially allowed to obtain Lebanese citizenship upon their arrival and later in 1994 when the Lebanese government “allowed Palestinians born of Lebanese mother” and a small group of “Palestinians from seven Shi’a villages” to claim citizenship after experiencing much outside pressure (R. Sayigh, 1988:16 cited in Robert, 2010).

Roberts (2010) explained that at the first two to three years of the increased inflow of Palestinians in Lebanon, the Lebanese government was lenient to welcoming the Palestinians. However, in 1951, the Lebanese government began to pass and implement severe policies toward Palestinian communities (Roberts, 2010). These harsh policies “coincided with the beginning of UNRWA’s operations, which were seen as ‘obliterating any possibility of an early return of Palestinians to their homeland’” (Tanmiya, 1998:6 cited in Robert, 2010:78). Besides, Lebanon’s severe approach toward management and regulation of the status of its Palestinian population since their influx in 1948 and 1967 is a result of multiplicity factors, central of which

is Lebanon's 15-year long civil war, sectarianism, Palestine-Lebanon past relations, and Lebanon's deep political deadlock.

Since its founding, the state of Lebanon has had a political system based on sectarian representation, in which the three major religious groups—the Sunnis, Shia, and Christians have shared political power (Roberts, 2010:186). With eighteen recognized religious sects in Lebanon, it was largely the tension between politicians from major sects over power-sharing that driven the country into a decade-long civil war that lasted from 1975 to 1990 (Bahout, 2016; Henley, 2016). As a way to finding a lasting solution to the civil war and restoring civil stability in the country, Lebanese politicians from different religious groups signed and passed a negotiation famously known as the Taif Accords in 1989 (Yassine, 2020). This Agreement led to an establishment of a sectarian government that equally shares power among the three main religious groups—Shia, Sunni, and Christians—based on the ratio reflecting the size of the religious community (Roberts, 2010; TRT World, 2017).

The antagonistic relationship between Palestinians political leaders under the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Lebanese government in the period between the 1960s and 1980s—the period when Lebanon was plagued by civil war—has by and large shaped the negative attitude that the Lebanese government and community hold against the Palestinians, in the post-war era. “The ‘implicit basis’ of the Taif Accords was the arrangement of ‘all the major Lebanese political forces’ to blame the ‘civil war on the Palestinian factor’” (R. Sayigh, 1995:32 cited in Robert, 2010:76). Since the restoration of peace in Lebanon, “the Palestinians have become the scapegoat for the civil war, which has helped to diffuse some of the tension between the Lebanese” (Fisk, 1992:77; R. Sayigh, 1995 cited in Robert, 2010:77). Moreover, the very existence of Palestinians in Lebanon has been perceived as a threat to Lebanon's peace and national security, with past Israel's invasion of South Lebanon in 1982 to retaliate against the PLO which led to the mass killing of thousands of people most of whom civilians, have been invoked as grounds for such negative perception (Roberts, 2010; Just Vision, 2015).

Different from Jordan and Syria, since the beginning of the large inflow of Palestinians refugees in the country, Lebanon did not create a state-wide mechanism to deal with such an influx, rather the country let religious sects and authorities, Red Cross, and later UNRWA to provide help and assistance to the Palestinian population. For example, it was the Christian institutions that offered their land to shelter Christian Palestinians and established five camps including Tel al-Za'atar and Nabatiyyeh to provide refuge to this population (Gorokhoff, 1984:315; Nasrallah, 1996:4 cited in Robert, 2010:77). Besides, due to the state's sectarian system, “assistance from religious organizations was provided on a confessional basis; Muslim organizations assisted Muslim Palestinians and Christian organizations assisted Christian Palestinians” (R. Sayigh, 1988:14 cited in Robert, 2010:78). It was not until 1950 that the Lebanese government established a Central Committee for Refugee Affairs which was tasked with monitoring and controlling refugee activity in the state (Robert, 2010).

