

Palestinians in Lebanon: Victims of Double Misrepresentation

*A study of political organization in Burj al-
Barajneh Palestinian refugee camp*

Vegard Grøslie Wennesland



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MØNA 4590 –60 sp
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Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages

University of Oslo

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By Vegard Grøslie Wennesland

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Summary

This thesis will tackle the organization of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and asks if this organization has been able to further the political and social goals of the Palestinians in Lebanon. The fieldwork is based upon 20 interviews with Palestinian political representatives, NGO representatives, camp residents, administrative officials and outside observers, and focuses on Burj al-Barajneh Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut.

Having been in refuges since the late 1940s, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have established political institutions to govern the camps in which they live. The thesis describes the political organization and divisions among the Palestinians in Lebanon. The political fault lines among the Palestinians in Lebanon are to a large degree similar to the ones in the occupied Palestinian territories, with the PLO on one side and Hamas, through Tahaluf, on the other. The major political difference between the two sides, are strategies for achieving the return to Palestine, and whether or not to recognize Israel. On more local issues, such as how to improve the Palestinian living conditions in Lebanon, the factions agree to a large extent, yet they fail to achieve tangible results, partly due to the split between the factions.

During the period when the PLO leadership was in Lebanon, the Palestinians felt they were at center of the Palestinian struggle. They enjoyed autonomy, job opportunities were present, and the struggle to return to Palestine was fought, quite literally, in Lebanon. Today, the situation is different. The Palestinians have little influence over the right of return in peace talks with Israel, and they are marginalized in the political scene in Lebanon. Still, the political factions are divided along the same lines as before, leaving the political factions to disagree and factionalize based on issues firmly beyond their own realm of influence.

I contend that the Palestinians suffer from double misrepresentation, as they are not in a position to influence their most important and desired goal, the return to their original homes in Palestine, nor are they able to improve the situation in Lebanon, over which they have considerable more influence over.

Acknowledgments

Parents are by nature concerned and curious with the endeavors of their children. My parents have always been anxious about progress on my studies, so when my father asked to see the latest version of my master thesis, I sent it to him. The email was sent on 22. July 2011 from Utøya, an island where I was working on my thesis while participating at the annual summer camp of AUF, the youth movement of the Norwegian Labor Party. The next time I spoke to my parents was later that night, when I could finally call and tell them that I had survived the massacre on the island, a massacre that claimed the lives of 69 fellow AUF members.

An event like that puts things in perspective and placed the thesis on hold. I would therefore firstly like to thank all those who never stopped pushing me to complete this thesis. My advisor, Bjørn Olav Utvik, bore himself through my countless attempts to restart the thesis. He gave invaluable guidance through the whole process, as well as equally appreciated conversations on topics well beyond the scope of the thesis. Thanks also to program advisor Monica Lund Haugom for never ending patients with a student who needed some extra time.

I am also grateful for an understanding employer, who so clearly valued letting an employee complete his thesis. Thanks also to Michael for helpful comments during the final stages of writing. Last but not least, to family and those closest, who always supported every attempt to finish the thesis. In short, I would not be writing these words had it not been for these people.

I am truly privileged to have had the opportunity to perform fieldwork in a Palestinians refugee camp. I owe gratitude to the University of Oslo for a scholarship to make the fieldwork financially possible, and to the Palestinians who accepted me so well when I arrived to the camp. Their willingness to share their stories and challenges in the camp, made performing research interesting and often even amusing.

22. July 2011 brought me closer to understanding some of the many atrocities that Palestinians have been victims of, then I had ever thought or hoped for. Receiving condolences from survivors of the Sabra and Shatila massacres, was truly one of the most gripping moments following 22. July 2011. It served to solidify my admiration for Palestinians, who despite continued injustice and dismal conditions always have a welcoming attitude and a smile to share.

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1 Introduction

The Palestinians in Lebanon have been refugees for the last 60 years. Prevented from returning to their hometowns in what is today the state of Israel, they are confined to refugee camps throughout Lebanon.

The word refuge implies a temporary state. A place away from home and danger to stay only for a short time, before returning to one's home or place of origin. The refugees are involuntarily placed in a state of refuge, uprooted from their known social and political order. This temporary space is not the most inviting in terms of establishing institutions for social and political order. Yet, some refugee groups stay in refuge for a long time and as they live in this refuge, a form of organization emerges. This has been the case for the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

In his book *Managing the Undesirables*, Michel Agier terms refugee camps as being in a state of "permanent paradox":

The refugee camps are always hybrid organisms, not reproducing any socio-spatial form that already exists; they are new experiences for the locality in which they are established, if only for the permanent paradox that their existence expresses, between an indefinite temporality and a space that is transformed because its occupants necessarily appropriate it in order to live in it." (2011, p.53)

The history of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon has shown that this group has indeed organized itself, creating structures and institutions to govern the society where they live. Whether these institutions are able to further the goals of the refugees living in the camp is, however, not clear. Organizing oneself can further goals such as maintaining order in the camp society, or to create social and political structures in the community. Since the first times I visited the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, I have been curious about how they organized life in the camps and to what extent such an organization is able to function under the difficult circumstances that the refugees live under. These questions therefore constitute the topic for this thesis.

It is necessary to state at this point that the fieldwork for the thesis was performed before the outbreak of the civil war in Syria in 2011. The topic for the thesis was decided, the fieldwork was completed and much of the writing was well under way before the war started. I have

chosen to stick to the original theme for the topic understanding that some factors may have changed for example as a result of the influx of refugees from Syria to the camps. Adapting the topic based on the recent events would have required a second fieldwork, which would have been beyond the scope of a master thesis.

Yet, several of the questions and findings in this thesis can provide meaningful knowledge for understanding the challenges that have arisen after the influx of Syrian refugees, and possibly elude to changes that need to be made in order to meet that challenge. For example, it seems fair to assume that the more effective the organization, the better equipped the camps would be to absorb the new refugees. While these questions merit further research, this thesis will describe the situation in the camp before the influx of Syrian refugees.

1.1 Literature on the Palestinians in Lebanon

There is a growing body of literature on Palestinian refugees in general and on the Palestinians in Lebanon in particular. This section will give a brief summary of relevant existing literature on the topic.

Rosemary Sayigh is one of the most renowned authors on the history of Palestinians in Lebanon. Her book *Too Many Enemies* (1994) gives a history of camp life in the Shatila camp and describes the early organization of the camp and historic and political background of the conflicts in the 80s. In *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (1979), Sayigh describes the revolutionary identity of the Palestinians in Lebanon and their connection to their home country through their insistence on the right of return.

In *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, Julie Peteet (2005) addresses the relationship between space and identity of Palestinian refugees. She describes a situation where the camps went from being places of “despair” during the “Days of UNRWA¹”, in 1948-1960s, to places of “hope” during the “Days of Revolution”, from 1969-1982. UNRWA’s role as a provider of services as well as an advocate for the Palestinian refugees is also addressed when she explores UNRWA’s evolving role towards the Palestinians. Peteet describes the refugees as persistent on the issue of right of return, (2005, p.219) but also claims that the hope of returning has become “muted” as early as in the 1990s. (p.170) As this thesis will show,

¹ United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East, is the agency responsible for services to Palestine refugees. More on UNRWA in later chapters.

although the hope of returning may have dimmed, especially among the older population, the issue of the right of return is still the single most important issue for the Palestinians in Lebanon.

Peteet also tackles the dichotomy of living under dire conditions at the same time as “the Palestinian refugee [has] imprinted the camp with landscape of hope of the future”. (2005, p.31) The camps have become a “space of contrast” (p.1) where terror and creativity live side by side.

For insight on more recent history, articles by Jaber Suleiman and Are Knudsen are helpful. Suleiman (1999) provides a historical background on the situation of the Palestinians in Lebanon. He identifies several stages of Palestinian history in Lebanon and explains how the refugees have organized themselves throughout these stages.

Are Knudsen (2007; 2009) writes about the many restrictions that Lebanese law place on the refugees’ interactions with Lebanese society. Knudsen takes us through the history of laws that have guided Lebanese-Palestinian relations, including the important Cairo Agreement of 1969 and the restrictions in the labor market. Knudsen argues that the restrictions put in place against the Palestinians stem from the Lebanese fear of a permanent settlement of the refugees, called *tawteen*². (Knudsen, 2007, p.6) In his article from 2005, Knudsen outlines the role of Islamism among Palestinians and argues that the vacuum created after the PLO left Lebanon, created breeding grounds for radical Islamist movements in Lebanon.

A more recent attempt to tackle the complicated political structures of Palestinians in Lebanon is Rebecca Roberts’ (2010) *Palestinians in Lebanon: Refugees Living with Long-Term Displacement*. Based on interviews and surveys from the Burj al-Barajneh, Burj al-Shamali and Nahr al-Bared camps, Roberts sets out to discover the coping mechanisms of Palestinians in Lebanon. She finds that Palestinians cope in dismal camp conditions due to “informal social structures” and a “resilient psychological attitude” (2010, p.155)

The book serves as an interesting reference point as it has a historic view on the political structures in Lebanon and because it covers the Burj al-Barajneh camp Roberts describes a political demobilization that affects development to such an extent that she argues for reducing the power of political parties in order to promote development. (2010, p.183)

² Tawteen means naturalization. It is dealt with in detail in chapter 2.3.1

Although several of the arguments Roberts proffers merit further discussion, there are some short-comings, the most striking example being that she fails to identify that there are two popular committees in the camp. This may well be because the two popular committees were not established during Roberts' fieldwork, but it nonetheless shows that further research on political organization in the camp is warranted.

In *Everyday Jihad*, Bernard Rougier (2007) explores the rise of religious extremism and portrays the refugee camps as breeding grounds for extremism and militancy. Focusing on a small group, Usbat al-Ansar, in Ein al-Helweh refugee camp, Rougier argues that the Palestinian nationalism, brought forward by the traditional Palestinian political parties such as Hamas and Fatah, was losing ground to radical groups that promote a global struggle for an Islamic state.

The publication of the English edition of the book coincided with the battles between the Lebanese army and the radical Islamist group Fatah al-Islam in Nahr al-Bared camp in Northern Lebanon. During this period, arguments of a surge of radical militant groups in the camps, and the notion of the camps as "islands of insecurity" were common. (Gade, 2007; Saab and Ranstorp, 2007) Yet, early in my fieldwork in Burj al-Barajneh, it became clear that these groups were far less dominant than the book and the news reports indicated. Khalili offers an insightful critique of the book, claiming "unwarranted generalization" from Usbat al-Ansar to the Palestinian refugee population as a whole. (2007, p.42)

Through different focus groups, Sari Hanafi and Taylor Long (2010) explore governance in the Palestinian refugee camps. They find that the lack of legitimacy of the political institutions has inhibited the improvement of the living conditions for the Palestinians in the camp. Hanafi and Long claim that in the lack of a legitimate political structure, "Islamism and the economy of morals" has been the main guiding principles for the functioning of the camps. (Hanafi and Long 2010, p.134) Hanafi and Long conducted their fieldwork almost at the same time as my own, and their research is therefore interesting to compare with the fieldwork conducted for this thesis.

The literature mentioned above touches on several of the issues in this thesis, and provides useful reference points for understanding the political situation in the camps. However, it does leave some holes. Few contributions specifically address the situation of political organization in the camps in general or specifically about the Burj al-Barajneh, the refugee camp that is the

subject for the field work for this thesis. Roberts (2010) addresses the situation in Burj al-Barajneh, but as mentioned, fails to identify the two popular committees in the camp. The existence of two popular committees is indeed an important factor for understanding how the camp works, but also to what extent that the Palestinians themselves are able to influence their own destiny. Others find that the rise of radical Islamism is the central feature in the camp (Rougier 2007), although it became clear very early in the research that radical Islamic movements were not prevalent.

This thesis will attempt, through interviews with political representatives, camp residents, NGO representatives and researches, to contribute with insight into the political organization of the camps, and more specifically the extent to which this organization in its current form provides an effective representation for the refugees in achieving their long-term and short-term goals.

1.2 Research question

This thesis asks the following question:

Is the political organization in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon able to further the social and political goals of the Palestinian refugees?

To answer this question I will first identify the main social and political goals of the Palestinians in Lebanon as well as the political structures in the camps. Then I will discuss to what extent these structures provide adequate means for reaching these goals.

1.3 Method

The findings rest on fieldwork done in the Burj al-Barajneh Palestinian refugee camp, on the outskirts of Beirut in 2010. Through this fieldwork I was able to observe camp life close up and become acquainted with the difficulties of living in a camp. The main primary data is drawn from 20 interviews with respondents from a variety of backgrounds, including politicians from different factions in the camp, camp residents and representatives from NGOs, as well as outside observers. Finally, secondary literature has been utilized to get a broader picture of the situation for refugees in general and for the Palestinians in Lebanon specifically.

Researching politics in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon is not easily subjected to normal social science research traditions. Politics in the camps is informal in its nature and little literature exists on the topic. The nature of the so-called *wasta*³ relationship, well known phenomenon in the Middle East, is often hard to identify. Some also see politics as a sensitive topic (as we will see, one political party did not want to talk with a foreigner about it). Although one could say that little has changed in the sense that the Palestinians have been refugees for over sixty years, politics, as we will see, can evolve and change rapidly.

1.3.1 Fieldwork and observation

I have chosen to conduct the fieldwork for this thesis in the Burj al-Barajneh Palestinian refugee camp. It is the largest camp in the Beirut area and is situated on the main airport road. The camp is well suited for studying the political organization of the Palestinians in Lebanon, as all the main political factions are represented in the camp. The camp's proximity to Beirut and my knowledge of the camp from prior visits also contributed to making it more practical for me to use this camp.

Access to the Palestinian camps in Lebanon varies from camp to camp. Some have checkpoints outside with entry restricted to those who carry special permits. Burj al-Barajneh has no checkpoints restricting access. Residents could, however, tell about Syrian army checkpoints during the Syrian presence in Lebanon. While there was no fixed checkpoint outside the main entrance of the camp, there was a presence of Lebanese police forces there. According to officials in the camp they were present to monitor the transportation of building materials into the camp, not persons. (Interview, 4. March 2010) Burj al-Barajneh also has several smaller entrances along all sides of the camp making access for any individual wanting to circumvent such controls easy, although vehicles are too large to access the camp through these entrances.

Physical access to the camp was thus not a problem. Doing research and living in the camp, however, required permission. Short summaries of the research project and a letter of recommendation from the university were presented to representatives from both popular

³ *Wasta* is an Arabic term that can be described as *connections*. Having *wasta* means having the connections or the means to obtain a certain benefit (job, service, favour). It often involves knowing people high up in the societal hierarchy. For more on *wasta* see Cunningham and Sarayrah (1993).

committees⁴ as well as leaders of the political parties that were interviewed. This was important although it felt more like a formality than an actual application process. No objections were raised and no questions regarding the motivations for the study were asked. The process gave more the impression of a popular committee that wanted to know what was going on in the camp, to “stay informed”, so to speak.

The tendency to treat appointments in a somewhat loose manner, quickly made the advantage, if not to say necessity, of living in the camp obvious. Arrangements were made for me to live in the camp and the majority of the interviews with the camp residents were conducted during the two weeks I lived there. Again, these “arrangements” included informing the popular committees of the place and time period of residence in the camp. Residing in the camp also gave the benefit of gaining a greater understanding of the situation and everyday camp life. Grocery shopping at the local store, checking emails at the Internet café, long hours of smoking *narguileh* and countless cups of coffee and tea (with lots of sugar), gave first-hand experience of the challenges and indeed the joys of life in the camp.

1.3.2 Interviews

20 semi-structured in-depth interviews, were performed over a three-month period with a broad spectrum of people, both refugees living in the Burj al-Barajneh, as well as with observers knowledgeable about the situation for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

The interviews were done in February to April 2010, with the exception of 1 interview that was done in October 2009, during a trip to Lebanon with a research project. 16 of the respondents were residents in Burj al-Barajneh. Broadly speaking, the respondents can be divided into political, 8 respondents; administrative, 2 respondents; NGO representatives and ordinary camp residents, 4 and 3, respectively; and 3 outside observers. Given that so many respondents lived in the camp, I was able to get a good impression of the day-to-day life in the camp.

