**The Problems of Camp Life**

The refugees have specific problems but not the camp. The camp is:

- the most economical form of refugee habitat

- a very easy mechanism for exercising refugee's bio-power

- but it is also easy to exclude the camps from decision making

**Cheap construction**

The impact of the socio-economic situation, urban location and the status of the Palestinian refugees in the host country are very important factors that can either encourage or discourage the Palestinian refugees from repatriation. Some 10 years after Oslo , the refugee camps in the Palestinian Territories are still excluded from development planning.

The refugee camps in the host countries have become like urban areas, closer to the characteristics of cities than to rural areas. Also the difference between camps and the other gatherings of the Palestinians is not so important. If you take one indicator like fertility among the Palestinians in Lebanon we see how gradually the average fertility rate is not that different from the cities where the camps are located. The total fertility rates (TFR) and the total marital fertility rates have declined. The TFR has dropped from 4.5 children per women in the 1987-1990 period to around 3.9 children in the period 1991-1994 and this is not very far from the average TEF in Lebanon, which is 2.5 children according to the statistics of Ministry of Health in 1995 (Fafo, 2003: 37).

For the purpose of this article I will focus on the situation of the refugee camps in the Palestinian Territories . According to the UNRWA statistics of 2001, there are 1,460,396 Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip of which 607,915 live in the camps. In West Bank , of the 607,770 refugees, 24% are camp dwellers (147,884) (See table 6). Regarding Gaza , there are 852,626 refugees of which 460,031 are camp dwellers (around 53%) (al-Rimawi and al-Bokhari, 2002: 23-24).

The three scenarios for the refugee movement, elaborated at the end of this article, will be evaluated according to the extent to which the camps in the Palestinian Territories are improved, as their populations are the most fragile. It is true that in terms of health and educational services the camps are better equipped, but in terms of all other economic indicators the camp dwellers are more disadvantaged, particularly concerning the unemployment rate, which is 21.5% (compared to 17.2% and 16% respectively in urban and rural areas).

Also, the poverty in the camps is more structural. The poor of the rural areas can always cultivate a piece of land for their basic needs, whereas the camp dwellers tend not to have any land. The fragility appears even more important if we compare the places of work in the camps and of the urban and rural areas: the camp dwellers work much more with the PNA (where the salary is very modest):27.4% compared to 19.5% and 12.8% in urban and rural areas respectively. In comparison, refugee employment with international organizations, where salaries are higher, is much lower: only 16.7% of international organization employees are camp dwellers compared to 15.6% and 26.8% from urban and rural areas, respectively. However, there is an exception to this tendency regarding employment with UNRWA: 5.7% of the work forces in the camps and 1.4% and 0.4% are from urban and rural areas, respectively. For the private sector where salaries are less than in international organizations but more than in the PNA, the camps dwellers are also less represented than in urban areas (34.7 of the work force as opposed to 46.6%)but slightly bigger than in rural area (33.2%).

**Refugees Registered with UNRWA** 

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| **Field** | **No. of Camps** | **Refugees Inside  Camps** | **Refugees Inside Camps  (%)** | **Refugees Outside Camps** | **Total No. of Refugees** | **Refugees' proportion of local population** |
| Jordan | 10 | 287951 | 17.5 | 1351767 | 1639718 | 32.8% \* |
| West Bank | 19 | 170056 | 27.9 | 437714 | 607770 | 31.4% \*\* |
| Gaza | 8 | 460031 | 53.9 | 392595 | 852626 | 78.4% \*\* |
| Lebanon | 12 | 214728 | 56 | 168245 | 382973 | 10.7% \* |
| Syria | 10 | 200054 | 51 | 191597 | 391651 | 2.4 % \* |
| Total all Fields | 59 | 1332820 |  | 2541917 | 3874738 |  |

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| *Source: UNRWA in Figures, UNRWA HQ, September 2001*  \* Statistics of 2000 \*\* Census of 1997 |

The incompatibility between the relatively high levels of education and the poor socio-economic status of the camp dwellers arises due to the fact that people for whom economic status and situations are improved usually leave the camp for a better place, usually in urban areas in the big cities, where the availability of work is greater.

Palestinian society in the Occupied Territories is not well integrated, either for the returnees or for the refugees, for two reasons: it is a highly fragmented society and its territoriality and the extent of the integration among its members is not subject to social factors at the national level alone, but beyond that to the Diaspora sphere. Culturally and socially speaking, the refugees in the Palestinian Territories are well integrated into the society where they live if they are outside of a camp, but integration becomes problematic for those living in the camps. This difficulty in integrating cannot be explained simply by lower socio-economic status, but by an absence of urban integration. According to the PSR survey of 2003, around 40% of the refugees living in outside of the camps have at least one member of their family married to a non-refugee, but this percentage decreases to half that figure when they are camp dwellers.

The nature of the life in the camps and the propensity for return are interrelated. According to the Jarrar study, the refugees' attitudes toward themselves and camp life, on repatriation and integration, on the one hand had motivated the refugees to return, while decreasing opportunities for integration.