After the restoration of peace in Lebanon, the Lebanese government went on and adopted several laws and policies that have been regarded as discriminatory by the Human Rights Watch. Following Qaddafi's expulsion of foreign workers in Libya, 5000 of whom Palestinian refugees from Lebanon, the Lebanese government passed the 1995 Law on Residency Rights intending to prevent the return of the Palestinian refugees in the country (Khalidi, 1995; Robert, 2010). This law implied that "no Palestinian was allowed to re-enter the country unless he or she had obtained a re-entry visa as well as an exit visa before leaving" (Roberts, 2010:100). The majority of Palestinians who had left before the law was put in place didn't have what it takes to return to Lebanon. This law was rescinded five years later but those who got stranded outside Lebanon were still unable to return (Khalidi, 1995; Robert, 2010). In 2002, the Lebanon government passed the Property Law to allow foreigners in Lebanon to own properties. This law, however, did not extend to Palestinian refugees who have been in Lebanon for decades (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Further, this law "forbids those Palestinians who already own their own homes from passing the property to their next of kin when they die" (Abouzeid, 2003; Fisk, 2001, as cited in Roberts, 2010).

Unlike other refugee groups in Lebanon, Palestinian refugees are considered "foreigners" and have been denied both citizenship and basic human and social rights including rights to employment in about 39 professions, right to movement due to lack of proper travel documents, and rights to property ownership (Robert, 2010; UNRWA, 2019). "Because they are not formally citizens of another state, Palestinian refugees are unable to claim the same rights as other foreigners living and working in Lebanon" (UNRWA, 2019). Initially, Palestinian refugees were barred from over 72 professions, and it wasn't until 2005 when rules around employment in Lebanon were relaxed to allow Palestinians into more professions that were previously closed for them (Robert, 2010). Even with this 2005 policy change, it is still very hard for Palestinians in Lebanon to find a job outside the camps (Robert, 2010).

Given their treatment and status quo, Roberts (2010) explained that Palestinian refugees in Lebanon regard themselves as "the forgotten people," this is because for over seven decades this group has lived in a hostile environment, has been denied basic human rights, including the right to employment, and have continued to live without effective means of representation or protection (3). Most Palestinian refugees in Lebanon feel forgotten by their leaders and political parties; they experience hostility from the host community yet, lack opportunities to get resettled to other countries due to restrictions imposed on them (Roberts, 2010:154). This group also fears that "any resolution to the Palestinian problem will overlook the Palestinians in Lebanon and that they will remain in a state of limbo" (Robert, 2010:154).

Palestinian Refugees in the Post-Syrian Civil War

Given Syria's approaches and treatment of Palestinian refugees for decades before the outbreak of the civil war, it's important to examine the implications of the Syrian war to the Palestinian population, most of whom have become second-time stateless refugees. First, due to

their lack of Syrian citizenship and possession of informal travel documents—Syrian *laissez-passer* rather than a formal passport has created a lot of barriers for Syria's Palestinian refugees since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011 (Gabiam, 2016:25). Among others, the lack of passport and formal citizenship status has hindered the ability of Syrian Palestinians to travel to other neighboring countries and obtain legal status. In an Aljazeera report, Bolongaro (2016) reported that “as refugees continue to flee civil war in Syria, the road to asylum remains difficult for some Syrian-born Palestinians.”

In its 2020 report, UNRWA reported that about 120,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria were said to have been displaced “to neighboring countries including Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, and increasingly, to Europe” (UNRWA). With already a large population of Palestinian refugees and citizens of Palestinian origin, Lebanon and Jordan have invoked tough policies to limit the inflow of Syria-Palestinian refugees. “Jordan and Lebanon closed their doors to Palestinians in January 2013 and May 2014 respectively. As a result, increasing numbers of Syrian-born Palestinians have looked to Europe as an alternative place of refuge (Irfan, 2017). Tucker (2018) provided that after the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, stateless refugees have been more attracted to seek asylum in Sweden and Germany than any other European or Arab countries, by and large, due to these two nations' asylum policies and access to citizenship. According to a March 2016 Eurostat report, of all the asylum applications made to the member states of the EU in 2015, 44% of those were filed in Germany by persons fleeing Syria (Aziz, 2017).