The questions were structured according to the groups mentioned above. The politicians were asked about the main goals of the Palestinians in Lebanon, political organization in the camp,

⁴ Popular committees are the political bodies in the camp that have a quasi-municipal function. They will be dealt with in later chapters, especially 3.4 and 5.2.

the main challenges facing the Palestinians and the political system and specifically on the lack of elections in the camp.

The administrative representatives were asked more specifically about the organization of the camp and the challenges in this field, the main challenges in the camp and the main goals in terms of the future of the camp and the Palestinians in Lebanon.

Early in the preparations to the field study, it became clear that ordinary camp residents (i.e. respondents that lived in the camp, without any other role in the organization on political factions), and NGO representatives had very similar understanding of the political organization and the challenges in the camp. They have therefore been put in the same group. They were asked about the main goals and challenges for the Palestinians in Lebanon, the political organization of the camp and how this functioned. The NGO representatives were also asked about the work of their respective NGOs.

Finally, the outside observers were asked about the political organization of the camp, how the political factions behaved and functioned, on the main challenges and goals of the Palestinians in Lebanon.

Early in my research, I had an assumption that there was increased support of radical Islamist movements in the camp and that the political situation had changed dramatically since the Syrian forces left Lebanon in 2005. I therefore included questions about this in the interviews. As the fieldwork progressed, however, it became clear that these topics were not as important as I had first thought. Some respondents, however, dwelled around these two topics, and I have included the answers they gave when relevant for the thesis.

I used open-ended questions in order to have as little interruption and guidance from the interviewer as possible. For example, to find out what the main political goals were, I simply asked: “what are your main goals?” To get a resident’s view of the performance of the political factions I would ask: “how are the politicians able to help you towards your goal?”, this left much room for the respondents to mention whatever issue they wanted. Some topics required more follow-up questions to get a full understanding of the situation and to identify the underlying issue behind the stories they told me.

The informal nature of the society in the camps, led to some of the interviews being interrupted by other people coming in for unscheduled appointments. In some cases the

interruption would be short, in others longer , and in some cases the person would even sit down and participate in the interview, sharing his or her opinions on the matter at hand. Although this could sometimes lead to conversations getting a bit off track, I believe it contributed to making the atmosphere more loose and informal, making the respondents more “at ease” with the interview situation. Although the informal talks enhanced my understanding of the situation of Palestinians in Lebanon, it is the formal interviews that provide the basis for this research.

Care was made to secure respondents from a wide range of political parties within the camp. Representatives from Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), Hamas, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC), Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and Fatah al-Intifada were interviewed. There was one notable exception among the political parties. All but the Islamic Jihad welcomed the interview request. One can only speculate as to the reasons why this political party chose not to answer the repeated requests for an interview, but it seems fair to assume that this party is more skeptical than others towards foreigners asking questions about politics and governance in the camp. This was confirmed by camp residents in several informal conversations. Nonetheless, most political views were covered through those interviewed.

Two of the political representatives were also members of their respective popular committees. A member of the so-called Security Committee in the camp was also interviewed. Together with the camp director of UNRWA, these officials were able to give first-hand accounts on how the camp was organized and how it worked in practice.

The third group comprised camp residents and representatives from various NGOs operating in the camp. Through their daily contact with camp residents, these respondents were able to provide a good reading on the sentiments of the camp residents as well as the main problems in the camp.

The outside observers were useful to give an objective view of the situation in the camp and to see the issues from a different perspective than the refugees. They were also able to shed light on statements made by Palestinians, mainly the politicians, and sometimes confirm or correct impressions I had from the field work in the camp.

I quickly found a translator who also helped to arrange the interviews. She had considerable experience in performing these types of research and could therefore be relied on to set up interviews with relevant informants in the camp. Relying so heavily on one person, opens the risk of bias towards this person's own preferences. I therefore checked with other sources in the camp whether the people interviewed were indeed relevant figures in the political scene in the camp.

1.3.3 Interview as research method

Several approaches exist on the role of interviews in understanding society and on how to perform them for qualitative research. The positivist approach argues that interviews can create a "mirror reflection of the reality", while the emotionalist perspective claims that interviews can produce an "authentic account of a subjective experience". The radical social constructionists on the other hand, claim that interviews will not provide us with a reality, since the interview is, in reality, simply a construction between an interviewer and an interviewee. (Miller and Glassner, 2011, pp.131-2)

Striking a middle stance, Miller and Glassner introduce the *interactionist*, a position where one acknowledges that "research cannot provide the mirror reflection of the social world that positivists strive for, but it may provide access to the meanings people attribute to their experiences and social worlds." (2011, p.133) Part of the logic of the interactionist is the acknowledgment that the interviews give a meaningful insight to the research question, while at the same time assuming that the stories are not necessarily a reflection of the full truth. (2011, p.135)

In Miller and Glassner's words:

"(W)e accept that what stories interviewees share with us, and how they tell their stories, may be shaped not just by the rapport established, but also by social similarities and distances between us and those we interview. Yet, rather than argue that this creates "bias" or makes the data of limited utility, we suggest that attention to how our social positioning affects the interview exchange offers an important site for social inquiry." (2011, p.136)

Care was taken to introduce the research to the respondents so to make them fully aware of the topic. Prior to the interviews, the translator was thoroughly introduced to the research topic and for what purpose the information would be used. The translator started each

interview with an introduction about the project. Furthermore, the translator was, as mentioned, known for helping foreigners with research in and around the camp, leaving the respondents with the feeling that this was indeed one of her assignments and thereby, I believe, removed some of the skepticism that might have occurred had I been by myself during the interviews. Nonetheless, some residents were hesitant to share their views on the matter and declined to be interviewed. Their propensity to do this made me believe that those who agreed to the interview also were ready and willing to answer properly and candidly.

Being a foreigner in the camp certainly represented a circumstance that could affect the information the respondent would provide in the interview. Indeed, as Riessman (1993, quoted in Miller and Glassner, 2011, p.134) notes, “[t]he story is being told to particular people; it might have taken a different form if someone else were the listener”. Different obstacles may occur when not belonging to the primary group; the interviewee may not trust us or we may simply not know enough about the subject to ask the right questions.

In general, being a foreigner in the camp was not affiliated with as much skepticism from the local residents as one might expect. Although few foreigners actually lived in the camp (two Canadians at the time of research), foreigners were by no means a rare sight in and around the camp. I also found that being a foreigner allowed me to ask somewhat naïve, but open questions on topics which might be seen as sensitive.

I did, indeed, get the impression that some respondents were very conscious about “who” they were talking to, possibly tilting answers in the direction that they expect the interviewer wants to hear. The broad range of respondents is meant to counter potential discrepancies between what was said during the interviews and what was in fact more correct on the ground. Also, outside observers proved useful to check statements made in the interviews.

Instead of looking for potential contaminating elements and attempts to minimize bias, Holstein and Gubrium (2011) suggest that these factors are natural elements in any interview situation (indeed, any conversation), and that these aspects should instead be taken into consideration when analyzing the material. Holstein and Gubrium distinguish between the *hows* and the *whats* of the information extracted from the interviews. Analyzing correctly rests on the ability to analyze substance (*what* was actually said) and the circumstances in which the information was obtained, the *hows*. (2011, p.151) Observation and describing the

circumstances around which the answers were given will therefore be presented where possible and relevant.

The interviews were done at the homes, workplaces or offices of the interviewees, settings that were meant to make the respondent as comfortable as possible.

The translator was used for the interviews with non-English speaking people, meaning all the respondents in the camp. The translator was experienced in translating for foreigners working in the camp. She also had several short-term work engagements with different NGOs in and outside the camp. This was of course well known to all the people interviewed in the camp given the camp's relatively small community and her frequent employment as a translator for foreigners. Her reputation as a person who helps foreign do researches, may well have contributed to removing skepticism. In any case, few of the prospective interviewees declined to be interviewed. Her wide range of contacts and knowledge of the camp and its residents was a benefit for the research project. The translator also proved extremely helpful in setting up interviews in the camp and she served as a basis for getting in touch with potential respondents.

There are, of course, obvious disadvantages with using a translator instead of a more personal one-on-one interview. Conversations take longer and natural follow-up opportunities are more easily lost. Also, one runs the risk of details being lost in the translation.

Affiliating myself with someone in the camp could provide some challenges in regards to the research. Through several conversations it became clear that the translator herself had political preferences, the strongest one was a general distrust to politicians in the camp as a whole. As we will see, this was not an uncommon sentiment among camp residents.

I nonetheless have no doubt in her professionalism and objectivity in the translation. Her experience in translation had made her well versed in the *lingua franca* of politics and she knew which procedures one had to go through to go ahead with the research. Her credentials were excellent and several well-known researchers frequently use her.

There are advantages and disadvantages of using a tape recorder during interviews. Using a tape recorder allows for transcripts and more precise accounts of what was actually said. Politics in the camp is, however, by many seen as a sensitive topic, especially when a foreigner is asking the questions. I therefore decided to take notes instead of using a tape

recorder and then write down the interview later the same day. This has the disadvantage that it is difficult to get the exact word-by-word quotes and that the interview itself becomes more challenging, as one has to take notes while engaging actively in the conversation. The quotes and opinions referred to in this research are a reflection to my best ability of the respondents' own views. On the other hand, not having a tape recorder is thought to make the respondent more comfortable and freer to speak his mind. I did indeed experience the respondents as open and frank, also on more sensitive topics, though whether they would have been equally open with a tape recorder is obviously unknown.

Respondents would at times dwell on topics beyond the scope of the thesis. Discussions about family and life in general would often break up the sometimes intense sessions on political issues. My translator would occasionally engage in these conversations – some of which could last several minutes. Though it would take focus away from the topic at hand, these digressions would also help loosen up the atmosphere and make the conversation more relaxed, thus increasing the level of trust between the respondent and myself. As Miller and Glassner reminds us: “successful interviewing involves the interviewee feeling comfortable and competent enough to talk back”. (2011, p.138) I believe that the informal, off-topic, parts of the conversation contributed to a more relaxed and open atmosphere. Though I could not contribute in these discussions, I could follow the general outline and was always given a short summary by my translator.

When asked, most respondents said they were comfortable having their names linked to most of their quotes. I got the impression that they did not consider their views and statements as controversial. Some of the politicians even laughed at the idea of anonymity. As one put it: “I cannot hide who I am”. (Interview, 21. March 2010)

That being said, I have chosen not to use the names of the respondents but to include the role they had, so to place the answers in a context. I have done it this way due to the sensitivity of the topic of politics and because I have not had the opportunity to present the respondents with the quotes for their approval. While I am confident that I have not deliberately misjudged the responses, without a tape recorder to “prove” my case, I prefer to keep the responses anonymous. Furthermore, as the thesis neared completion, I realized that identifying the respondents by role as I have done is sufficient to present the reader with an understanding of the topic without missing out on any substantial information. (National Committees for Research Ethics in Norway (NESH) 2006) There are a few exceptions where respondents

have been identified, where the identity is important to understand and check the statements, mostly this involves the outside observers. A full list of list of respondents is provided in the appendix. I have chosen to use the names that were given to me by the respondents.

1.3.4 Validity and Reliability

Validity is understood as how accurately the answers describe the phenomenon it attempts to describe. (Silverman, 2010, p.275) There are several factors that can challenge the validity of interviews in qualitative research, but also several ways to counter these. The challenge is, as Peräkylä puts it:

In interview research, one key question of validity is whether the views expressed by the interviewees reflect their experiences and opinions outside the interview situation, or whether they are an outcome of the interview situation (2011, 366)

Qualitative research can quickly fall in the trap of resorting to anecdotalism, the temptation to “jump to easy conclusions just because there is some evidence that seems to lead in an interesting direction.” (Silverman, 2010, p.279) Below I present some methods for tackling this challenge.

Firstly, the sample can be non-representative. This is an obvious challenge when dealing with small samples. Do the respondents’ views, in sum, give a fair representation? To control for this, a broad range of respondents were chosen. As mentioned, all but one of the main political factions was interviewed, securing representativeness among the political movements. Since interviews with opposing factions were done one day after the other, I was able to constantly compare the answers from one faction to the answers from another. (Silverman 2010, p.279-280) By doing this I was able to see whether a statement from, for example Hamas, was one that Fatah could agree on or not. Obviously, the political factions had different views on how to solve problems in the camp, and precisely because they disagree on other accounts, one can assume that if the opposing factions in fact agreed and had a common understanding of a situation or a problem, that this understanding is indeed on that is common among the Palestinians in Lebanon, thus strengthening validity.

I utilized a similar approach to minimize the risk of answers being tilted due to me being a foreigner. Being a foreigner and open on the topic, could lead to bias towards the answers,

making respondents answer not what was the truth, but what they thought I “wanted to hear”. Using outside observers was a way of checking for this.

Silverman explains how “comprehensive data treatment” and “deviant case analysis” are helpful to avoid presenting biased examples or the anecdote that fit the assumption of the researcher. (2010, pp.280-281) These methods imply using all the data from the interviews, including the deviant cases where answers are different from those of the majority. This implies digging deeper into the answers of those few respondents to find the reasons for their answers. (Silverman 2010, p.281-282) When examining the goals of the Palestinians, I have used this approach to check whether respondents actually dismissed certain goals that were held by the majority, or if they had other legitimizations for mentioning different goals than the majority.

I have also used tabulations to check for the consistency of the data. This involves simply counting how many respondents gave a certain answer. This approach does of course have certain flaws as the verbal communication does not necessarily account for the importance placed on a topic. (Silverman 2010, p.285) A respondent may even have forgotten to mention an important topic. Nonetheless, the higher amount of respondents that gave similar answers to similar questions, the higher the likelihood of that answer being close to the truth.

Reliability is understood as a degree of consistence. (Silverman, 2010, p.290) Would other observers find the same answers if they performed the same research at the same time, or could the same researcher make the same observations if using the same method. Obviously, it would not be possible to replicate the answers of the respondents at any given time. Events, such as the Syrian civil war, may have altered the situation on the ground and created a new situation. Since I have chosen not to use a tape recorder, there is no possibility to go back to the original sources for detailed and precise transcripts available for scrutiny. Where possible, secondary literature has been referred to subsequent to the finding from the interviews, making it easier for researches to check the findings.

In interview-based, qualitative research, reliability therefore rests on the openness of the method used and its intrinsic soundness and the transcripts from the interviews and the soundness of the researcher. (Silverman, 2010, p.290)

1.3.5 Secondary literature

Secondary literature on Palestinians in Lebanon was used where possible to verify information so as to enhance the validity of the information. As the respondents were from different groups in society, they tended to have different views on the same topics. Typically, politicians had more optimistic views on the role of the political parties in the camp than camp residents. In these cases, reflections from outside observers, coupled with secondary literature, proved helpful in understanding, in this case, the true role of the political parties in the camp.

Secondary literature also enhances the reliability, understood as the ability of the information to be replicated under the same circumstances. In interviews, one cannot expect the exact same answers to be given each time. This will of course be influenced by the circumstances of the interview and at the time the interview was conducted. Holstein and Gubrim (2011, p.154) note that "...good interview material should be viewed as 'reliable enough' *under the circumstances*." Secondary literature will allow the readers to independently examine the material.

1.4 Structure of thesis

In this first chapter, I have laid out the research question and the methodology of the thesis and presented some of the literature on the topic. Chapter 2 will set the stage for answering the research question. Describing the history of Palestinians in Lebanon, including the early formation of political institution, as well as understanding the political context the Palestinians live under in Lebanon is important to understand the situation for the Palestinians refugees in Lebanon. The chapter therefore also includes background on tawteen and on the social and legal discrimination of the Palestinians in Lebanon.

