

Palestinian refugees: stateless, exiled and excluded

*Sobhi Albadawi**

Abstract

This paper examines the conditions of the Palestinian refugees in host locations by focusing on the political, social and citizenship rights. In doing so, the paper utilizes examples from current locations of displacement to draw some analysis to the debate around citizenship rights and its association to the right of return question. The imbalance of political power and political instability in host location, particularly in Arab states continues to be the major factor of refugee hardship. This is relevant as it is unmasked the truth behind host states' policies about Palestinian refugees and the right of return in particular. In fact, this article brought forward some different argumentation in each case as principle position unites most Arab states. Moreover, the article illustrate how Arab states views the plight of Palestinian refugee may not necessarily be about protecting the right of return but may be used for other implicit reasons such as local and international political agenda.

Key words: *Refugees, citizenship, rights, exclusion, marginalization.*

*Researcher, NSW Sydney, Australia. sobhialbadawi@yahoo.com.au

Introduction

The war of 1948 and the subsequent expulsion of thousands of Palestinian from their home land was the genesis of the Palestinian refugees' problem. In fact, dispersed Palestinians around the world sought refuge and protection while waiting for the conflict to be resolved. The Palestinian refugees issue remains unresolved however after sixty-six years as refugees continue to be subjected to extreme conditions within host states, particularly in Arab countries. The conditions to which the Palestinian refugees in the Arab world are subjected are in a constant state of flux and may differ from one Arab country to another. Indeed, the plight of Palestinian refugees is adversely impacted by changes to the political climate in Arab countries and the threat of political instability (Zureik, 1998: 38). This article focuses on the legal status and socio-political circumstances of Palestinian refugees living in Arab countries since 1948. The Arab countries include Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Libya, Jordan, the Arab gulf, and Kuwait. This Article provides details and analysis of each host country separately and attempts to clarify a number of common aspects including residential rights, nationality, movement and travel, participation in the workforce, and access to government services. In doing so, this article explores the theoretical debate around the broad concept of belonging and social exclusion.

Palestinian refugees in Iraq

Approximately five thousand Palestinians fled to Iraq following the 1948 war (Salamah, 2008: 32). The Iraqi government however did not allow the United Nations Relief Work Agency (UNRWA) to provide services to the refugees, claiming instead that the care of the Palestinians was its duty. As a result, the Palestinian refugees in Iraq were not included in UNRWA records (Shiblak, 2011). After the 1967 war more Palestinians fled to Iraq (Bouckaert, 2006: 8). Iraq granted citizenship to every Arab, including the Palestinians, and the Palestinians enjoyed full citizenship rights, except the right to vote (Takkenberg, 2003: 187). A third influx of Palestinian refugees into Iraq occurred after the Gulf War and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1991. Many Palestinians were forced to leave Kuwait and large numbers of them resettled in Iraq (Bouckaert, 2006: 8), especially the Palestinians of Gaza who were denied the right to return to Gaza in 2003 (Bouckaert, 2006: 36). Following the cessation of hostilities in Iraq and the fall of Saddam Hussein many Palestinians were persecuted and lost their

lives as revenge for their support for Saddam Hussein (Wengert & Alfaro, 2006: 19). Subsequently, the refugees were evicted from Iraq and were forced to move to other neighbouring Arab states and some Scandinavian countries (Sadi & Alsahli, 2007: 13).

The plight of the Palestinian refugees changed with the formation of the Iraqi interim government. In 2005, the minister of displacement and migration called on the government to expel all Palestinian refugees from Iraq on the basis that the Palestinians were involved in terrorism (Bouckaert, 2006: 2). The refugees' permanent residency status was terminated and they were subjected to social exclusion. The Iraqi government also imposed periodic reviews by security authorities on the refugees and stopped issuing travel documents and residency papers (International NGO Delegation, 2008: 1). This resulted in the Palestinian refugees dispersing into three locations: Baghdad; camps on the Jordanian-Syrian borders; and neighbouring countries across the north of Iraq, Iran and other countries (Sadi & Alsahli, 2007: 39).

These Palestinians have been the target of persecution and violence, with militant groups (mostly Shia) claiming they received preferential treatment under Ba'ath Party rule (Wengert & Alfaro, 2006: 19). Currently, several hundred Palestinians from Iraq live in border camps after being refused entry to neighbouring Jordan and Syria. Others have resettled in third countries (Wengert & Alfaro, 2006: 20). In short, Palestinian refugees in Iraq continue to face the uncertainty and the tensions of living in political and legal limbo (Bitar, 2008: 3). Indeed, many issues related to their rights and duties as citizens in the new state remain unresolved. This tension has resulted in the deaths of many Palestinian refugees and the ongoing exclusion of entire communities as they are systematically alienated and refused various rights. As such, Hilary Silver (2007) argues:

Social exclusion is a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live.