Under the German asylum procedures, Syrian-born Palestinians without Syrian citizenship or passports are treated the same way as Syrian citizens with formal traveling documents (Bolongaro, 2016; Aziz, 2017). This has created some inconsistencies among different German immigration officials handling asylum cases of the Syrian-born Palestinians, especially those that are not aware of the Palestinians' lack of formal Syrian citizenship or travel documents. This inconsistency is in part due to the division of the German immigration bureau “into local offices in municipalities,” even though the national immigration law is ought to be applied similarly across agencies (Bolongaro, 2016). Moreover, “it is getting increasingly hard for Palestinian refugees from Syria to apply for family reunification if one member has already reached Germany while another remains in a third country” (Aziz, 2017). On the other hand, Palestinian refugees from Syria have been compelled to go to Sweden to seek asylum due to the existence of “The Swedish Aliens Act which determines refugee status and identifies those in need of international protection contains articles that explicitly extend to a “stateless alien who is outside the country in which he or she has previously had his or her usual place of residence” (Bolongaro, 2016). That is, the Swedish Aliens Act upholds that “a stateless Palestinian who has had his or her permanent residence in Syria will have the asylum application tried against the circumstances in Syria, in the same way as Syrian nationals.” (Bolongaro, 2016).

Even with its earlier efforts to shut its borders to Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS), the proximity between Syria and Lebanon had driven an inflow of about 31,000 Syrian Palestinians in Lebanon. “Many of them have been pushed into a precarious and marginalized existence due to their uncertain legal status and face limited social protection, making them heavily reliant on UNRWA for their basic needs” (UNRWA). Given their treatment as ‘foreigners’ and indifferent treatment compared to other foreigners in Lebanon, in 2019, groups of Palestinian refugees took on the streets in Lebanon to protest against what they referred to as a “racist system” and called for changes in the system to enable the rights to work, like some other foreign groups in Lebanon (Younes, 2019). This came in part following the launched efforts by the Lebanese government to “crackdown on undocumented workers” who are said to compete with the Lebanese people for work/employment opportunity. Even though some government officials have argued that this crackdown was not targeted to a single group of nationalities, this crackdown has largely impacted Syrian refugees as well as Palestinian refugees (Younes, 2019; Aljazeera News, 2019). Now amidst the pandemic, undocumented people in Lebanon—including Palestinian refugees from Syria that are mostly without formal status in Lebanon—have been turned away from accessing testing, while higher prices have been set for those who can afford (Azhari, 2020). A coronavirus test is currently costing 150,000 Lebanese Pound or about \$99 in a private clinic (Azhari, 2020). Given the Lebanese government’s previous approach to refugees, this can be viewed as one of the strategies of the government to push refugees out of the country.

Similarly, the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War has driven a large number of Palestinians from Syria to Jordan seeking refuge. In response, “Jordanian government has reportedly applied the differential treatment to Palestinians from Syria, at times turning them back at the border while continuing to allow entry to Syrian refugees” (Minority Rights Group International). “The Jordanian government in several cases has also engaged in refoulement of Palestinian refugees to Syria, in contravention of international law. This included several Palestinians holding Jordanian passports, who were stripped of their citizenship before being involuntarily returned to Syria” (Minority Rights Group International). In a 2020 Al Jazeera report by El-Shamayleh, it was reported that Syria's Palestinian refugees in Jordan were encamped in an isolated, former industrial complex compound called “Cyber City”, where they were denied basic human rights like the right to movement. Even though Syrian refugees in Jordan have been tolerated to live outside camps and allowed certain rights including rights to work although, in a limited number of sectors, Syrian-born Palestinian refugees in Jordan have faced a very different treatment.

Politics of Camps

It is important to acknowledge that even in light of their many similarities to other refugee groups, Palestinian refugees are distinctively unique. Most refugees under the mandate of the UNHCR are not stateless like the Palestinians. Their inability to return to their homeland and the prolonged protracted refugee situation faced by Palestinians refugees—including their

descendants—have attributed to this group's uniqueness in the realm of forced migration. Their collective background and aspirations have impacted their perception of the nature of their livelihood in their host countries. When camps can be viewed as a temporary shelter for refugee livelihood, to most Palestinian refugees, camps have a deeper meaning. Gabiam (2016) provided that from the Palestinian refugees' perspective, camps serve as a symbol, a reminder for their suffering and commitment to their right to return to their homeland. Among other things, this kind of perspective has driven Palestinian refugees' suspicion and reluctance to development initiatives taken by UNRWA, as supported by international donors, particularly from the West.