Chapter 3, 4 and 5 are based on the fieldwork done in Lebanon. First, the Burj al-Barajneh refugee camp is described, based on personal observations, respondents' answers as well as literature on the camp. In chapter 4 the main goals of the Palestinians in Lebanon are laid out. Chapter 5 lays out the political organization and the main fault lines between the political factions in the camp.

Finally, chapter 6 will sum up and answer the research question. It will make the main argument that the Palestinians suffer from a double misrepresentation. They are left with little influence over their main goal, the right of return to their original homes, and the political institutions have been unable to meet the requirements for the Palestinians in their immediate surroundings in Lebanon. The chapter will also discuss possible reasons for this, bringing in both external factors beyond the Palestinians' own control as well as internal factors.

2 Background of Palestinians in Lebanon

This chapter will outline the basic background needed to address the research question. It will first present a short demographic description of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon today. Then the historical background of the Palestinians in Lebanon will be presented. The final part addresses two important themes when it comes to understanding the situation of Palestinians in Lebanon, namely the issue of tawteen and the social, economic and legal discrimination of the Palestinians in Lebanon.

2.1 Demographics

The United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is the UN agency in charge of providing services to the Palestinian refugees. UNRWA defines a Palestinian refugee as:

“... [a person] whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 and 15 May 1948 and who lost both their home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict.” (UNRWA, 2000, quoted in Roberts 2010, p.6)

UNRWA has registered a total of 425,000 refugees in Lebanon. (UNRWA, 2011) It is doubtful, however, that there are so many Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon today and reports estimate the number from 200,000-600,000. (Ugland, 2003, pp.16-17) There are few ways of knowing the exact number of Palestinian refugees actually residing in Lebanon today. According to a census for the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) from 1998, the number of Palestinian refugees residing in the camps or in gatherings in Lebanon was estimated to approximately 140,000. (Tiltnes, 2005, p.13) Tiltnes claims that the number is approximately 200,000. (2005, p.12)

It is not possible to be certain of why there is such a discrepancy in the numbers, but several factors can explained the difference. A few Palestinians have been naturalized and become citizens in Lebanon. Most likely, however, emigration to other countries is the main reason. (Tiltnes, 2005, p.11)

The Palestinian refugees in Lebanon mainly live in camps located across Lebanon. There are 12 official camps located mainly around the cities of Tyre, Saida, Beirut and Tripoli. Approximately 222,000 are registered as camp residents. It is, however, estimated that the total number of camp dwellers is up to 275,000. (Hanafi, 2010, p.6) This difference is explained by the fact that the camps have become home to several non-Palestinian residents. A large number also live in more unofficial camps, located outside the official UNRWA camps, known as “gatherings”. These are typically located in the urban areas in the cities, often in close vicinity of the camps. (Tiltne, 2005, p.12)

As for the legal status of the refugees, they are mainly divided into three categories. The registered refugees are registered both with UNRWA and with the Lebanese government. A second group consists of the non-registered refugees, who are only registered with the Lebanese government and not with UNRWA. The third group is the non-ID refugees that are neither registered with UNRWA nor with the Lebanese government. (Palestinian Human Rights Organization, 2005, 11) The implications of this categorization will be dealt with later in this chapter.

2.2 Historical background

There are several detailed accounts of the history of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The following is a short summary of events relevant to understanding the political situation of the Palestinians in Lebanon.

2.2.1 Birth of the refugee issue in Lebanon

It is estimated that around 100,000 refugees fled to Lebanon after the establishment of the state of Israel. Most of these Palestinians came from villages in the Northern part of what is today Northern Israel. According to Tiltne “some 70 percent came from Safad and Akka regions, and another 25 percent from the regions of Nazareth, Haifa, and Bisan”. (Tiltne, 2005, pp.12) These refugees settled in camps on the out-skirts of the major cities of Beirut, Saida, Tyre and Tripoli. (Schultz, 2003, p.53; Sayigh, 1979, p.99)

The establishment of UNRWA in 1950 was an acknowledgement of the needs of the refugees and was meant to alleviate the host countries of the financial burden of accepting the new

refugees. It has become the main provider of food, jobs, health services and other social needs of the Palestinian refugees.

UNRWAs original mandate was to:

provide “direct relief and works programs” to Palestine refugees, in order to “prevent conditions of starvation and distress... and to further conditions of peace and stability”.
(UNRWA, 2014)

During the 1950s and 1960s, Pan-Arabism was the dominant political ideology in the Palestinian communities in the Middle East. Among the Palestinian diaspora, institutions that could meet the social needs of the refugees emerged. Common experiences as an uprooted people became stronger than the centrifugal forces of religious difference. Brynen describes that the traditional leadership receded and that new generations emerged. Political activism was channeled through student and workers unions (Brynen, 1990, p.21)

Suleiman (1999, p.67) identifies the phase from 1948-1958 as one of “adaptation and hope” where the Palestinians were to a large degree accepted in Lebanese society. This could be attributed to the sympathy that Palestinians enjoyed in the aftermath of the *nakbah* of 1948. The Palestinians were at this point mainly seasonal workers. (Sayigh 1994, in Roberts, 1999, p.17)

2.2.2 Political activism

The PLO was established by Arab leaders at the Arab League Summit in Cairo in 1964. The PLO and other Palestinian organizations were from the early stages prone to strong influence from neighboring Arab countries. Brynen argues that although the formation of the PLO was indeed a “tacit recognition” of the “growing political assertiveness” of the Palestinian people, it was at the same time “maintaining Arab (and particularly Egyptian) domination of the Palestinian issue”. (Brynen, 1990, p.22) Several other small organizations were also formed during the late 50s and early 60s, and there was a growing sense that the Palestinian cause was a national Palestinian issue – not solely an Arab issue.

The group that was eventually to control the PLO was the Palestine National Liberation Movement, best known by its acronym Fatah, founded by Yasir Arafat, among others.

Arafat's approach to the Palestinian question was no longer solely a pan-Arab one. As Brynen puts it:

While [Fatah] accepted the Arab dimension of the Palestinian question, the Arab nature of the Palestinian people, and called for cooperation with friendly Arab forces, Fatah's advocacy of Palestinian liberation of Palestine through armed struggle nevertheless represented a position in contradiction to pan-Arab formulations of the time. (Brynen, 1990, p.23)

Political activity was limited in Lebanon. Lebanese authorities explicitly prohibited these kinds of activities and tightly controlled the activities that existed through their intelligence services, the so-called *Deuxième Bureau*. The control was so extensive, that even UNRWA teachers required approval from the *Deuxième Bureau* prior to employment. (Brynen, 1990, p.28)

Lebanese decision-makers feared the increased influence of the Palestinian movement, both ideologically and politically. Several demonstrations and events organized by the Palestinians in Lebanon could draw huge crowds to the streets. (Brynen, 1990, pp.47-8)

By the mid-1960s, Palestinians had established military bases in Lebanon and were launching cross border raids against Israel. Lebanon soon developed into a sanctuary for the armed resistance movements, which at the time also enjoyed widespread popular support in Lebanon. (Brynen, 1990, pp.46-7) The cross border raids led to Israeli retaliatory aerial bombardments that caused discontent among the local Lebanese population and prompted a crackdown by the Lebanese state.

In 1969 there was the so-called "uprising in the camps", pitting Palestinians against Lebanese security forces. (Suleiman, 1999, p.67) There were several demonstrations and counter-demonstrations following arrests and killing of Palestinian *fida'iyin* (Palestinian militiamen) in April. (Brynen, 1990, p.52) Clashes and tensions around other camps in August 1969 sparked regional diplomatic interventions (Brynen, 1990, p.50)

The uprising in 1969 led to the signing of the Cairo Agreement, that had important implications for Palestinian political and military activities and that would affect the political organization of Palestinians in Lebanon. Struck between PLO and the Lebanese General Emile Bustani in the Egyptian capital, the agreement defined the relationship between the Palestinians and the Lebanese state. The agreement gave Palestinians autonomy of their own

camps, the right to bear arms for the purpose of resisting Israel and the right to run a resistance movement in Lebanon. (Knudsen, 2007, p.5; Hanafi and Long, 2010, p.137)

The Cairo Agreement laid the groundwork for the establishment of the Popular Committees in the camp:

“Art. 2 of section 1 of the Agreement called for a reorganization of “the Palestinian presence” in Lebanon through “the foundation of local administrative committees in the refugee camps, composed of Palestinians, in order to defend the interests of the Palestinians residing in those camps, in collaboration with the local authorities and within the framework of Lebanese sovereignty” (Hanafi 2010, p.13)

The agreement became controversial, creating a paradox of sorts where Palestinian institutions developed into what has been called “a state within a state”. (Hanafi and Long, 2010, p.137)

The Cairo Agreement was also important for the PLO, who saw it as the “first official recognition of the Palestinian revolution in Lebanon”. The agreement was accepted and respected by the political movements, albeit with some reservations. (Brynen, 1990, p.51)

Although the agreement was abolished by the Lebanese government in 1987 following intense clashes in and around the camps, it is still commonly accepted that Lebanese security forces are at the very least to cooperate with Palestinian security forces before entering a camp. This was challenged during the Nahr al-Bared conflict in 2007, which will be dealt with later in this chapter.

2.2.3 “The days of the revolution”

The Cairo Agreement’s impact was further strengthened a year later following events in Jordan. After the Arab-Israeli war in 1967, Amman became the headquarters for the PLO and its leader Yassir Arafat and the centre for the Palestinian resistance movement. By 1970, conflict between Palestinians and Jordanian state became violent. Following bloody clashes between the PLO and the Jordanian army, dubbed “Black September”, Jordanian security forces expelled the leadership of PLO from Jordan to Lebanon. Coupled with the increased autonomy granted from the Cairo Agreement the Palestinians took a more dominant role on the Lebanese stage.

The Palestinians refer to the years following the PLO leadership's entry to Lebanon till its expulsion in 1982 as the "days of the revolution" and it is remembered with considerable nostalgia. Employment opportunities were available through the PLO-institutions the education and health services improved drastically and a sense of optimism prevailed. Hanafi and Long attribute this "golden age", as it is also called, "almost exclusively to the transfer of the PLO leadership from Jordan to Lebanon in 1970". (2010, pp.137-8)

Khalidi describes the social role played by the PLO during the 1970s when he shows that around 10 000 families who had lost members in the struggle for Palestine were receiving aid from the PLO's Social Affairs Department. Less than two years later, that number had doubled, with the full increase being in Lebanon. (1984, p. 257)

Others have claimed that the PLO expenditure in Lebanon during the period from 1975-82 "[was] rivaling the budget of the Lebanese state" with an estimated \$400 million spent on PLO and its allies. (Brynen 1995, p.28)

Suleiman describes a period of the increased activity, militarily, politically and socially. The civil war gave room for the organizational structures to flourish and for the establishment of organized activities, civilian and military. (Suleiman, 1999, p.67) The Palestinians were gaining considerable ideological and political support among the public in Lebanon. This was largely due their successful military operations against Israel. The Arab states on the other hand proved time and again their inability to stand up against the Israeli forces. (Brynen 1990 p.47)

During this period, Palestinians felt like they were actively taking part in the struggle for the liberation of Palestine. Lebanon became a flagship in the Palestinian struggle. Brynen show us, that although PLOs military presence and capacity was indeed invigorating for the Palestinians in Lebanon, the diplomatic activity was also the most prominent, describing Lebanon as a "nerve centre of a vast international network of diplomatic and information officers and personnel. (1989, pp.52-9)

2.2.4 Victims and victimizers. The civil war years.

It falls beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss to what extent the Palestinians were involved in the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war.⁵ Samir Khalaf convincingly argues that Palestinians contributed to exacerbate already existing internal Lebanese problems rather than to create new ones. (Khalaf 2002) Brynen (1990) argues in a similar manner when he claims that the Palestinian presence aggravated the fact that Lebanon was a battleground for regional interests.

On 13 April 1975, the massacre of a bus full of Palestinians in Ein al-Rummanah in Beirut became the spark that ignited the civil war. An alleged retaliation for previous attacks by Palestinians against Christians, the bus massacre sparked increased fighting and plunged Palestinians and right wing Christians into open conflict. (Brynen, 1990, pp.79-80)

Palestinians were after this intensively involved in the civil war, a war known by its shifting enemies and alliances. The Lebanese central authority weakened considerably during the civil war, and Palestinian institutions and influence grew accordingly. (Suleiman, 1999, p.67) This said, the civil war also brought about some challenges that would ultimately force parts of the organized institutions out of Lebanon.

2.2.5 So long, days of the revolution, hello confusion

Increased Palestinian cross border raids into Israel were in the early 80s causing considerable strain on both the Israeli population in Northern Israel and on the local population in Southern Lebanon, who bore the brunt of the Israeli retaliatory air strikes. This led to a rapid erosion of local support to the Palestinians. The Palestinians also started active meddling in the internal affairs of Lebanese politics. As Brynen explains:

“Active and often gratuitous Palestinian intervention in Lebanese political affairs, coupled with cross-border firing and the lack of regard to Lebanese sovereignty and poor public behavior of some guerrillas only served to solidify opposition to the feda’yyin, while weakening the PLO’s own essential Lebanese popular base of support.” (1989, pp.52-3)

Israel invaded Lebanon a second time in 1982, this time with the goal to crush the PLO stronghold in Beirut. They succeeded and eventually forced the PLO leadership to leave Lebanon for Tunis. Operation “Peace for Galilee”, as it was called, was not an effort solely to

⁵ For more on the outbreak of the civil war see Salibi (1976, pp.92-99)

halt the cross-border attacks, but rather an attempt to “severely weaken the PLO under Syrian dominance.” (Brynen 1990, pp.153-4;Shlaim 2000, p.396)

On September 14 the newly elected president from the Kata’eb party, Bashir Gemayel was assassinated. Shlaim (2000, pp.393-396) argues that the alliance with the Kata’eb made the invasion of Lebanon possible for the Israelis, but also that part of the plan of Ariel Sharon, then in charge of the military campaign in Lebanon, was to put into power a Lebanese president that was more favorable towards Israel. The assassination sent shock waves of anger through the Christian supporters of Gemayel. As retaliation to the assassination, right wing militiamen, under Israeli protection, entered the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps and perpetrated a devastating massacre. The number of dead varies between 800 and 3000, many of who were women and children. Brynen puts the number to “over one thousand” men, women and children. (1990, p.181)

Massacres were not un-common during the civil war. Apart from the number of Palestinians killed during those 3 days in Sabra and Shatila, the massacre left important scars and a sense of defenselessness in the minds of the Palestinians in Lebanon. Occurring not long after the armed PLO activists had been kicked out of Lebanon, the massacre became in the consciousness of the Palestinians a grim reminder of how exposed they were without an armed presence in Lebanon. Indeed, the memories of Sabra and Shatila are frequently brought up as a justification for maintaining at the very least an armed presence in the camps.

The 80s also marked a split among the Palestinians that according to Suleiman had a profound effect on the organization of the camps. (Suleiman 1999, p.68) The PLO was under pressure from Israeli forces as well as right wing Lebanese militia. A break away group was led by Abu Musa and was strongly supported by Damascus. The National Salvation Front (NSF) was set up as an umbrella organization for the groups opposing the PLO. With the support of the Syrian regime, these groups won control over the camps in Beirut and in the North, gaining all but full control after Arafat was forced to leave Lebanon. This would have profound implications on the power structure in the camps and it explains why the Tahaluf⁶ faction, as the group is known among the Palestinians, is the dominant in Burj al-Barajneh.

⁶ The Tahaluf is a coalition of pro-Syrian factions. More on Tahaluf later, especially in chapters 3.4 and 5.