According to the 2011 report from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, about 31 thousand Palestinians from an estimated 40 thousand remain in Iraq (UNHCR, 2011). These Palestinians are living in extreme poverty due to high costs of living and the lack of employment opportunities (Charles, 2012).

In addition, the Palestinians' sense of belonging is under constant threat as they do not feel welcome or accepted in Iraq due to political changes in the country. As suggested by Maslow's hierarchy of needs that belonging is a need that human naturally seek in order to feel loved.

In fact satisfying belonging needs means that the social belonging in host states or within communities must play a key in recognizing and accepting refugees regardless of their status.

In others words the elimination of social exclusion by forming inclusion based on integration and social bonds irrespective of political climate satisfies individuals needs and enhances justices including equal political participation. As such Fraser (2010) illustrates that exclusion is grounded in the political constitution of society, as when the architecture of political space denies some people the chance to have even a marginal say in disputes about justice. Indeed, Palestinian refugees were denied political participation within host states and are subjected to authority investigation due to their political affiliation. In addition, I would that Palestinian refugees are active victims of poverty imposed by host states where they are deprived from participation of work force or accessing equal rights.

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon

Due to the geographical position of Lebanon and its borders with Palestine, many Palestinians settled there after the 1948 war. Palestinian refugees now make up about 10 percent of the total population in Lebanon (Hanafi, 2008: 61). Successive governments in Lebanon have considered the refugees to be a source of threat to Lebanese society and as a source for political and social instability (Takkenberg, 2003: 193). According to statistics from the Ministry of Interior in Lebanon there are approximately 415,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (Shafie, 2006: 2). As of June 2011 the number of Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA was 433,000,

although the actual number of refugees residing in the country is estimated at between 260,000 and 280,000 (www.unrwa.org).

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon may be categorised into four groups:

- a. Refugees registered with UNRWA issued with travel documents by the Lebanese government valid for one year and renewable three times;
- b. Refugees not registered with UNRWA but registered with the Red Cross. The Lebanese government has granted them travel documents valid for one year;
- c. Refugees not registered with UNRWA and the Red Cross. The government has issued them travel documents valid for a period of three months, and not valid for return; and
- d. Other refugees from Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza Strip who have lost their original travel documents (Salameh, 2008: 30-31).

The UNRWA established schools in the camps and some Palestinians work in these schools (Al Khalidi, 2002: 3). Public schools are reserved for Lebanese nationals however Palestinians are entitled to access the 10 percent of places offered to foreigners (Suleiman, 2006: 20). The same policies are applied to public universities and therefore Palestinians look to the private sector for higher education depending on their financial resources (Khalil, 2011: 700). Other restrictions are evident related to health services whereby Palestinian refugees are denied access to government hospitals (Suleiman, 1996: 20). Moreover, the legal status of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon remains uncertain as they are deprived of many civil rights including the right to work (Suleiman, 1994). In addition, Lebanese authorities enforce strict security policies whereby refugees must specify when they will enter and leave a camp. This is aimed at reducing movement during the night (Al Khalidi, 2002: 3). As such, Preston and Rajie (2007) argued that a matrix of area accessibility, area mobility and individual mobility as a possible schema for identifying concentrated and scattered manifestations of social exclusion and inclusion and for suggesting appropriate policy responses.

Lebanese law prevents Palestinian refugees from exercising their right to work even if they have valid qualifications to practice medicine, law or engineering, etc. (Shiblak,

1996: 42). Most Palestinian refugees are denied Lebanese nationality despite the government in the early 1950s granting Lebanese citizenship to some 50 thousand Christians and a small number of wealthy Muslims (Zureik, 1998: 46). Furthermore, Lebanese security services prevented all forms of political activity in the camps during the 1960s (Al Khalidi, 2002: 4). Lebanese authorities restricted construction in the refugee camps and adding new buildings or repairing existing structures in the camps was not allowed without prior military approval, which was often denied (PASSIA 2004). This led to further deterioration in their living conditions (Al Khalidi, 2002: 14).