In Syrian, for example, Palestinian refugees from Neirab and Ein el Tal—"two small and isolated camps outside Aleppo"—were skeptical about the infrastructural and socio-economic development that UNRWA began to undertake in the mid-2000s, and they viewed these initiatives as a tactical mechanism orchestrated by Israel and the UN to facilitate their integration in Syria and to divert them from their commitment to their rights to return Palestine (Gabiam, 2016:2). While undertaking some of its developmental initiatives to improve the conditions of Palestinian refugee camps in Syria, UNRWA's failure to "articulate a vision of progress and improvement" that was not overlooking the Palestinian refugees' "history or seem to compromise their political claims" had also contributed to the Palestinians' skepticism over such initiatives. Thus, the Syrian Palestinian refugees' cynicism toward the improvement of their camps was not an upright rejection of such developmental initiatives but rather a political action seeking to compel UNRWA and the international community to recognize their commitment to their right to return to their homeland.

Besides the Palestinian refugees' attitude toward camps, host governments have had varying views and agendas over Palestinian refugee camps. For a sectarian state like Lebanon, the encampment had been an early approach taken by the Lebanese government toward regulating their Palestinian refugee population. The negative attitude that the Lebanese government has maintained over Palestinian refugees has impacted the way Palestinian refugees' camps have been perceived and portrayed by some government officials and the Lebanese people. Roberts (2010) provided that, Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon "are regarded as lawless places and are referred to by politicians as 'human garbage islands' (M. Khalidi & Riskedahl, 2007:27) inhabited by 'human garbage'" (Fattoush, quoted in M. Khalidi, 1995:28) (cited in 98). These camps, and their inhabitants therein, have also been regarded as a threat to the Lebanese national security, a view that has been reinforced by the media coverage "with stories of fighting, insecurity, and militias" inside the camps (Robert, 2010:99). Moreover, Roberts explained how refugee camps can be a visible reminder to the host community of the very existence of refugees in their country, a token that can sometimes arouse the community resentment against refugees in their backyard (2010:50). Refugee camps in Lebanon have also been used by the government as part of the agenda to prevent local integration of Palestinian refugees they host. This has been done by enforcing the separation of the local Lebanese

communities from those of the Palestinian refugees, as well as by maintaining an isolated camp environment, even though most camps are located in the urban areas (Roberts, 2010).

Reluctance to refugee integration and extension of right to refugees

Feldman (2012) provided that, the status quo of a Palestinian refugee is largely shaped by a “political geography of displacement, by dynamics within this dispersed community, and by humanitarian action” (155). There are several factors that host Arab countries have cited or are seemingly driving these countries’ reluctance to integrate and extend rights to Palestinian refugees they have been hosting for over six decades. These factors include population imbalance, fear to undermine Palestinian refugees’ right to return, and distrust and discontent among host and refugee communities.

First, the population imbalance. The percentage of refugee population relative to the native population has been a factor influencing host countries’ attitudes toward refugee management and rights provisions. The higher percentage of refugees compared to the native population has driven away host Arab states from efforts to integrate or extending rights to their refugee population. Unlike Jordan and Lebanon who have perceived Palestinian refugees as a threat, especially to their economy and natural resources, mainly due to the large size of the refugee population compared to the native population, Syrian had viewed Palestinian differently due to their small composition relative to their native population (Gabiam, 2016). A Palestinian refugee in Syrian “has never constituted more than 3 to 4 percent of the country’s population, unlike Jordan and Lebanon where they represent about 30 and 10 percent of the respective population. Contrary to Jordan and Lebanon, Syria generally did not see its refugees as a threat to Syrian employment or natural resources” (Al Hussein and Bocco 2009; Kodmani-Darwish 1997; Takkenberg 1998, cited in Gabiam, 2016:21).