PLO was experiencing significant organizational challenges at this crucial period. “Multiple centers of authority coexisted and even competed, while organization and discipline suffered”. For example, it would be difficult to order the removal of a checkpoint in Beirut or enforce disciplinary punishment when members of the political movements misbehaved outside the camp. (Brynen, 1990, p.175)

“Although the PLO shared the same goals, their organizations were differently set up. PLO in a loose manner that, if not encouraged lack of discipline, then certainly did not stop it.” (Brynen, 89, p.64) The more leftist organizations had stronger discipline, but with a propensity not to respect military restraint, leading PLO officials at the time to label them as “militant irritants”. (Brynen, 1990, p.175)

Through personal experiences and conversations with people affiliated with politics in the Middle East, I have indeed experienced a stronger discipline and coordination in rhetoric and ideology from leftist organizations. When asking respondents who belonged to leftist factions in Burj al-Barajneh, they confirmed that the organization put strong emphasis on behaving in accordance with the ideological line of the organization. (Interview, 21. March 2010)

The exit of PLO also marked a decline in the significance of the Popular Committees. The PLO-committees were either forced to dismantle completely (apart from in the South) or were taken over by pro-Syrian factions. These newly led institutions lacked the financial resources and were therefore unable to provide the Palestinians with the same quality of services as the PLO. Their legitimacy was further weakened by the lack of representativeness of the committees. They were not elected, nor were they representative in terms of political or demographic representation. (Hanafi, 2010, p.13; Roberts, 2010, p.149) Also, there was heavy casualties on civilians and an excessive wealth and corruption among the armed Palestinians, would steadily erode popular support for the PLO. (Brynen, 1989, p.61)

After the Israeli invasion, the Palestinians were also in a significantly different position with regards to their ability to influence their own situation. Khalidi describes the situation as evolving from one where the Palestinians experienced insecurity, but also “a measure of freedom”, to a situation where the former had grown and the latter “disappeared”. (Khalidi, 1984, p.258) The most serious problem was the demise of the central authority after the PLO exit and the lack of ability to meet the needs of the Palestinians population. (Khalidi, 1984, p.259)

2.2.6 My friends enemy is maybe mine too

Shifting alliances were quite common during the civil war and made it difficult to predict who would be on which side of the fighting. As Syrian influence grew, factions could soon be indentified as either pro- or anti-Syrian. The war of the camps, from 1985-1989, however, would prove to be an example of how insufficient such a fault line was. The war pitted in the main part the Palestinians of the camps in the Beirut area against Amal, who at the time were dominant among the predominantly Shia neighborhoods of the camps. Often, the fighting parties were both pro-Syrian. (Suleiman, 1999, p.68)

The Taif Accords marked the end of the civil war. The divisions between the Palestinians now became cemented. Khazen (1997) points out that after a period where the Palestinian issue had being a major point of disagreement among the Lebanese, there was now unanimous consent on what to do with the Palestinians. The Taif Accords made the settlement of non-Lebanese in Lebanon illegal. Tawteen, as it is called, became unconstitutional. (Knudsen, 2007, p.5)

After the Taif Accords, Lebanese and Palestinian leaders started discussions over the role of the Palestinians in Lebanon. Lebanese foreign minister Faris Buwayz and the head of the PLO Political Department, Faruq al-Qaddumi, started talks on three main topics: First, the Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon; Second, the security situation in the camps; and third, civil rights. An agreement was reached for the Palestinians to give up their heavy weapons and to redeploy their armed forces to the camps. The further talks on the situation of the Palestinians in Lebanon ground to a halt. Palestinians retreated their armed presence to the camps, but the two other issues, especially the latter, were put on a halt. (Suleiman 1999, p.70)

2.2.7 A peace too far: The Oslo Accords. Palestinians in Lebanon betrayed?

The signing of the Declaration of Principles, the so called Oslo Accords, between Israel and PLO further divided the Palestinians in Lebanon as it indeed divided Palestinians elsewhere. The question of how to deal with the state of Israel caused the creation of a fault line of “negotiation” versus rejection of negotiations among the Palestinians. This division was indeed present within the Arab world and the Palestinians in Lebanon were soon to find allies

and enemies among similar minded Arab countries. Knudsen also shows how the Oslo Accords created a deep split between PLO and those who objected the agreement, including Hamas and leftist groups. (2005, p.231) Suleiman claims that any kind of cooperation between pro- and anti-Oslo movements at this point was impossible. (1999, p.70) At the time, the Syrians were in control on the ground in Lebanon and being a supporter of the Oslo Agreement, quickly made you anti-Syrian, and vice versa.

Despite the disagreements over the Oslo Accords, it did introduce a common concern for all Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. It postponed what must be seen as the single most important issue, namely the right of return. The Oslo Accords therefore represents a blow to Palestinian refugees of all political colors. (Knudsen, 2007, p.7)

2.2.8 The end of “Pax Syriana”

The Syrian exit from Lebanon was hastily set in motion in 2005. After the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri in a massive car bomb in Beirut on 14 February, a growing movement in Lebanon was calling for the exit of the Syrian forces that had been the dominant force in Lebanon since 1976. Hariri was staunchly anti-Syrian, and his supporters blamed the Syrians for the assassination. Although the Security Council-sanctioned investigation of the assassination has yet to conclude who was behind the crime, there was in the aftermath a growing movement that called for the ousting of Syrian forces. The pullout was completed later that summer. (Blanford, 2006)

The Syrian exit marked the end of the so-called “Pax Syriana”, where the Syrian-Lebanese intelligence services controlled the activity in the camps. (Hanafi and Long, 2010, p.138) Furthermore, the Syrians during their period in Lebanon actively facilitated a split between the Palestinian factions. (Rougier, 2007, p.11) This was done by keeping PLO out of the North, and actively encouraging opposition groups such as PFLP-GC and al-Saiqa, the groups that would later be know as the Tahaluf faction. (Hanafi and Long 2010, p.138)

The exit of Syrian forces from Lebanon represented somewhat of a paradigm shift in Lebanese politics, in bilateral Lebanese-Syrian relations as well as in Palestinian affairs. There was a revitalization of the Lebanese-Palestinian affairs. The Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC) was set up to “address the situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon”. It consists of various Lebanese ministries and has UNRWA and the PLO as their

main partners. (LPDC, 2014) Although this institution and its process have stumbled in its early years, it has been seen as an important recognition that the Palestinian “file” in Lebanon needs more attention. (Knudsen, 2009, p.66)

When it came to intra-Palestinian affairs, relationships between political movement and their relative power against each other were altered and become more ‘open’. This is certainly true for the Beirut area where the Syrian presence had been strong, but was now weakened. Pro-Syrian groups would be expected to have less influence after the withdrawal of Syrian forces.

2.2.9 Breaking the rules and rise of radical Islamism?

Hanafi and Long (2010) argue that Palestinian refugees have resorted to alternative forms to manage the day-to-day regulation of affairs in the camps. Following the PLO’s exit in 1982, with the severe weakening of institutions, conservative Islamic movements, as well as the continued surveillance from the political factions, have played an important role in governing the camps. The revival of the Islamic values in the Middle East since the late 60s and early 70s has affected societies (including NGOs and other institutions) and through this, also the governing of the camps. Noting that few refugees actually join Islamist movements, Knudsen suggests that:

The rise of Islamism is the result of “complex mix of contingent factors that is fuelled by social and political deprivation and shaped by divergent views on Palestinian nationalism (secular vs. Islamist)...” (2005, p.231)

In Lebanon, the 2007 clashes between the radical Islamist movement Fatah al-Islam and the Lebanese armed forces in the Nahr al-Bared camp North of Tripoli sparked a debate on the role of these movements in the Palestinian camps.

In the clashes, the Lebanese army entered the camp with full force and all but leveled it to the ground. It was a notable exception to the rule of non-intervention in the camps. It is worth remembering that in the early days of the conflict, several prominent political figures echoed similar restrictions on entry into the camps by Lebanese forces as were mentioned in the Cairo Agreement. This exception has not yet proven to change the established precedent that Lebanese security forces are not to enter the camps without permission and coordination with the Palestinians. In the other camps after the Nahr al-Bared clashes, the same caution against

entering the camps are still evoked, suggesting that Nahr al-Bared was indeed an exception to the rule of non-entry into the camps.

Both prior, but especially after, the Nahr al-Bared battle increased focus was put on the rise of radical militant movements in the Palestinian camps. Rougier (2007) focuses his extensive research on the Ein al-Helweh camp in the Southern port town of Saida. In the aftermath a plethora of research has been done on Fatah al-Islam specifically and the rise of radical Islamist movements in Lebanon and in the camps specifically. (Gade, 2007; Saab and Ranstorp, 2007; Knudsen, 2005)

As we will see, few findings in this research will support any claim of a widespread radicalization. From their focus groups, Hanafi and Long give good insight to refugees' view on religion:

Taken as a whole, however, participants across the focus groups had a conflicting idea about the role that religion and religious movements should play in the administration of the camps. For example, when asked whether politics and religion should be kept separate in government, participants in the youth focus group were divided in their opinions. Some favored a secular authority like the PLO of decades past, while others voiced a preference for a religio-nationalist government, like that endorsed by Hamas. Only a few, however, endorsed the full implementation of sharia. (Hanafi and Long, 2010, p.155)

2.3 Fear of tawteen and discrimination

Two other issues deserve further explanation in order to understand the situation of Palestinians in Lebanon. In the following I will briefly describe the meaning of tawteen and the legal discrimination of Palestinians in Lebanon.

2.3.1 Tawteen

The term tawteen means “naturalization”, and is commonly used to refer to the permanent settlement of Palestinians in Lebanon. As the International Crisis Group [ICG] (2009, p.13) shows, the term does not have an agreed definition and is used by different groups, Lebanese and Palestinian, for different political purposes. A main result of from the “fear of tawteen” is that is frequently used to deny Palestinians civic rights.

It has become a term that is laden with controversy in the political scene in Lebanon. According to Knudsen, “the question of naturalizing refugees is one of the most contentious political issues in Lebanon today”. (Knudsen, 2007, p.2)

Rex Brynen sums up the many political elements important to understand the complexity of tawteen:

The question is also caught up in broader local and regional political dynamics, intersecting with such delicate and important issues as the presence of armed non-state groups in Lebanon, Lebanese sovereignty, the Palestinian-Israeli and Arab-Israeli conflicts, factional tensions within Palestinian politics, Syrian-Lebanese relations, the growth of radical jihadist groups, and others (2009, p.2)

Interestingly, Palestinians and Lebanese agree on the issue of tawteen, in the sense that both reject it. This rejection was “mainstreamed” in the 1990s, as Knudsen puts it (2007, p.6), meaning that the it had become so universally accepted policy, that no politician would challenge it or place themselves in a position to become accused of it.

For the Lebanese the refusal of tawteen is so ingrained in the political rhetoric that it is included in the preamble of the constitution and as well as in political speeches and documents such as the ministerial declarations of different governments. (ICG, 2009, p.13)

Al-Khazen frames the rejection as three no’s: no to multilateral talks on the subject; no to all measures leading to a further entrenchment of Palestinians in Lebanon; and no to permanent settlement. (Khazen, 1997, p.280)

One main reason for the fear of tawteen is that a permanent settlement of Palestinians, who are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim, is perceived as a threat to the confessional balance in Lebanon. (Knudsen, 2007, p.6) Remembering the civil war years, some Lebanese fear that a shift in the demographic base of the Lebanese population can be exploited by political opponents politically and militarily. Christians are the typically the most worried, fearing that the demographic balance would shift decisively in favor of Muslims. (ICG, 2009, pp.13-14)

Other political parties in Lebanon, argue against tawteen in order to defend the refugees right to return to Israel. This has typically been the stance of parties with a strong anti-Israeli rhetoric, mainly Hizballah, but also by Amal, the other Shiite party in Lebanon. (ICG, 2009,

pp.14-15) In this understanding, a settlement of Palestinians in Lebanon is a step towards conceding the right for the Palestinians to return to their homes.

In short, there is good reason to claim that the Lebanese political movements view the rejection of tawteen as a way of protecting their country. (Knudsen, 2007, p.6; Petet, 2005, p.75)

As for the refugees themselves, all factions reject tawteen. This is closely tied to the right of return to the territories from which they fled after the establishment of the state of Israel. In their view, The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194, confirms this right and is therefore constantly referred to by Palestinians.

Although all parties seem to agree on rejecting tawteen, political factions, both Lebanese and Palestinian, accuse their respective political opponents of wanting to naturalize Palestinians. (ICG, 2009, p.15)

This agreement has what one might say is an odd and undesirable implication when it comes to granting Palestinians more rights as refugees, as it has become a zero sum game, where suggesting improvements on the situation for the Palestinians is easily seen as (and condemned as) a move towards tawteen. In his article *The Law, the Loss and the Lives of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon*, Knudsen argues that:

[the] legal discrimination of Palestinian refugees was instituted amidst growing fear of their permanent settlement in the country and institutionalized through the executive's patronage of the legislature and the judiciary. (2007, p.2)

2.3.2 Social, economic and legal discrimination

The fear of tawteen has thus been used as an excuse to discriminate Palestinians in Lebanon. Knudsen shows how the political climate in Lebanon has made granting Palestinians more civil rights all but impossible. "... in post-war Lebanon, ministerial decrees curtailing the refugees' rights have, almost without exception, met with unanimous approval". (Knudsen, 2009, p.63)

The history of discrimination is long. Knudsen points out how Palestinians in 1962 were singled out as a "special kind of refugees", since they were not holding passports from a

foreign country, but at the same time were residing in Lebanon. To compensate for this discrepancy in the legal system, the Arab countries agreed in 1965 to grant the Palestinians the same rights as ordinary citizens. (Knudsen, 2009, p.55)

As time passed, however, and the Palestinian presence in Lebanon grew more controversial, the restrictions came gradually. In 1983 the Ministry of Labor barred Palestinians from 72 professions, all of who were in high tier professions. It then became illegal for Palestinians to work as engineers, doctors or professors in the Lebanese labor market. Even within professions where Palestinians are allowed to work, permits are so hard to obtain, often requiring a lengthy and expensive application process, that few even bother trying. It is telling that in 1999 only 350 work permits were issued to Palestinians, while the equivalent number for Egyptian laborers was 18,000. (Suleiman, 2006, p.16) Some improvement has been made in the Palestinians' right to work. In June 2005 the then Labor and Agriculture Minister, Trad Hamade lifted the ban on some manual and clerical jobs. Hamade was minister from Hizballah, who according to Knudsen is the only political party that offers some support for civil rights for Palestinians in Lebanon. (2009, pp.65-6) Khalili, however, claims that the party also had alternative motives for lifting the restrictions, calling it "unintended consequence of the Syrian withdrawal," after many Syrians workers left following Syria's departure from Lebanon. (Khalili, 2005, p.38)

But, this support falls short of a full recognition of civil rights as this would most likely come to close to supporting tawteen. In interviews with ICG (2009), camp residents claim that Palestinians already work in these professions, albeit informally, and that the eased restrictions "essentially legalization a pre-existing situation" (2009, p.17)

A 2001 amendment bars Palestinian refugees from owning, and even inheriting, property in Lebanon. Before 2001, Palestinians were considered to be "Arab citizens", entitling them to owning a certain amount of property. The amendment in 2001, however, prohibited persons without a nationality from a "recognized state" to own property in Lebanon. Knudsen explains: "Palestinian refugees are the only foreigners not having a 'nationality of a recognized state'. The law, hence, deliberately excluded Palestinians from owning, bequeathing, or even registering property." (Knudsen, 2009, p.65)

Some Lebanese politicians have proposed changes to the legislation. Progressive Socialist Party leader Walid Jumblatt presented a draft law that would grant Palestinians equal rights as

other citizens in Lebanon. (Hanafi and Long, 2010) A law was finally passed on 17. August 2010 after high profiled deliberations between the political parties. In effect the bill had been considerably watered down. It only marginally improved the situation for the Palestinians on paper, much less on the ground. One human rights organization labeled the law as a “minor gesture”. (PHRO, 2010)

Despite these attempts to improve the situation for the Palestinians, statements from the political parties traditionally opposing granting any form of civil rights to the Palestinians shows that the sentiments towards Palestinians and the fear of tawteen remain the same in Lebanon. (Hanafi and Long, 2010, p.145)

To sum up, Palestinians have the status as “stateless foreigners”, and are therefore excluded from the same privileges as other residents. (Knudsen, 2009, p.64)

3 The Burj al-Barajneh camp

As mentioned, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon live in camps and in so-called gatherings outside camp premises. The fieldwork for this thesis was done in the Burj al-Barajneh Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut. This chapter will give a brief outline of the camp, its history, living conditions, and the political structures that are in place in the camp.