Palestinian refugees were understandably disappointed that the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations failed to address their cause. Residents of the camps felt abandoned by the Palestinian leadership (Al-Hassan, 1996: 60), and this was exacerbated by the feeling the international community had abandoned them as well. In contrast, the Lebanese government perceived Palestinian refugees to be the responsibility of UNRWA and the international community. It is evident however that the efforts of UNRWA to reconstruct the camps were hindered as the government claimed the reconstruction of camps contributed to the resettlement of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (Suleiman, 1994: 167). This is reflected in the official position of the government with the former Prime Minister, Rafik Hariri, stating that he supported the settlement of Palestinian refugees, but that the government would not permit settlement at the expense of the Lebanese state. Indeed, Hariri was opposed to resettlement as a solution to the Palestinian refugee problem in Lebanon (Sfeir, 2010: 34) and so the official position, supported by the majority of the Lebanese people, was to oppose any integration plan in Lebanon. Following the departure of the PLO in 1982, Lebanese authorities aimed at reducing the number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (Shiblak, 1996: 40).

There is a discrepancy between the official and non-official positions in Lebanon concerning the issue of resettlement and marginalisation. The official position on the refusal to resettle the refugees is based on the fear of sectarian imbalance in Lebanon. The non-official position rejects resettlement and refuses to recognise the state of Israel, and demands the return of refugees to their homeland.

Evidently, there is debate on the streets of Lebanon on the issue of the refugees, specifically resettlement. Conflicting attitudes have created a new social situation where civil rights seem more important than citizenship. As Hanafi (2010: 87) stated:

I see a contrast between those who consider the absence of refugee camps to be a critical factor in the process of absorbing the refugees into the identity of the host country, and those who see a relationship between national identity, the housing environment and the connection with the camps. The camps can create a local rather than a national environment.

The official argument is multifaceted and appears to be weak. The Lebanese government views the marginalisation of refugees as a way of determining their right of return and the resettlement option is therefore not permitted in Lebanon (Suleiman, 2006: 18). Moreover the Lebanese government, under the pretext of resettlement, refuses to grant Palestinians their basic civil and economic rights; in addition, the government claims that this form of marginalisation was planned to prevent the termination of UNRWA services (Sfeir, 2010: 34).

These attitudes are not limited to politicians, but are also expressed by the clergy. One such clergy member, the Maronite Patriarch Cardinal Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir, stated:

Lebanon has suffered for twenty-five years because of the Palestinian presence and there are now rumours that the past can come back (Sfeir, 2010: 35).

The clergyman also indicated that the issue of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon hinders the country's security and peace (Sfeir, 2010: 35). These opinions reflect the legislature in that The Constitution does not support the partition of Palestine or the resettlement of Palestinians in Lebanon (ElZebon, 2000: 29). As a result, there is no future in Lebanon for the Palestinian. As described by Young (2000)

The outcome of social exclusion is that affected individuals or communities are prevented from participating fully in the economic, social, and political life of the society in which they live.

Hanafi (2008: 56) claimed the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon are islands of security and are used as field experiments for control and security surveillance. He

adds that the exclusionary practices involve the participation of different groups and different levels of government; expressed in multiple policies (Hanafi, 2008: 56).

The insistence on the excluding Palestinian refugees and denying them their privileges granted by international conventions and treaties – such as the Geneva Convention 1951 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 – is justified by the Lebanese state under the guise of their anti-settlement policy (Suleiman, 2006: 11). This is despite the Lebanese state acknowledging that the refugees have rights in the settlement process. Hence, Palestinian refugees remain in a social situation of instability and uncertainty underpinned by their lack of trust of confidence in the government of Lebanon as well as Palestinian negotiators.

Palestinians are not allowed to benefit from social security, health services or to belong to trade unions and are excluded from participating in 72 occupations (Salameh, 2008: 31). Following the end of the Lebanese civil war the social exclusion of Palestinians intensified dramatically as a result of the involvement of the PLO in the civil war. The refugees were subjected to degrading treatment and socio-economic exclusion (Khalid & Riskadle, 2010: 3). Palestinian men had a lower earning capacity than Lebanese men in all aspects of employment. Palestinian women were also subjected to discriminatory practices. Although they were able to work in the health and social sectors in particular they were forced to pay higher taxes than the local Lebanese women (Abdulrahim & Khawaja, 2011: 151). As such, Lister (2003) claims that those physically excluded from a territory, exclusion does operate as an absolute.

Palestinian refugees in Jordan

Since 1950 and the establishment of the Kingdom of Jordan a large numbers of Palestinian refugees have settled in Jordan (Al-Aza'r, 2004: 17). Palestinian refugees were considered Jordanian citizens according to Jordanian nationality laws introduced in 1954, with the accession of the West Bank to the Kingdom of Jordan (PASSIA 2004). As a result, Palestinians fully exercised their citizenship rights just as the Jordanians did, including military service (Takkenberg, 2003: 187). Nevertheless, Palestinian refugees who lived in UNRWA refugee camps remain worse off in all aspects of life (Arneberg, 1997: 7). Camp refugees are employed mainly in low

income jobs with extended work hours and non-flexible conditions. Therefore, poverty among these refugees is common (Khawaja, 2003: 33).