Human Rights Watch (2010) provided that “More than half of the 6.3 million population of Jordan is of Palestinian origin—that is, from areas west of the River Jordan, including the West Bank, today's Israel, and Gaza.” The fact that the majority of those individuals with Palestinian origin were reported to have had Jordanian citizenship, that had increased fear to the Hashemite Kingdom, and drove the Kingdom’s effort to adopt a policy that allowed for the withdrawal of Jordanian citizenship from its citizens of Palestinian origin (Human Rights Watch, 2010; Gabiam, 2016). This was done to reduce the number of people of Palestinian descent in Jordan to deter the growing native to non-native population asymmetries. In contrast, pre-war Syria, with a small proportion of Palestinian refugees compared to its native population, had extended the right to work, right to “join labor unions, equal access to government services, including education, and the duty to serve” in the Syrian army, as a mechanism to “allow for a greater degree of socioeconomic” and political integration of Palestinians (Brand, 1988:624 cited in Gabiam, 2016:21-22).

Second, concerns about sabotaging Palestinian refugees' right to return. Akram (2020) provided that, in response to the expulsion of the Palestinians from their homeland, the Arab states in the region “reached a consensus that absorption or resettlement of the Palestinians within Arab territories (or elsewhere) would undermine the demand for the refugees’ return” (2002:42). Akram referred to this as a Palestinian and Arab Strategy which contributed to the creation of a “protection gap” (2002:42), that has left most Palestinian refugees in the Arab region in a state of limbo. Jordan for example, since the early 2000s began to implement its denaturalization policy and renouncing integration efforts, most of which have been justified by some Jordanian officials as a mechanism to “forestall supposed Israeli designs to colonize the West Bank, by maintaining the birthright of Palestinians to live in the West Bank” (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Like Jordan, the Lebanese government approach to refuse provision of rights, socioeconomic integration, and rights to citizenship to its Palestinian refugee population have been justified with concerns to undermine Palestinians’ right of return. Robert (2010) explained that the Lebanese government fears that by granting Palestinian refugees citizenship and right, the UNGA Resolution 194 will fail to be enforced, therefore chose to maintain its stance on denying Palestinians rights and opportunities to naturalize, “in hope to force the international community to honor” Palestinians’ right of return (76).

Even though the Syria government adopted wide measures to facilitate the socio-economic welfare of its Palestinian refugees as well as guaranteeing the most fundamental right to this population, Syria was very clear about its plan of not allowing permanent resettlement nor full integration of Palestinian refugees in Syria. This is in part uncovered in the second principle of the 1956 Law No. 260 that maintains that “The Syrian government opposes the resettlement of Palestinians [in Syria] “in shape or form and under any circumstances”” (2002:47 translation by author, cited in Gabiam, 2016:23). The Syrian government justified this position as the mechanism to support Palestinians’ cause and uphold their right to return to their homeland. As seen through different actions taken by these three host states’ the use of rights to return as a rationale seem to conceal the underneath intention of the host government to deny rights, integrations, and legitimacy of Palestinians as well as the desire to get rid of a large number of Palestinian refugees and persons of Palestinian descent.

Third, distrust and discontent among host and refugee communities. Reluctance to integrate and extending rights to Palestinian refugees in the host Arab countries has also been furthered by host communities’ negative attitudes toward Palestinian refugees. In fear to lose political support from voters, politicians in the host countries have been compelled to support the negative sentiments and anti-immigration agendas to maintain the support of their constituency. In Lebanon for example, government officials have continued to use negative attitudes from native communities toward Palestinian refugees as a mechanism to maintain the government’s disapproval of possible integration of this group. Tapping into these anti-Palestinians sentiments, Lebanese politicians and government officials have framed Palestinians’ integration and

regulation of status as a threat to the sectarian balance, largely due to the largest proportion of Sunni Muslims among the Palestinian refugee population (Robert, 2010). “UNRWA figures suggest that the Palestinians in Lebanon, the majority of whom are Sunni, account for 11.4% of Lebanon’s total population” (UNRWA, 2002 cited in Robert, 2010:75). “The Lebanese government argues that the presence of the Palestinians threatens the stability of the state and that to grant them citizenship would upset the fragile demographic structure” (Robert, 2010:75). Thus, the Lebanese community's negative attitude and distrust toward Palestinian refugees have been referenced and weaponized by policymakers to maintain the reluctance to integrate and provide rights to refugees.

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