3.1 Location and population

The Burj al-Barajneh camp is situated on the main road between the airport and the center of Beirut. It lies in the Haret Hreik area in the Southern suburbs of Beirut municipality. The surrounding area is controlled by the Shia-Muslim Hizballah party which exerts more or less full control in the area.

Burj al-Barajneh is the largest camp in the Beirut area. UNRWA has registered more than 16,000 refugees in the camp. (UNRWA 2014b) The actual number of residents in the camp is, however, estimated to be higher, with most respondents claiming that a total of 20,000 people lived in the camp at the time of research. (Interview, 22. March 2010) The number of non-registered refugees and an increasing amount of non-Palestinian foreigners living in the camp account for the discrepancy. (Roberts, 2010, p.124)

3.2 History

The camp was established in 1948 as the first camp in the Beirut area. It was placed on 104,200 square meters of what was then unwanted wasteland outside of Beirut. Today the area is known as Dahyeh, a Shia-Muslim area controlled by Hizballah. (Robbers, 2010, p.124) The residents were mainly from the Northern parts of what is today the state of Israel.

Originally it was a tent camp, but residents have over time replaced the tents with brick houses. The Lebanese authorities imposed building restrictions in the camp and exerted strict control through its own intelligence services. (Sørvig, 2001, 49)

Following the Cairo agreement in 1969, the Palestinians took control over the camp. Residents will remember “days of revolution,” from 1969 to 1982, with considerable

nostalgia. Factories gave employment opportunities and the PLO provided economic support and social services. (Sørvig, 2001)

3.3 Living conditions

UNRWA describes living conditions in Burj al-Barajneh as “extremely poor”, listing overcrowding, poor quality of the houses and insufficient infrastructure as main problems. (UNRWA 2014b)

The borders of the camp have not expanded despite the increase in population leading to serious overcrowding. According to the UNRWA representative, the camp had gone from an original 5-7.000 inhabitants, to today’s approximately 20.000. Streets have become narrow alleyways and families are forced to expand their houses vertically to accommodate new family members. (See picture in Appendix2)

Quality of housing is also inadequate. According to a study done in Burj al-Barajneh 80% of household had poor ventilation, 61% had water seeping through the ceilings, while 74 % experienced water seeping from the walls. (Khoury, 2008) Residents attributed the poor quality of the houses to, among other things, the water from the local wells. This water had a high concentration of salt and was not suitable for construction. Though the camp was not directly hit during the 2006 war between Hizballah and Israel, the UNRWA official in the camp received a marked increase in complaints regarding cracks in the foundation of the building following the Israeli bombing of the neighboring areas. (Interview, 22. March 2010)

Sanitation conditions are also a major problem. Around 45% of the population complain of garbage and sewage smell in the camp. UNRWA employees collect garbage on a daily basis, but residents complain about poor job performance among the garbage collectors.

Furthermore, several residents do not use the garbage bins placed in and on the outskirts of the camp. Plastic bags filled with garbage and leftovers from the daily meals are simply thrown out on the street, to be collected during the garbage employee’s next round. (See picture in Appendix 2) As this will often be the next day, these bags are prime supper for malnourished cats and oversized rats. The camp is filled with these.

A proper sewage system was put in place during the first reconstruction of the camp following the civil war. The system is under-dimensioned and will overflow during the heavy

winter showers. A rehabilitation program initiated by UNRWA in 2009 is meant to improve the sewage and storm water system in the camp. It is yet to be finished and had stumbled into several hurdles, technical and political.

The lack of urban planning is evident when viewing the system for distribution of electricity, Internet and water. The lines and pipes transporting these services throughout the camp are often piled together for “convenience”. The effect of this is, of course, an extremely hazardous environment. With many of the water pipes leaking, electricity will on occasion flow through the water, making a seemingly innocent action such as touching a wet wall dangerous, even life threatening. (See picture in Appendix 2)

The water is also very salty, leaving one’s hair and skin feeling a lot like coming out of the Mediterranean and not a shower. Drinking water therefore has to be bought in bottles. The more fortunate in the camp have separate tanks for drinking water on the rooftops.

Tiltne neatly sums up the living conditions in the camps:

... the living conditions among the refugees in Lebanon are uniquely linked together in a sort of negative spiral. Thus, it is primarily in Lebanon camp and gathering households that we find that poor outcomes are directly linked to the location in Lebanon. (2005, pp.9-10)

3.4 Politics

Chapter 5 will give a detailed account of the political fault lines between the political factions in the camp. For now, it is useful with a short description of the institutions in the camp.

The Popular Committee is the official authority in the camp. It has evolved into a quasi-governmental structure in charge of distributing certain services and collecting money. In her fieldwork from 2001, Roberts (2010, p.148) identifies 10 members of the popular committee, eight of whom were drawn from the main political factions. The members are appointed by the political parties and not elected by residents.

Roberts, however, only identifies one popular committee. In fact, there are two separate popular committees, one made up of the Tahaluf⁷ and the other of PLO. After the PLO was expelled in 1982, the Popular Committees in the Beirut area were replaced and taken over by the so-called Tahaluf faction. During this period, the Syrians curtailed PLO activity and the PLO was banned from organizing activity in Beirut and in the North. As the Syrian influence dwindled, PLO reasserted their role in the camps. They did so by establishing their own Popular Committee, instead of joining the Tahaluf led committee.

Political activity in the camp largely consists of organizing various events marking important dates in history, negotiating disagreements between residents, and more day-to-day trivia. Despite a plethora of political parties and an organizational structure of committees and such, no political party or organization exerts full control over the camp (Roberts, 2010, p.149; Lombardo 2009)

There are no elections to the popular committees, so campaigning or implementing political programs is not a part of the activities of the political parties. One party claimed in the interview that they indeed had political programs, although the document was never presented, despite several requests for it. (Interview, 8. March 2010)

⁷ The Forces of the Palestinian National Coalition, Tahaluf, is name of a group consists of several political parties that share pro-Syrian sentiments. In Burj al-Barajneh Tahaluf is dominated by Hamas, PFLP-GC, Saiqa (ICG) 2009, p.2)

4 Main goals of Palestinians in Lebanon

This chapter will describe the main goals of the Palestinians in Burj al-Barajneh. All in all there was agreement between the respondents over the main goals. It should come as no surprise that right of return is the most important issue for the Palestinian refugee, as it would be for any refugee. Yet, exploring more immediate needs and priorities is also relevant, as most respondents would acknowledge that the return to their homes in Palestine was in a very distant future. When the focus shifted to more local issues respondents mentioned issues such as improving living conditions and civil rights.

4.1 Right of return and the Palestinian cause

“Right of return is a motivation. A reason to live” (Interview, Camp resident, 6. March 2010)

All respondents said that the right of return to Palestine was their most important goal, regardless of whether they were representatives from political factions or camp residents. One politician said “Right of Return is the most important issue for the Palestinians in Lebanon.” (Interview, 5. March 2010), while a camp resident simply said: “nothing is more important”. (Interview, 6. March 2010)

Not only the interviews, but indeed many of the regular conversations I had in the camp revolved around that topic. People would be reminiscing about history and territory lost, and dreaming of the future and the return yet to come. During the interviews, especially if there were others present than those directly involved in the interview, the conversation would switch into Arabic and become quite loud and intense.

The return in question was always to their original home villages, meaning villages that are now situated in Israel. As mentioned, most of the residents came from the Northern parts of Palestine, in what is today the state of Israel. A return to a future Palestinian state within the 1967 borders of the West Bank and Gaza was therefore not an option for the respondents. As one camp resident put it: “We need to get our own land and house back.” (Interview 6 March 2010)

Several respondents would tie the right of return to other similar issues that are in different ways interlinked. One political leader tied the right of return to a future state and a sense of dignity:

“Without a free state and independence we are nothing. Dignity is an important part of our culture (and) we feel deprived of it. We have a spiritual, religious and cultural connection to our homeland, a connection that is denied us.” (Interview, 4. March 2010)

Some respondents would also focus on the future state after returning to Palestine. “We want to establish a free democratic state with full religious freedom, free unions (and) equality for all.” (Interview, 21. March 2010)

A camp resident linked peace to the return to Palestine, saying that he wanted “peace, to settle and live a proper life, (and that) this should happen in Palestine – not Lebanon.” (Interview, 6 March 2010)

In their interviews with Palestinians in Lebanon, the ICG researchers also find that different political groups attach other issues to the right of return. A member of PFLP-GC in the Beddawi camp in Northern Lebanon, said “Our weapons protect the right of return.” (quoted in ICG, 2009, p.8) Though this may be seen as using the right of return as an “excuse” to maintain an armed presence in the camps, it is also a consequence of the troubled history of the Palestinians in Lebanon. They bear in mind the painful memories of massacres of Palestinians after the PLO were forced to leave Lebanon. As one political representative in Burj al-Barajneh put it, “If I can protect the Palestinians here, I can protect the Right of Return.” (Interview, 21. March 2010)

The right of return was for many of the respondents tightly linked to the struggle for Palestine and the establishment of a Palestinian state. As one member of the political parties in the camp put it: “(Our main goal is the) establishment of a Palestinian state in Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital, 1967 borders and the right of return. This is first”. (Interview, 8. March 2010)

It should not come as a surprise that refugees want to return to their homes, though there obviously are options. As Knudsen reminds us:

The three common UNHCR solutions to protracted refugee problems are either integration into host society (assimilation), resettlement to a third country or voluntary repatriation.

Palestinians have rejected the first two, while embracing the latter, colloquially referred to as the “right of return”. (Knudsen, 2007, p.6)

Although return was the main goal, some were willing to discuss different alternatives to the right of return. “There is such a thing called transitional justice. An apology,” an NGO worker who was also a Palestinian, said explaining that there should be a temporary solution while the final issue of return is being settled. She went on: “People need to be presented with options. Compensation needs to be fair. Then they can decide what to do.” (Interview, 16. March 2010)

Exploring these “deviant” answers further, the sentiments described above seemed more prevalent among the older generation. For them, the prospect of returning to Palestine has become dim. According to the ICG, they “(fear) their cause will become a casualty of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.” (ICG, 2009, p.16)

Nonetheless, they were clear that there was a need to acknowledge that they had been “wronged” and that a form of substantial compensation would have to be in place. I did not get the impression that these respondents rejected the principle of their right to return, but talked about how and to when a return would take place.

There were a few respondents who had different main goals, though they were in the clear minority. During an interview with a camp resident, one of his sons stopped by. When he understood what we were talking about, he said blatantly, “(I) just want a better life. Anywhere.” (Interview, 6. March 2010)

In his report on the living conditions for the Palestinians in Lebanon, Tiltnes claims that youth find themselves in such a dire situation in the camps, that “those who can” simply leave. (2005, p.10) According to Tiltnes, this has a lot to do with the lack of job opportunities, as was described in chapter 2.

Through informal conversations during the fieldwork in the camp, the sentiment of the respondent’s son, seem more prevalent among the younger generation. When exploring this topic further, it became clear that this sentiment did not mean a total abandonment of the right of return, but that this fight could as easily be fought on other battlegrounds than the camps in

Lebanon. Acknowledging that the youth had no memories of physical connection to their homes, some respondents from the older generation showed sympathy towards these kinds of sentiments. “[You] can’t blame the youth for wanting a better life,” one NGO representative said. (Interview, 20. March 2010)

The long period of exile has had influence on the notion of a return to their original homes. In her research on Palestinians in Lebanon, Roberts describes this in the following:

“The myths have become more important than reality with the result that many in the camp have little idea of the basic facts, such as the geographical location and climate of Palestine, and confuse what happened in Palestine in 1948 with other events such as the bombing of Hiroshima.” (2010, pp.150-151)

Even though there were some who gave an impression of hopelessness regarding the return to the homeland, it was their main goal. As Peteet puts it, “[the] refugees insist on right of return.” (2005, p. 219)

Freeze – Fight – Flee

The state of mind of Palestinians was neatly summed up by one of the NGO-representatives who herself was a Palestinian. She described three different phases that Palestinians in Lebanon had been through. First, “Freeze”, which characterized the state of mind of those who originally fled Palestine. They “miss Palestine and long back”, and in today’s Lebanon, “nothing of significance” happens. Second, “Fight”, was a state that was common during the “Revolution”. These people took an active role in regaining Palestine. They are not necessarily born there, but feel a strong connection and long for it. Third and most common among the youth, “Flee”, represent those who wish to “escape and get a better life”. They will go anywhere that is better than their current situation. This does not mean that they give up their fight for Palestine, but that they seek “alternative routes back to Palestine”. (Interview, 20. March 2010)

Questions were also asked about what their more immediate day-to-day concerns were. Even then some respondents would almost refuse to speak about anything else than the right of return. “Nothing is more important”, one camp resident said (Interview, 6. March 2010). Nonetheless, when the conversation shifted towards local issues, it was not hard to identify what people were concerned with.

4.2 Civil rights

“We have 99% no rights” (Interview, Political representative, Burj al-Barajneh, 8. March 2010)

Civil rights was an issue that, second to right of return, was mentioned by not far from every respondent. “We have no rights,” as one NGO representative put it. (Interview, 19. March 2010) As one of the political representatives put it, “[We just want] to live a proper life. This is not a goal, but ‘a way of life’”, he said before elaborating that having this ‘proper life’ should be a bare minimum on “our way to our goal”. (Interview, 5. March 2010)

Knudsen supports this, claiming that apart from right of return and resisting tawteen, gaining civil rights is a pillar of Palestinian political activism in Lebanon. (2007, p.6)

Not only what they said, but also the way in which they presented it gave a strong indication that civil rights were of huge concern for them. Respondents would get emotional and sometimes agitated when talking about their situation in the camps.

While several of the respondents got emotional when talking about this topic, some also made reference to international law. “Political and civil rights in Lebanon in accordance with the UN Human Rights charter. We want all the kinds of protections that are granted to other peoples in the world.” (Interview, 21. March 2010)

As we have seen, the Lebanese are, however, apprehensive of granting civil rights to the Palestinians. Often, the connection is made between granting civil rights and the permanent settlement of Palestinians in Lebanon. The refugees reject this connection. “Lebanese fear that giving the Palestinians their civil rights would make them forget about the right of return”, one NGO representative said, calling the notion “nonsense”. (Interview, 19. March 2010)

Outside observers agree. Brynen argues that improving the conditions for Palestinians in Lebanon could prove to benefit both the Palestinians and the Lebanese, adding that such reform initiatives would be both hard to champion in the Lebanese political system and would have to be accompanied by increased support for the camp improvement initiatives by the UN and others. (2009, p.12)

One of the political leaders in the camp echoed similar statements:

Palestinians do not want tawteen. Giving (us) a better life will not bring us closer to tawteen. We will never forget about (returning to) Palestine. No matter where we are. ... Giving us a better life will give us more energy to continue our fight for Palestine.” (Interview, 22. March 2010)

As described in previous chapters lack of civil rights for Palestinians takes many forms. The right to work is one of these rights. “Palestinians are deprived of basic rights, including the right to work,” one representative from the political parties said. (Interview, 5. March 2010)

Denying Palestinians work in a number of professional occupations has far-reaching implications on the community. No jobs means little or no income, which in turn decreases the opportunity to obtain higher education or obtain even the most basic health care services. The discrimination in the work force is probably one of the most damaging on the quality of life for the Palestinians. Even when Palestinians wish to contribute, they meet obstacles, legal and physical, that make participation difficult. When law does not deny Palestinians in Lebanon, they are in practice, as they are denied permits and such, often without good reason. (Hanafi and Long 2010, p.146)

One respondent gave the following account:

“My son is a dentist. (He) took his education in Sweden. Then he came back to Lebanon to work and started his business in the camps. Power outages made that impossible. To work outside (the camp) he could not use his title because he is not allowed to as a Palestinian. This was unacceptable and he is now back in Sweden.” (Interview, 22. March 2010)

The example shows the obstacles that face the Palestinians in Lebanon. It trashes the hope of social mobility in Lebanese society. The lack of opportunity to improve their own situation leads many to leave the country.