Refugees and displaced persons in Jordan are divided into two groups: 13 percent living in the UNRWA refugee camps and the remaining refugees have settled in major cities and other areas (Arneberg, 1997: 7). Palestinians who fled to Jordan during the war of 1967 or later are not considered citizens of Jordan. Moreover, they would be considered as second class citizens by a resident of Jordan (Zureik, 1998: 44). In addition, Gazans displaced by the 1967 war are not entitled to Jordanian citizenship (Zureik, 1998). However, they are eligible for temporary Jordanian passports which do not entitle them to full citizenship rights such as the right to vote and employment in government agencies (Khawaja, 2003: 34).

One may argue that citizenship rights must be exercised in their full capacity to prevent social instability and organised social exclusion. As such, Lija (2011) argues that the concept of citizenship is connected with certain rights, like the right to vote or stand for election, the right to property and so on. However, opponents of this argument may suggest the government of Jordan denied certain groups these rights in response to demands from Palestinians and their officials in order to prevent settlement as a substitute to right of return.

In 1988, after the first Intifada, King Hussein responded to the demands of the Palestinian people and abandoned the rule of the West Bank. This automatically resulted in the loss of Jordanian citizenship rights for the people of West Bank (Hasawi, 2008: 185). However, in the aftermath of separation the remaining Palestinians could use their Jordanian passport for only two years and were denied permanent residency in Jordan (Takkenberg, 2003: 188). According to UNRWA figures as of January 2012, Jordan has a Palestinian refugee population of 1,979,580 million (UNRWA, 2012).

There are a total of 13 Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, ten official and three unofficial camps (UNRWA, 2012). Five of the camps: Irbid, Wihdat, Hussein, Maddaba and Zarqa were established after the 1948 war, the remaining camps were established as a result of 1967 war (Khawaja, 2003: 35).

Palestinian refugees in Syria

In 1948 about 90 thousand Palestinian refugees fled to Syria and relocated in all Syrian governorates. About 30 percent of Palestinian refugees in Syria live in approximately 10 camps (Daraj, 2006: 72) recognised by the UNRWA, and some live outside the camps. However, there are 13 Palestinian refugee camps in Syria. These camps receive UNRWA services including health and education (UNRWA). After 1949, the government of Syria enacted a set of laws which guaranteed equal rights for Palestinians residing in Syria including the right of employment, labour, and trade, military service and to keep their Palestinian nationality (Takkenberg, 2003: 198). Moreover the refugees were issued travel documents which gave them the right to obtain the services of Syrian embassies abroad, just as do Syrian citizens (Daraji, 2006: 73). Equal rights contributed to Palestinian refugees afforded living conditions similar to Syrian citizens (Tiltnes, 2007: 8). Evidently, Palestinian refugees have been better integrated into the Syrian community compared to the Jordan and Lebanon communities. Therefore, Palestinian refugees in Syria have the same social and economic rights as Syrian citizens, including the right to seek employment in all sectors (Tiltnes, 2007: 45).

Equal socio-economic rights empower Palestinian refugees with travel documents to return to Syria without the need for a return visa (Malaf, 2007). This is contrary to the type of travel documents granted to Palestinians from other governments (Malaf, 2007). Palestinian refugees have the right to belong. They also have the right to property and movement like Syrian citizens (Alsahlie, 1999: 221). Palestinian children attend schools run by the UNRWA, Syrian government schools, and private school (Tiltnes, 2007: 27). Furthermore, Palestinian children have equal access to free public education with Syrians. They also have the same access rights to universities as Syrians (Tiltnes, 2007: 27; Khalil, 2011: 700).

During this period Palestinian resettlement projects have been undertaken in Syria, specifically in the north-eastern regions Syria, Turkey, and Iraq. However, the refugees have refused to be resettled (Al-Sahli, 2006).

In the wake of the Oslo Accords several claims were made about the settlement of refugees in Syria because they have access to civil rights and their proportion in Syria

does not exceed 3% of the total population. Palestinian refugees in Syria have shown their unwillingness to resettle there however and maintain their determination to realise their right of return (Al-Sahli, 2006). This reflects Hanafi's (2010: 64) assertion that granting Palestinians civil and economic rights does not further the cause of resettlement.