“As their political self-esteem was high and their housing conditions were bad, they felt that they differed from the locals, and their social status in others' eyes was low. On the other hand, the mistrust and the lack of harmony among them, and the lack of readiness of the members of the political factions to work together decreased their capability to obtain repatriation. Considering that, they still feel that they differed from the locals and that their social status in others' eyes is low, these factors made their integration opportunities very narrow. The effect of refugees' attitudes toward Israel was no less contradictory on the topic of repatriation and integration, than their attitudes toward themselves. From one side, they expressed their bitterness, pain, and experiences of maltreatment at the hands of Israelis, and their mistrust of Israel . From the other side, a significant proportion of the refugees expressed their readiness to live under Israeli rule and even to give Israel a large part of their land if Israel allows them to return. This shows the dilemma these refugees are facing. They expressed their bitterness and bad experiences with Israel , while at the same time they are willing to return and live under its rule. This is due mainly to their poor economic and housing conditions and their nostalgia for home” (Jarrar, 2003).

One of the hypotheses of this study consists in classifying the Palestinian refugees in two categories: those who are dwellers of a camp and those who are not. The differentiation is very important in terms of their propensity towards repatriation, as will be developed below.

Palestinian nationalist discourse used to base its legitimacy on two issues: the Nakba and the right of return of the refugees. To keep this nationalism as strong as possible, the camp was seen as the first unit to maintain refugee identity in the Arab host countries, and thereby maintain Palestinian identity. As a result, the camp, as a quasi-political entity, becomes a subject of investigation for one discipline: the political sciences. The camps were shown as reproducing the structure of Palestinian society like that pertaining before 1948. Following this logic, the researchers tried to identify the reproduction of place of origin in the camps: elements of the culture of Lobieh, Safad, etc. used to be seen in Ein Al-Hilweh and Yarmouk camps.

There is a clear “ethnicization” of refugees' history, and the importance of the economic, social and cultural relationship with the host countries is often overlooked. There have been a few sociological, psychological, anthropological and juridical studies done, but very rarely urban studies; the refugee camps have not yet been studied as urban sites. Many myths were circulated, not only in popular thought but also within the scholarly community: more Palestinians in the camps, more memory and more Palestinian identity means more people return. The more the camp is miserable, the more people do not want to settle in the host countries.

Control of refugee discourse cannot be exercised by UNRWA and the host country unless refugees are gathered in a centralized and controlled place where they can be under constant surveillance. The discourse about the refugee camp is a discourse of stagnation and muzzling of the camp. Refugees can conserve their status as refugees even if they are residing outside of the camp. According to UNHCR statistics of 2002, only 38% of the refugees in the world are camp dwellers (4,439,158 refugees) as opposed to 20% in urban areas.

The camps in the Palestinian Territories have become symbols of territorial illegitimacy because of two processes, one from above and one from below. From above, the camps are invisible in the Oslo process. The new regime of control by Israel divides the Palestinian Territories into Areas A, B and C, while the PNA divides the land according to refugee and non-refugee areas. It excludes the refugee camps from any urban or infrastructural project. From below, the camps as heterotopic places, in the Foucauldian sense, disconnected from the social and urban tissues in their neighboring areas. To an extent this disconnection has happened gradually, and has been expedited by the local elections, which excluded the refugee camp dwellers from voting. According to Emmanuel Marx (1978) the refugee camps have lost their temporary nature and became low-class residential neighborhoods.

This delegitimization makes the refugee camps slum areas. Local urban identity becomes a decisive factor in constructing ideas of the “local” and the “national”. According to a Shaml survey, 89% of the camp dwellers interviewed consider the camp as a constitutive element of their identity and are proud of being there. However, some cases, especially those who reside in Shufat camps, declared that they hide from their university colleagues the fact that they live in the camp. Any minor social dispute between people of the city and camp dwellers quickly become major ones, as with the former clashes between people in Kalandia camp and Ramallah in 2001. We cannot understand the problems of refugee camps unless we study them as urban sites. Many years of double marginalization of the refugee camps in West bank and Gaza (from the Israeli authority and from the PNA and the municipality) have made them like any slum area in the world. These sites should be regarded as urban, and approached by scholars in a similar manner as, for example, the suburbs of Paris .

According to Shaml survey about two thirds of the refugee camp dwellers interviewed felt that the size of their home is not sufficient for their family. About half also felt that the camps do not meet their basic needs, and 57% stated that the camps do not have proper health conditions. Two thirds of the camp dwellers interviewed stated their willingness to move out of the camp if their financial situation improved.

Finally, the Palestinian refugee camp dwellers feel this social and urban marginalization, and are willing to change their urban location. According to a PSR survey of 2003, half of the refugees would not mind being settled outside of the camp, and would accept normalization of the camp (87% prefer to vote in the municipality level when the camp is inside the city, and three quarters when it is outside). Around half are in favor of enlargement of the camp inside the city parameters.