There was little optimism among the refugees with regard to a potential improvement of their situation. These findings were also shared in Hanafi and Long research:

“At present, there are few indications that the Lebanese government has the political will to return to the Palestinian community any of its civic rights. The Christian establishment, in particular, is reluctant to permit the Palestinians to own property, and certain of its representatives have made the rather unfounded claim that the Constitution and the Ta’if Accord forbid it from doing so.” (2010, p.145)

Palestinians do not feel protected from this discrimination even when under the UN umbrella. “UNRWA has started to transport some patients to Lebanese hospitals. As soon as they find out that they are from UNRWA, they are given poorer treatment than others,” one NGO representative claimed. (Interview, 8. March 2010)

UNRWA is not tasked with the protection of the refugees and the Palestinians were excluded from the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. As Knudsen explains, “no international body secures legal protection for Palestinian refugees. (Knudsen, 2007, p.3) Hanafi and Long describe it as the Palestinians in Lebanon have been classified as “only refugees”, meaning they have lost their “right to have rights”. (2010, p.144)

4.3 Camp improvement and services

“We can’t drink the water. It’s 70% salt!” (Interview, camp resident, 22. March 2010)

The above-mentioned example of the dentist returning to try to make a living in the camp, is telling when it comes to the infrastructure problems in Burj al-Barajneh. Having lived for a short time in the camp, it comes as no surprise that improving the camp conditions is a primary concern for the residents. It is striking how camp residents on the surface can seem quite acquiesced to their poor living conditions.

This adaptation is however not to be mistaken for an acceptance of their living situation, but is rather a remarkable sign of their resilience and survival capabilities. Julie Peteet describes the paradox in how the camps are temporary spaces that the residents wish to leave (to return to their homes), while at the same time they are becoming meaningful spaces where people define and identify themselves. (2005, p.2)

Especially the NGO representatives, who mostly provide services in the field of health, education and cultural activities, were quick to mention the lack of services in these fields as a main problem. NGOs have credibility on this subject as they are by many seen to be able to provide services that residents cannot get elsewhere.

UNRWA is responsible for providing basic services for the Palestinians, but residents will quickly make it clear that even the most basic services are not being provided.

An episode during an interview with the UNRWA official illustrated the situation. A resident interrupted the interview to plead her case. As was custom, the UNRWA official stopped the interview to hear her case. He took all the documentation and promised to do his best. In reality there was little the official could do to improve the resident's situation. He later admitted that many residents went to NGOs before they came to UNRWA, a sign that people lack faith in UNRWAs ability to deal with their concerns.

“[After the PLO left] UNRWA was left to undertake of all the services that the PLO had provided during the revolution, which was a lot since their offices and all their money were in Lebanon. UNRWA was under-dimensioned and under-funded to manage this task.”

(Interview, 22. March 2010)

Though UNRWA has provided services since 1948, the situation improved for the Palestinians when the PLO came to Lebanon in the 1970s. From chapter 2, we remember Brynen (1995, pp.28-29) putting PLO spending in Lebanon to up \$400 million. In addition to this, the PLO was also a major employer of Palestinians in the camps. Sayigh (2005, cited in Hanafi and Long, 2010, pp.137-138) claims that as much as two-thirds of the Palestinian labor force in Lebanon was employed by the PLO.

UNRWA is also criticized for issues that it has more control over. “UNRWA does not have a dialogue with the residents of the camp, but rather has foreign experts on the field, who take a top down approach.” (Interview, 16. March 2010) The UNRWA official himself would admit that the communication with the residents had been one of the challenges for the organization. “In 2007 UNRWA established committees that are to coordinate the activities in the camp and get input from the residents on the different projects that are implemented.” (Interview, 22. March 2010)

A telling example was shown with the sewage system in the camp. The system is under-dimensioned leading to overflowing during the winter storms. During the research period a program for upgrading the under-dimensioned system was being discussed between UNRWA and the popular committee. The project stranded on disagreements between residents over which parts of the camp that were to be upgraded first. This has profound effect on camp residents' trust towards politicians, an issue that will be addressed later.

“People's anger tends to be directed towards UNRWA regardless of whether it belongs there or not,” the camp director claimed. The UNRWA official did not deny that UNRWA has

difficulties, “UNRWA has had its share of problems”, but held that they do as good as they can with the limited resources they have. (Interview, 22. March 2010)

Indeed, the budget situation for UNRWA in Lebanon has been difficult. The increased needs of the refugees have not been met with increased funding, causing a decrease in per capita budget of UNRWA. (Roberts, 2010, p.7) Focus has shifted towards the organization’s operations in the occupied territory. In 2009, Canada stopped funding UNRWAs basic programs and directed all its funding towards emergency appeals. UNRWA repeatedly reminds the international community that despite austerity measures in the organization, and a budget with zero growth, “the overall funding situation is dire, if not desperate,” according to Deputy Commissioner-General, Margot Ellis. (UNRWA 2013)

Most parties will agree that the lack of funding for UNRWA in Lebanon is a contributing factor for the poor quality of their services. “As the needs of the Palestinians increase, the funding to UNRWA decreases,” according to one NGO. (Interview, 16. March 2010) Others acknowledge that UNRWA’s shortcomings are linked to funding when they claim “they [UNRWA and the international community] do not bear the brunt of the responsibility for this (the situation in the camps).” (Interview, 8 March 2010) Asked what was UNRWA’s main problem, another NGO representative said that the lack of funding was a major concern, and that most of UNRWA’s donors were focusing on the West Bank and Gaza. (Interview, 8. March 2010)

One respondent who was vocal in her objection to UNRWA would admit that the organization did have a significant role towards the Palestinian community. “[I will] not place all blame on UNRWA,” she said, highlighting UNRWA’s important role as “a reminder to the international community of its responsibilities towards the Palestinian refugees.” (Interview 16. March 2010)

Placing blame is an important part of the conversations when it comes to describing the situation in the camp. UNRWA is subject to many of these allegations. First and foremost, however, Palestinians will blame the Lebanese for their lack of will to provide basic services and infrastructure: “this should be the responsibility of the host community. Lebanon does nothing.” (Interview, 22. March 2010) One of the NGO-representatives summed up the Palestinians’ feelings towards the Lebanese when it comes to the discrimination, blaming

their situation solely on the Lebanese: “They could ease the restrictions,” she said. (Interview, 16. March 2010)

4.4 Other issues

Right of return, civil rights and camp improvement were the issues that most respondents mentioned most frequently. There were also several other issues that were brought up by the respondents and that will be addressed below.

4.4.1 Awareness and Advocacy

“Increased awareness among women is a key component [of the struggle]” (Interview with NGO representative, 8. March 2010)

Awareness is seen as important work for the actors in the society, be they NGOs or political. In fact, one representative of a smaller political faction mentioned awareness as the most important work for the parties inside the camp. “[We need] awareness on all levels ... to motivate people to resistance and the liberation of Palestine.” (Interview, 23. March 2010)

Creating this “awareness” in the context of Palestinians in Lebanon means teaching the history and culture of the Palestinians. Youth would learn about the origins of the family, which village they are from, learn traditional Palestinian handcraft and the traditional *dabkeh* dance.

Advocacy and awareness is indeed one of the main activities of the NGOs in the camps. “This was an increasingly important role for the NGOs,” (Interview, 16. March 2010) one NGO-representative said. The lobbying would take many forms and could be directed towards the camp community itself (awareness and call for political unity) to the community outside the camps, be they the Lebanese or the international community.

Several NGOs and political parties hold events commemorating their homeland (See picture of event in Appendix2). As one NGO representative said:

“Patriotic issues such as ‘Land Day’ is given focus. We help bring people from the older communities to tell about their land of origin and such. Awareness on violence and discrimination are also important issues.” (Interview, 8. March 2010)

Yet, even the awareness and advocacy issues were not without controversy in the camp. One NGO representative shared the following:

“Ironically [it is] easier [to do advocacy] outside the camp than inside because of political divisions. Awareness and support from the outside make the NGOs powerful and safe vis-à-vis the Popular Committees. NGOs are tolerated in part because of their support from outside. (Interview, 20. March 2010)

The legal constraints that the Palestinians meet, are also affecting the NGO work in the camps. Knudsen points out that this also has to do with the legal discrimination. For example, in order to register a NGO with the authorities, it has to be headed by a Lebanese citizen. Though it admittedly is a fairly easy rule to circumvent, it is an example of the constraints the NGOs are met with. (2007, p.10)

The political importance of commemorating their heritage, is neatly described in Khalili (2004, p.7), where she also explains the increased importance focus on heritage gained after 1990, when Palestinians feared that a permanent settlement with Israel would not include a return to Palestine.

The political parties also have awareness campaigns and have events focusing on traditional Palestinian values. Important historical events such as the *nakbah* are commemorated through different types of events in the camp. Khalili points out how the PLO was seminal in organizing these events from 1969-1982, but how the events declined in numbers after the exit of PLO's leadership, only to rise in importance again after the Oslo Accords. (2004, p.8)

These events are in fact some of the more visible activities of the political parties. Typically, these events are organized by one of the political factions. Invitations will be hand-delivered throughout the camp. The events will include speeches and cultural performances of singing, dancing and plays. The events are also held to show unity, with representatives from all the political factions attending as front row dignitaries.

4.4.2 Education

“It is our only weapon” (NGO-representative, 19. March 2010)

Several Palestinians mentioned education's pivotal role in Palestinian culture. As one respondent said, “Education! I would live in poverty and sickness to be able to give my

children education”. (Interview, 19. March 2010) It was to some one of the most important issues politicians could get involved in, according to one political representative. “We focus on education. It is a priority even though work is hard to find [for educated persons].” (Interview, 22. March 2010)

Many residents and political figures focused on education, mentioning it as one of the most important issues to work with in the camps. (Interview, 21. March 2010) There were several challenges when seeking education in the camps.

The quality of education is, however, poor. “Before there were 8 schools that ran double shifts. Now there are 5 schools that run single shifts. We have around 2200 students,” the UNRWA official in charge of Burj al-Barajneh said. This of course leads to overcrowded classrooms and does not make for a good learning environment.

Some complained about school policies towards the pupils: “UNRWA has started a policy of accepting students to the next year of school even after they fail classes. If one fails twice one is kicked out of the school,” they claimed, adding that “teachers catered to the smart students and the rest were neglected”. (Interview, 8. March 2010)

It was difficult corroborate this information, but it is an indication of the distrust towards the UNRWA-led education system. A resident gave voice to this distrust. When asked about UNRWA services and the money spent on education, she simple replied: “Ask the thieves at UNRWA!” (6. March 2010)

In their surveys on Palestinians in the Middle East, Hanssen-Bauer and Jacobsen (2007), find that as a whole, the refugee population has almost the same kind of access to services as the population in their host countries. The notable exceptions are in Lebanon and Gaza. Their research provides an equally grim picture of the education system. There was no improvement of the situation over the last 30 years. 60% of young adults did not complete basic education and the youth illiteracy and retention rates are high. (Hanssen-Bauer and Jacobsen 2007, p. 38)

When it came to higher education, UNRWA claimed that they provided scholarship for around 60 students to go abroad a year. (Interview, 22. March 2010) The scholarships do not cover the full cost of education, and the outstanding fees are too expensive for most Palestinians in Lebanon. According to one NGO, “less and less was taking higher education

despite the traditional focus Palestinians place on this.” (Interview, 8. March 2010) Knudsen also confirms this, saying that Palestinians are denied from several institutions, that few complete their basic education and even fewer complete higher education. (2007, p.10)

4.4.3 Health

“[Health services] has become a sometimes impossible financial burden.” (Interview with political representative, 23. March 2010)

As with other services, adequate health care is lacking in Burj al-Barajneh. This is a substantial source of frustration and deprivation in the camp. While living there, not a day would pass without running into a heartbroken mother with a sick child in her arms begging for spare change to provide for medical treatment for her child. One respondent linked the many health issues and the lack of services to the larger economic situation. “People lack money because of the large medical bills.” (Interview, 23. March 2010)

UNRWA also acknowledged that health services were not good enough. The camp director explained, “Before, UNRWAs role was preventing illness. Now it is curative.” (Interview, 22. March 2010) In other words there were few resources to spend on patients before they were ill.

The lack of adequate health care also shows in the statistics. Hansen-Bauer and Jacobsen (2007) find that

“over 50 per cent of adults (15 years and older) in Lebanese camps and gatherings are afflicted with functional impairment (movement, sight, or hearing), chronic illness, other disabilities or severe psychological distress.” (2007, p.37)

The situation is worse for those living in the camps than those outside.

When living in the camp, illness is visible in the streets. Daily I would see people with diseases that were in dire need of treatment. Sometimes these people were left to beg on the streets for money for treatment. According to the translator, the begging was especially devastating to see, as she claimed this was something the residents preferred to solve through relatives before resorting to begging on the streets.

Basic treatment is done in the clinics in the camp for free, the rest are referred outside. Given the relatively simple equipment in the clinics in the camp, referrals to hospitals outside the camp were quite frequent. The UNRWA official explained the process:

“When referred (to a hospital) outside, 50% of the expenses are covered. For outside referrals UNRWA covers the bed expenses for the first three days. Then up to ten if necessary. UNRWA will provide an additional 200 \$ pr day. The bill, however, for a day [at a hospital outside the camp] is around another 400 \$ pr day.” (Interview, 22. March 2010)

These kinds of sums are well beyond the financial capability of an ordinary camp resident.

In what seems as partly a sort of paradox and partly a sign of the distrust towards UNRWA, Hansen-Bauer and Jacobsen found that the number of users of UNRWA services in Lebanon is 42 per cent. One might expect this number to be higher, given the difficult situation in the camp. Most likely it is a sign that residents resort to family ties before seeking UNRWA services. One can also not rule out that the general distrust towards UNRWA leaves many Palestinians with the notion that they are as well off managing by themselves, as through UNRWA. The UNRWA official admitted that people try the NGOs before contacting UNRWA, but he claimed that the budget situation did not allow for UNRWA to provide more services than they were already offering. (Interview, 22. March 2010)

Summed up, the Palestinians long for their return to their original homes. In their refuge, the day-to-day challenges in the camps seem to many as insurmountable. Lack of funding and ability to agree on priorities, leave the camp residents in this dismal situation, with little hope of improvement in infrastructure. Coupled with their lack of civil rights, there are few avenues for social mobility for the Palestinians. The “days of the revolution”, where they were indeed a part of the fight to return to their homes, are gone. Today, the struggle is more one of survival in the camps.

5 Political Divisions

The political party structure in the camps is similar to the structure in the Palestinian territories, although in Lebanon Hamas is incorporated in the Tahaluf faction. Using the answers from respondents in the camp, this chapter will address the political structure and fault lines between the political factions in the camp. It will first focus on the political divisions between the political factions and show how this division has had institutional consequences in the establishment of two separate popular committees. It will also describe the agreements that exist between the factions in the camp and whether this has led to meaningful cooperation.

In addition the chapter will describe some political features in the camp, namely that there is less intra-factional violence in Lebanon than elsewhere, that there are no elections to the political bodies that exist in the camp, and that camp residents that are not themselves members of political factions, share a deep distrust in the political leaders in the camp.

5.1 “The divisions”

“Politics among Palestinians in Lebanon is divided along the same lines as between Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian Territory.” (Interview, Political representative, Burj al-Barajneh, 15. March 2010)

Respondents, politicians as well as camp residents, referred to this split between the political factions simply as the “divisions”. As shown previously, the split is between the PLO and the so-called Tahaluf. Relations with the state of Israel dominate as explanation for this division. PLO supporters generally support the PLO line of negotiation for a settled solution to the Palestinian issue. The Tahaluf faction believes Palestine can be liberated only through armed resistance. Respondents also linked the divisions to the question of whether to recognize the Israeli state or not, PLO having recognized Israel already, while Tahaluf does not believe in recognition as a path to their goal of returning to a liberated Palestine. One of the political leaders in the camp summed up the split: “There are two main groups in Burj al-Barajneh: First, pro -negotiations with, and acceptance of, Israel, ‘this means Fatah’, and second, anti-negotiation and anti-Israel, ‘this means Hamas’.” (Interview, 4. March 2010)

Few respondents mentioned the way of organizing society as a main reason for the divisions. This is somewhat surprising, given the significant ideological difference between Fatah and Hamas on the role of religion in society. Maybe even more surprising is that very few of the political representative brought up the topic either, and those who did, tied it to a future Palestinian state, as we saw in chapter 4.1.

5.2 Two popular committees

“This [2 popular committees] is because of the political divisions” (Interview, 23. March 2010)

Perhaps the clearest example of the division is the existence of two popular committees in Burj al-Barajneh. The dominant popular committee in Burj al-Barajneh is run by the Tahaluf. The PLO heads the other popular committee. After the PLO was forced out of Lebanon in 1982 and in the aftermath of the civil war, the Tahaluf factions took over the political structures in Burj al-Barajneh. Even though the PLO has re-established themselves in the camp, they do not challenge the authority and the responsibilities that the Tahaluf faction has established. This includes managing camp services like water and electricity. (Interviews with political representatives in Burj al-Barajneh, March 2010) Members of the PLO popular committee claimed that they would not challenge the opposing committee on their responsibilities. “Fatah will not challenge the established role of the Tahaluf committee in the camp.” They participate in meetings regarding other “issues in the camp”. (Interview, 5. March 2010)

The PLO defends its decision to establish a separate popular committee. “PLO re-established its 'natural role' as the 'sole representative of the Palestinian people' by (re)establishing itself with popular committees in the camps when the Syrians left.” (Interview, 5. March 2010)

Having two popular committees was for many seen as “natural” consequence of the divisions. In any case the politicians themselves saw cooperation between the committees as good. “Cooperation between the two popular committees is good and in many cases they act together,” according to a camp resident. (Interview, 19. March 2010) An NGO employee confirmed this, “They coordinate with each other, especially on the security issues, but also on other issues such as water and electricity.” (Interview, 19. March 2010) There were also a few respondents that found the situation more difficult, calling the existence of two

committees as a “problem”. (Interview, 8. March 2010) Most criticism towards the popular committees was not necessarily that there were 2 committees, but rather their ineffectiveness. As one camp residents claimed, they were “only reactive, not proactive” (Interview, 8. March 2010) Hanafi and Long experienced similar grievances in their fieldwork:

“However, despite this veneer of cooperation and coordination, other focus group participants complained that these committees rarely come to any consensus on important issues, fail to coordinate their activities, do not have widely accepted legitimacy, are not duly recognized by the Lebanese government, cannot protect their constituents from the harassment of Lebanese security forces, do not hold UNRWA accountable for its shortcomings, and in short, do more to enable factional infighting and bolster patron-client politics than they do to promote Palestinian unity.” (2010, pp.139-40)

5.3 Agreement on local issues

“Camp interests take highest priority and on this the factions agree.” (Interview, political representative, 23. March 2010)

Despite the clear division and criticism from some camp residents, political leaders were keen to stress that all Palestinian political factions in Lebanon, indeed all Palestinians, would agree on all issues that would improve their own situation in the camps. “... both parties agree on all issues related to the well-being of the camp residents” (Interview, 23. March 2010).

Political leaders from all factions gave similar statements. (Interviews, March 2010)

This apparent agreement could be attributed to several different factors. No doubt, the Palestinians’ troubled history in Lebanon plays a central role. Especially during the civil war relations with the Lebanese society became strained. The animosity created during these years is very much still a present, a fact widely acknowledged by Palestinians as well as Lebanese. “I hate to say it, but some Lebanese (politicians) are like Israelis in their statements towards Palestinians”, one NGO representative said, pointing to the Free Patriotic Movement, a right wing Christian party, as particularly hostile. The same representative did, however, claim that relations had improved with some political parties in Lebanon, notably Hizballah. Still, the respondent was cautious in giving wholesale endorsement of Hizballah, calling them “grey”. “Hizballah are for Palestinians in Palestine but against Palestinians in Lebanon”, she said. (Interview, 16. March 2010)

Some Palestinians will admit that actions during the civil war affected the situation with the Lebanese in a negative manner. As one respondent put it:

“PLO’s big mistake was not necessarily that it sided with the leftists in Lebanon, but that it overtook their role. What relevance to the Palestinians cause had a check point in Hamra?”
(Interview, 20. March 2010)

The same respondent understood that this interference of the Palestinian military factions, annoyed the Lebanese.

The desire to avoid a repeat of this troubled history has led to a remarkable agreement among Palestinian factions, that they should not interfere with Lebanese affairs and should attempt to create fewer grounds for conflict with the Lebanese. “(We have) focus on avoiding inter-Palestinian conflict”, one political leader said. (Interview, 4. March 2010)

Despite this proclaimed agreement and good cooperation, there seems to be somewhat of a mismatch between information from the respondents and the actual life in the camps. First, despite the claimed agreement on “all that will benefit the Palestinians in Lebanon”, there are several disagreements between the factions on precisely those kinds of issues. One example was work on upgrading the sewage system in the camp. Despite the obvious benefit of improving the sewage system, the factions could not agree on who was to serve as a counterpart to UNRWA, who was in charge of the improvement. “[They] need money and the political will to rebuild”, one NGO-member said, saying that the political parties lacked both. (Interview, 19. March 2010)

Thus, disagreements on in which location to start the construction, where the pipes should go and so on, becomes an avenue for political disagreement not only between the political parties and the popular committees, but also between the political parties and UNRWA, who is in charge of the reconstruction.

One politician from one of the smaller parties claimed that the politicians were “victims of vanity”, so that every time a project would have viewable consequences “on the surface”, politicians would race to claim the responsibility for the success. (Interview, 21. March 2010)
Hanafi and Long found similar sentiments in their focus groups:

“that factional politics have lost sight of the nationalist cause and promotes through clientelism and similar such practices individual self-interest over collective Palestinians interests.” (2010 p.143)

Outside observers confirmed that political bickering could come in the way of solving issues in the camp. “ Hamas and Fatah would strike down any agreement that would make the other part look better than themselves”, an observer claimed. (Interview, 7. April 2010)

Notwithstanding the financial shortcomings on almost all levels, among donors as well as in the community itself, there is little if any unified initiative from the political factions to promote the camp improvement so wanted by all factions. Another example is when the political factions sent two separate letters to the LPDC to list demands from the Palestinian community. The letters were very similar, but the factions felt the need to send their “own” letters. They agree on the issues they need to improve, “yet they find it hard to strike an agreement”, according to one observer. (Interview, 7. April 2010)

Moreover, the Lebanese, who claim that they lack a credible counterpart on the Palestinian file, exploit the lack of unity. As one resident put it:

“Of course it would be better if they were unified. Then they could talk with one voice towards the Lebanese. This would help also externally when it comes to asking for funding. The lack of unity is used as an excuse not to provide the Palestinians with services.”
(Interview, 19. March 2010)

NGOs also feel frustrated with the lack of unity. According to one representative the NGOs frequently plead to the political parties in the camp to unite to at the very least agree on camp related issues. (Interview, 16. March 2010)

According to some, initiatives had been made to create a unified leadership:

“After the 2006 elections in Palestine, Hamas proposed to establish one sole source of representation in Lebanon that would include all parties and distinguished persons and technocrats. The authority would deal with all matters related to Palestinians in Lebanon including liaison with UNRWA and others. This was refused by PLO.” (Interview, 4. March 2010)

The politician showed frustration with the PLO: “They want people to follow them as if they were blind. It’s like going on a bus without knowing which direction the bus is going.”

(Interview, 4. March 2010)

5.4 Less violence

“Here there is nothing to fight for” (Interview, 23. March 2010)

It is maybe the same desire to avoid making the same mistakes as previously that has led to less inter-factional violence between the Palestinian political factions in Lebanon, than there is in the occupied Palestinian territories. “... divisions have not had the same result in terms of violence”, one leader claimed (Interview, 15. March 2010). The split stems from the fault lines, the outcome is however different. Again, the specifics of the Palestinian situation in Lebanon appear to be the reason for this more peaceful political environment.

Close family ties between the camp residents were given as a main reason, by both the political factions as well as by the camp residents. “The important factor for this [lack of violence] is the family ties and the connections between members of the Popular Committee”, one said. (Interview, 5. March 2010) Through marriage, people belonging to opposing political factions would be related and would see each other on a regular basis. It was even claimed that members of opposing popular committees were related through marriage, albeit distantly.

Personal relationships are not only important on the local level. The then heads of Fatah and Hamas in Lebanon, Abbas Zaki and Ousama Hamdan respectively, were known to have a good personal relationship. The war in Gaza in 2008-2009 showed the importance of this personal relationship according to a local Lebanese sheikh from the southern city of Saida, who is familiar with mediating between Palestinians. (Interview, 23. October 2009) The Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas publicly criticized Hamas for its actions. The Palestinian factions in Lebanon, however, refrained from this type of criticism, thus maintaining unity and solidarity with the people of Gaza. (Interview, 23. October 2009)

Others claimed that the neighborhood where the camp was situated played a central role.

“Burj al-Barajneh is different than the other camps. It is in a Shia neighborhood and we have

good relations with (the Lebanese Shia parties) Amal and Hizballah” (Interview, 5. March 2010)

Though the relative calm between the Palestinian factions distinguishes the situation for Palestinians in Lebanon from Palestine, the Palestinians in Lebanon do not operate in a vacuum and events in Palestine do indeed affect the situation in Lebanon. Especially during the clashes between Hamas and Fatah in Gaza in 2008, cooperation between the factions in Lebanon was difficult and was for periods put to a halt. (ICG, 2009, p.19)

There were, of course, some conflicts in the camp. According to Hamas they had been subject to harassment and vandalization of property in the camp. (Interview, 4. March 2010) Hamas leader in Lebanon, Usama Hamdan, made similar claims. (ICG, 2009, p.20) There were, however, few incidents of personal attacks. Yet, the party’s local representative in Burj al-Barajneh stressed that “we are cautious not to let the disagreement in Burj al-Barajneh escalate as it has done in Palestine.” (Interview, 4. March 2010)

The challenge with clashes in the camps, is that they quickly take on a political color, though residents, as well as the political factions, claimed the conflicts were seldom rooted in political disagreements. Families or individuals will often be affiliated, more or less loosely, with a political faction and a conflict would therefore take on a factional character, especially in local and international media. An observer summed it up:

“It seems impossible to just have an individual fight. It always takes a factional logic even though it did not start as a factional disagreement. Most Palestinians have a factional affiliation of some sort. This makes the risk of expanding conflict larger.” (Interview, 7. April 2010)

An incident in Ain al-Hilweh camp serves as a good example of these clashes. On 15th February 2010, clashes erupted in the camp, which has become known as a camp where clashes often occur. The following day, newspapers reported on “gun battles” in Ain al-Hilweh between “members” of two political factions. (Zaatari and Reuters, 2010) A few days later, a meeting was held between the political factions, resulting to statements from political leaders focusing on the “cooperation among all Palestinians”. The conflict was also rejected as an “individual dispute that spiraled out of control and involved the two factions”. (Zaatari, 2010) Finally, the same newspaper could cancel any disagreement between the political factions in the camp. The spokesperson of the Islamic Forces in the camp claimed that the

Palestinians were targeted “as Palestinians” and that unity was more important than ever. According to The Daily Star’s sources, the clashes were instead the result of fighting within Fatah faction. (Zaatari and Rizk, 2010)

Fatah had indeed been embroiled in internal disputes. As ICG show, local leaders have “rejected central authority” of Fatah and sought to maintain their control by creating ties with Lebanese actors as well as regional ones. The PLO has tried to deal with this by reshuffling local political leaders in Lebanon, a move that caused “considerable tension.” (ICG 2009, p.21)

5.5 Elections

“There are no elections, no agreement. We have facts” (Interview, Political representative, 4. March 2010)

Respondents were also asked to comment on whether electing the officials in the camp was an option. The answers also proved to be a good example over the lack of cooperation between the factions.

Camp residents were clear on their wish to be represented by elected officials. One NGO-worker who also lived in the camp said, “Popular committees should not be appointed”, adding that elections were “long overdue” (Interview, 16. March 2010). “No one leaves their position”, a shop owner said, claiming that incompetence was rampant among appointments made by political leaders. (Interview, 6. March 2010)

All parties would claim that they wanted these elections, but that other factors were the main problem. Typical responses from the politicians would be: “PLO are, of course, for elections and would agree on “any kind of elections” (Interview, 5. March 2010), or from the Tahaluf: “Personally I wanted the elections. If there are elections it would prove our ability to organize ourselves properly”, he said. (Interview, 15. March 2010) So despite this broad political consensus on the principle of electing one’s representatives, elections were far from a reality.

Reasons given for the lack of elections vary. Some named institutional difficulties and the “disagreements between the political parties over how to do it”. (Interview, 5. March 2010) Also, one argued it would be hard to separate Burj al-Barajneh from the structure of the Palestinians in Lebanon: “If there was to be elections for one committee in Burj al-Barajneh

there would have to be the same in all the camps, not only Burj al-Barajneh”. (Interview, 22 March 2010)

Some claimed that results would favor their own faction to such an extent that the other factions would not accept the results. “... PLO-affiliated candidates would for sure win a huge majority. This would deny the other parties representation and the PLO does not want to monopolize power like this” (Interview, 5 March 2010). Similar belief in own popularity was present with other political parties. The smaller parties admitted that politicians were afraid of losing their positions, “The political parties fear introducing elections as it might lead to them losing their positions”, one representative said. (Interview, 8 March 2010)

Camp residents and NGO representatives agree on the reasons behind the lack of elections. When asked why there were no elections in the camp, one NGO representative said: “Because they [the politicians] are afraid of losing. The grassroots would win. One of the popular UNRWA teachers or someone from the NGO community.” (Interview, 16. March 2010)

This correlates with Hanafi and Long in their argument of shifting governmentalities in the camps where the political parties are losing influence to newer groups such as NGOs and other grass-root movements. These movements have been able to provide services and assistance that the political institutions have failed to provide. (2010, p.152)

Acknowledging this fact, an outside observer shared this view: “Fatah and Hamas would not allow elections to happen.” (Interview, 7. April 2010)

Other respondents viewed the “tribal nature” of the Palestinians as an important reason (Interview, 15. March 2010), although it is hard to see this as an adequate explanation given the relatively free and fair elections held in occupied Palestinian Territory in 2006 and that Palestinians in general cannot, convincingly, be charged of being “estranged” from the notion of elections. Furthermore, all the camp residents expressed a desire to choose their own representatives.

Jaber Suleiman, who follows the situation for the Palestinians in Lebanon closely, noted that:

“Elections are not easy to hold in the camps. The problem lies as much with the PLO as with the other parties. It involves the larger question of PLO’s internal democracy. It also needs to be properly coordinated with the Lebanese government.” (Interview, 18. March 2010)

Although there was wide agreement that elections were preferable, several respondents were “not sure” whether elections would help their situation. (Interview, 16. March 2010) A member of one of the political parties shared the lack of enthusiasm for elections: “What good would it do us to have elections and one committee? In Palestine Hamas won the elections ... but Fatah did not accept [the result]. Same would happen here”, he declared. (Interview, 23. March 2010)

Several also feared that money would take a central role in elections should they be held in the future. “Money would be important” (Interview, 15. March 2010) one said, while a member of the NGO community went further saying “money would play a decisive role”, and claimed that vote buying would be rampant. (Interview, 20. March 2010)

One resident brought up the issue of elections early in the interview. “We have no elections. No one leaves their position”. (Interview, 6. March 2010) Similarly summarizing the pessimism surrounding the effects of elections one political leader said: “[that] would mean merging the popular committees. The political divisions would still be there. This is a fact.” (Interview, 22. March 2010)

These answers show little chance for elections in the camps. Yet, there had been a few indications that the atmosphere may be ripe for including the refugee population in decision-making through elections. Following the Syrian exit, elections were held for half the seats in the popular committees in the Shatila camp, which is not far from Burj al-Barajneh. This gave the refugee population in the camp a hope that they can chose their own leaders sometime in the future. (Khalili, 2005, p.38) Jaber Suleiman, also acknowledged that these elections had taken place, but claimed that they “only lasted a few months”, lending little optimism that this spark that this example represented would lead to a burst of elections in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon. (Interview, 18. March 2010)

When it comes to elections, the political factions seem to steer away from the principal matter of whether people should have the right to elect their officials, the politicians are elevating the matter of elections to an issue of peace and unity in the society.

5.6 Distrust towards politicians

“Popular committees are like Arab governments: they talk, but don’t act” (Camp resident, Burj al-Barajneh, 6. March 2010)

The residents have developed a general distrust to the politicians and their possibility to influence their own situation. “Political parties are useless” one resident told me. (Interview 6. March 2010) Discussing the issue of the political parties with camp residents would often lead to emotional statements. “Politicians spend time fighting each other”, one NGO-representative said, asking rhetorically “why?”, before declaring that all political parties were “rubbish”. (Interview, 16. March 2010) Such harsh descriptions were not uncommon among camp residents and frustration runs high due to the lack of progress on local affairs.

Politicians admit that they lack the ability to provide the services that are demanded from them and to achieve their own goals. “The political parties are not in the position to do much, especially when it comes to the issue of right of return. [We] are therefore mostly involved in purely local affairs”. (Interview, 5. March 2010)

Even in these local affairs there is an acknowledgement of their lack of ability to provide adequate services for the residents. “The Popular Committees lack the ability to influence and improve conditions on matters that are crucial for residents, such as health,” said one politician. (Interview, 8. March 2010)

Although Hanafi and Long give the civic organizations and the popular committees some credit for providing services, they by and large conclude in the same manner:

“From 1948 to the present, Palestinian governance in Lebanon has been ad hoc at best. Only two structures – the *tanzimat*⁸ and the popular committees – have ever really succeeded in serving the community’s needs, and both of these have survived 60 years of exile in no more than a diminished capacity.” (2010, p.141)

The tendency to describe the camps as “islands of insecurity”, free from the state control and influence, coupled with the recent focus on the rise of militant Islamist movements has in

⁸ Tanzimat refers to civic organizations. These organizations are “highly informal” and play a role in “regulating social order”. They can for example mediate on conflicts and solve disputes. Over the time, these organizations have all but disappeared in the refugee camps. (Hanafi and Long 2010, pp.141-142)

some circles led to an impression that the camps have become breeding grounds for these movements. Few, if any respondents can support such a notion.

As shown, politics in the camp may seem similar to the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories on the surface, with the Hamas/Tahaluf- PLO divide, but in reality there are several nuances that differentiate the two from each other. Less violence and a claimed agreement on local issues are issues that are brought forward by the politicians themselves.

However, with the lack of ability to provide results on the ground to improve the situation for the Palestinians and with the absence of elections, little is in place to build trust between the decision makers of the camp and the people. This has caused the residents to feel a great deal of distrust towards the politicians.

The Palestinians in Lebanon are thus organized along the same lines as in the Palestinian territories, but with a different set of circumstances that make their situation completely different. It is striking then, that while claiming to agree on all issues they are in a position to exert influence over, such as camp improvement and daily life, the Palestinian political movements in Lebanon are organized and left to disagree on issues firmly beyond their own realm of influence, namely on strategies to achieve the right of return and on the recognition of Israel. This contributes to a lack of progress on projects that could improve the situation in the camps.

6 Findings, debate and conclusions

This chapter summarizes the findings of the thesis and discusses whether the political organization of the Palestinians in Lebanon furthers the goals of that particular group. It is based on the findings in the previous chapters. The chapter will then discuss possible explanations.

It is worth reminding that this thesis has not dealt with the situation in the camps after the outbreak of the Syrian civil war. Yet, the finding bears relevance for a situation like the one we see with an influx of Syrian refugees, in that a community such as the Palestinians in Lebanon would benefit greatly from organized and well established political institutions in order to tackle the new situation. As we have seen, however, the political organization is divided and in some cases non-functional, making them less able to meet the formidable challenge that the influx of refugees represent.

6.1 The goals of Palestinians in Lebanon

The interviews have shown that the right of return is the single most important goal of the Palestinians in Lebanon. It was the first issue they brought up during the interviews, and the topic dominated conversations. Many of the camp residents would talk about the subject with enthusiasm and could get emotional during the conversation. Other issues that were mentioned were also related to the right of return, such as for example “awareness and advocacy”. These were issues closely tied to the distinctive Palestinian culture and were important to remind the refugees, especially those whom had not been to Palestine, of their Palestinian heritage.

Civil rights and the day-to-day perils of camp life dominated the answers when the interviewees were asked to look for issues other than the right of return. One of the clearest examples is the Palestinians’ lack of right to work in certain skilled professions such as engineers. Due to the extremely difficult conditions under which the Palestinians live in Lebanon, concerns such as education for the children and basic health concerns dominate everyday life. Residents would worry about whether they could find suitable medical treatment for their children and whether they could afford to put their sons and daughters

through higher education. Furthermore, both parents and youth would be concerned over the opportunity to find a paid job after graduation.

6.2 Political organization

During their prolonged refugee experience, the Palestinians in Lebanon have been politically active. The extent of this activity has varied as we have seen in previous chapters. Today, the main fault lines between the political parties among the Palestinians in Lebanon are similar to those between Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories. The Tahaluf faction is run by Hamas, while Fatah dominates the PLO. This “division”, as it is called, mainly springs from opposing strategies on how to obtain the main goal of right of return and their relationship towards Israel. The Tahaluf advocates a resistance line, with no negotiations with or recognition of the state of Israel. Fatah on the other hand supports the negotiation line towards Israel.

Interestingly, the political factions claim to agree on all issues regarding the well being of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. But despite this proclaimed agreement, it was difficult to find concrete examples of cooperation on these kinds of issues.

In the camps there are popular committees that act as quasi-municipal bodies. They are in charge of basic services in the camp. There are no elections to these committees, despite, as shown, that both political factions claim to want election. Instead there are two separate popular committees, one for the dominant Tahaluf and the other run by the PLO.

6.3 Answering the research question.

The task of this thesis was to answer the question:

Is the political organization in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon able to further the social and political goals of the Palestinian refugees?

On the issue of right of return the political factions are divided along the lines that represent two different approaches to achieving the goal of return to their original homes in Palestine. This gives people a real choice of which side to support, and given the fact that the right of return is the most important goal, this division seems logical. Yet, both political parties will

admit that there is little they can do to influence this goal, largely because they are cut off from the relevant decision-making processes. As argued earlier, the military and diplomatic efforts of the Palestinians in Lebanon to gain the right to their homeland was significantly reduced after the PLO leadership was forced out of Lebanon in the 1980s. Also, the Oslo Accords have pushed the issue of right of return to the final status negotiations. Implicitly, this means that the right of return is an issue that can be sacrificed in a potential final agreement. This is indeed a fear that many refugees share. (ICG 2009, p.16) In inter-Palestinian disputes Fatah is accused by its rivals for having abandoned the claim in the negotiations. (ICG 2009, p.15)

When it comes to the civil rights in Lebanon there is a stronger agreement between both the political parties. This agreement has, however, not led to a common stance on the issue, nor has it resulted in significant improvement in these rights for the Palestinians. The example of the political factions sending two separate, but almost identical, letters to the LPDC, shows that practical cooperation between the two factions is hard to achieve despite self-proclaimed agreement on the issue. While this type of split is not unique to the Palestinians in Lebanon, it has a pronounced effect because a third party can exploit this disagreement. The Lebanese counter-parts use precisely this disunity on the Palestinian side as an argument to maintain status quo on the restrictions against the Palestinians in Lebanon. After all, if the Palestinians cannot even agree on common demands, why should the talks on easing the restrictions even get started.

Many respondents also mentioned camp improvement as a main issue where the Palestinian political organizations could have opportunity to influence their own situation. Coordination and cooperation with the residents in the camp is paramount to successful camp improvement, whether it would be on matters of infrastructure or on services such as education and health. The popular committees can serve as representative and coordinating bodies that can act as counter parts for outside donors, contractors or service providers. Inside the camps is also one of the few areas where the Palestinians can act more or less without influence from outside.

Yet, the political parties struggle to serve as effective intermediaries to solve these kinds of issues. The starting date for the sewage upgrade project was at the time of research put back due to internal bickering on the Palestinian side over which area to start the project.

Disagreements could be small or large, but given the remarkable agreement over the local issues, one might expect more coordination and cooperation between the political factions.

All in all, given the answers of the residents in the camp, literature on the topic, as well as first count observations during the stay there, it seems fair to argue that the goals of the Palestinians are not met. They are not closer to a return to their original homes. There may be some small steps towards more civil rights for the Palestinians, but they are far from the demands from the refugees. With regards to the camp improvement, there are also few positive signs.

6.4 Discussion. Reasons and consequences

Despite flaws in the political organization of the Palestinians in Lebanon, it would be too simple to put the blame solely on the political organization itself. Indeed, some of the external obstacles facing the Palestinians in Lebanon are so staggering that it would be difficult to overcome them even with a unified political system.

6.4.1 Structural causes

As explained, Palestinians remember the period with the PLO leadership's presence in Lebanon as the years of the revolution. They recall a situation where they felt that they were actively part of the struggle for their homeland, a return to Palestine. When the PLO was forced out in 1982, the political and military leadership left and continued the fight from outside Lebanon. This arguably weakened the PLO as such, but it dramatically affected the Palestinians in Lebanon, and not only politically and militarily. During the years of the revolution there had been plenty of jobs and social benefits for the refugees. After the political leadership of the PLO was forced to leave Lebanon, a considerable amount of funds, jobs and social benefits channeled through the political leadership also "left".

The Oslo Accords, in 1993, left the Palestinian' refugees feeling left behind, as it postponed the issue of right of return to the so-called final status negotiations. What had been seen as an inalienable right was now postponed, signaling that the right of return was an issue that was up for negotiation. At the very least the issue was placed on hold, and history has showed that the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories has taken a much more central role in the future Israeli-Palestinian issue.

Other international issues are also beyond the Palestinians control. UNRWA, the agency in charge of several services in the camp, is under-funded and therefore unable to provide some

of the basic services the agency is set to provide. This is hardly the fault of the Palestinian political system, rather a lack of will of the international community to provide the adequate funds. This leads to poor services in basic fields such as education and health.

It seems obvious, that the political factions are in little position to influence many of the issues that the refugees desire. Hanafi and Long point out that “scarce access to resources since 1982 and the antipathy of the Lebanese state, in particular, have hindered [the popular committees] from fulfilling their municipal functions.” (2010, p.142)

Given the situation in Lebanon and the controversy that surrounds the Palestinian question and tawteen, few of the Lebanese political parties are willing to take the political risk of doing anything that could open them up to accusations of advocating tawteen.

The political climate in Lebanon has also been changing rapidly due to external factors. The Syrian withdrawal and a Lebanese government in frequent crisis, leaves the hope of making progress on the Palestinian file in Lebanon slim.

6.4.2 Internal issues

Though the external issues have serious implications, the internal factors are important in order to understand the failure of the political factions to meet the needs of the refugee population.

The political parties have not been able to create institutions or forms of cooperation that are effective in bringing the Palestinian refugees significantly closer to these goals. The political parties are more organized along fault lines relating to an issue over which they have little influence, namely the strategies to achieve right of return and the recognition of Israel. As such the political factions mirror the political divisions we see in the occupied Palestinian territories. Though this is not at all surprising given that this is the single most important issue for the Palestinians in Lebanon, it has not brought them progress on the fields that they have more influence over, namely civil rights and camp improvement.

6.4.3 The case of double misrepresentation

In his paper, *Islamism in the Diaspora: Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon*, Are Knudsen argues that the Palestinians in Lebanon are "...doubly marginalized: they are deprived of civic rights and barred from returning to their homeland". (2005, p.230)

In a similar way, I argue that the Palestinians in Lebanon are left in an unfortunate situation with a sort of double-misrepresentation. Firstly they have been sidelined from the relevant discussion-making forums with regards to their right of return to their original homes in Palestine. While they felt like a centerpiece in this struggle during the years of the revolution, the situation today is vastly different, with both the political and the military struggle being fought in the occupied Palestinian territories. Furthermore the Oslo Accords put the right to return up for negotiations, opening up the possibility that the issue can be given away in future final status negotiations.

Secondly, when it comes to more local affairs, such as camp improvement and civil rights, the refugees' local political leaders have failed to establish institutions and organizations that are able to influence these topics.

This raises the question over the main reasons why the political factions even exist: they are not elected by the public and not able to serve the refugee population adequately. As we have seen, the refugee population has had a growing distrust of the political parties, especially after the PLO were forced out, some even claiming that the political parties exist simply for self-interest.

To sum up, issues that are outside the realm of influence of the Palestinians in Lebanon have indeed affected the possibility of the political factions to meet the goals of the refugee population. The special situation in Lebanon, where the Palestinian file is filled with controversy, has made it particularly difficult to meet these goals.

Yet, the Palestinian factions remain divided on precisely these issues that are beyond their control. This division has in many cases made it difficult to meet challenges that the refugees meet in Lebanon and which the political factions have considerably more influence over.

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Appendix 1 – List of Interviewees

Abu Aymad	Camp resident. Shop owner in his 70s.
Abu Aysam	Fatah al-Intifada. Member of popular committee?
Abu Muhammed	Camp resident. Shop owner. During interview, the wife and son entered and participated for a brief moment.
Abu Walid	Member of Tahaluf Popular Committe in Burj al-Barajneh
Ahmad Hajj	Camp resident. Author of book on Burj al-Barajneh ”The shadow of life and death” (published in 2008 in Arabic)
Ali Ayyoub	Leader of Palestinian Front for Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC) in Burj al- Barajneh
Ahmed Mustafa	Leader of Democratic Front for Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) in Burj al- Barajneh
Bahaa Hassoun	UNRWA Camp Director, Burj al- Barajneh
Sahar	NGO-representative, Beir Atfal al-Sumud (also known as National Institution of Social Care and Vocational Training (NISCVT), NGO working with the Palestinian communities in Lebanon.
Fouad Daher	Leader of Palestinian Front for Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in Burj al- Barajneh
Housni abu-Taqa	Leader of PLO Popular Committee in Burj al-Barajneg
Sahar Attrach	Researcher for International Crisis Group (ICG) in Lebanon
Jaber Suleiman	Researcher based in Lebanon. Written several articles on Palestinians in Lebanon

Maher Hamound	Local sheikh in Saida. Known for mediating in local conflicts in the Saida area.
Majiha	Association Najdeh, Head of social works in Beirut. Palestinian residing in Shatila refugee camp in Beirut. An employee in Najdeh also participated during parts of the interview.
Rashid al- Mansi	Norwegian Refugee Council, Community Relations Offices for Nahr al-Bared camp in Tripoli and for the Beirut area.
Raafat Morra	Hamas, Leader of Lebanese Relations in Beirut area.
Abu Firaz	Member of Security Committee in Burj al- Barajneh
Wafa Yassir	Resident Representative for Norwegian Peoples Aid in Beirut
Oulfat Mahmoud	Representative from Womens Health Organization, NGO working on womens health in Beirut.

Appendix 2 – Pictures of Burj al-Barajneh



Top left: Water pipelines and electrical cords piled together for “convenience”.

Top right: A typical meeting organized by one of the political factions.

Bottom left: A typical narrow street.

Bottom right: Garbage collecting, UNRWA-style.

All pictures are taken by the author.