At the Madrid Conference in 1991, Syria insisted on upholding the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland as part of the peace process (Malaf, 2007). In addition, Syria refused to participate in the multilateral negotiations on the basis that it held the position that the Arab-Israeli withdrawal from Arab and Palestinian territories was a prerequisite to any negotiations on regional issues (Malaf, 2007).

Syria also opposed the transfer of UNRWA responsibilities to a developmental organisation. The Syrian government considered that such a transfer would encourage international settlement projects for Palestinians (Malaf, 2007). Al-Mawed argued that most Palestinian refugees were satisfied with the UNRWA services. In addition there is a common belief among camp dwelling and non-camp dwelling Palestinian refugees in Syria that such cuts in UNRWA services are politically motivated (Al-Mawed, 1999: 32).

Following the fall of Hussein regime in Iraq hundreds of Palestinian refugee families were expelled and tortured leading to their migration back to Syria to seek asylum (Salameh, 2008: 29). Currently, refugees on the Syrian-Iraq border live in extremely difficult conditions (Salameh, 2008: 29). The Syrian government allowed them to travel to the Syrian border and imposed restrictions on their movement in and out of the camps. This reinforces the point made at the beginning of the article that the survival of governments depends on how they manage the refugees' issue. If there is hostility in one Arab country it may impact negatively on refugees in general and the conditions of their stay in the host country. This is evident after the fall of the Hussain regime in Iraq, the Oslo agreement, and the collapse of the Palestinian relationship with Libya.

The fallout from these events led to the displacement of thousands of Palestinians onto the Egyptian-Libyan borders where, for political reasons, they have been denied

residency in the host country for the second time. Once again, the current political crisis in Syria and the instability in the region have resulted in instability for the Palestinian refugees in the region especially for those in Syria. A number of leading parties have demanded the expulsion of some Palestinian refugees leaders from Syria and have also opened communications with Israel, all of which means Palestinian refugees are in danger of losing the rights they currently have.

As the Syrian uprising gathered momentum and the Syrian regime escalated its opposition to what started as a peaceful revolt, concerns have emerged about the impact of the uprising on Palestinian refugees in Syria. The current unrest resulted in the involving many refugee camps. A significant number of Palestinian refugees have been killed, injured or forced to leave their homes to relocated within Syria, other Arab states or abroad. In fact, Palestinian refugees have left Syria to more unknown faith where a high number of them end up missing or died in the way to a third country.

The Palestinian political elite in Syria are divided. Some factions have desperately attempted to appear neutral, distancing themselves from the unrest. Others have actively supported the regime. The opposition movements in Syria demonstrate different views regarding how to manage the refugees. The current trend is to associate the stability of the refugees with the Palestinian political movements within Syria, where the Popular Front General Command is the main target. A well known Syrian Sociologist, Borhan Ghalioun, commented to various news agencies that in the event of a government forming after the fall of Asad regime he will terminate relationships with Hamas and consider the resettlement of refugees in Syria by overriding the UNGA Resolution 194 (Mjhar, 2012).

One could argue the current situation does not offer refugees any form of stability or protection. Palestinian leadership has called for Palestinians not to be involved in the internal conflict. However, young Palestinians from different refugee camps and informal gatherings continue to participate in the current conflict. In the event the Asad regime keeps control of the country, Palestinian refugees may face significant consequences. On the other hand, opposition movements continue to claim Palestinian political movements will be marginalised and therefore refugees will have less political representation (Salaimaha, 2012: 24).

Palestinian refugees in the Gulf

A large number of Palestinians have migrated to Persian Gulf countries since the early post-exodus period to improve their quality of life. Included were skilled workers and teachers as well as unskilled workers. Indeed, Palestinians have become the largest expatriate community in the Gulf (Takkenberg, 2003: 190). However no Arab Gulf government granted Palestinian refugees the right to citizenship or permanent residence, and they retained strict control over work and residence permits. The nationality legislation sets very strict limits on the acquisition of citizenship for non-natives.

Palestinians continued to participate in the work force and this attracted further migration from their families and friends until 1991. Following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait PLO leaders supported Saddam Hussein (Hasawi, 2008: 188). As a result, the Kuwaiti government deported large numbers of Palestinians to Jordan specifically. After the end of the war Palestinians remained a focus of hostility and prejudice. They found themselves in a precarious situation. Some of them could not return to Palestine and the only option was to resettle in Iraq (Takkenberg, 2003: 192).

Palestinian refugees in Kuwait

In 1990 there were approximately 400,000 Palestinian residents in Kuwait (Schulz, 2003: 64). The Palestinian community there was well established however the refugees have not been granted citizenship as no foreigners can become citizens (Schulz, 2003: 65). The relationship between the Palestinian and the Kuwaiti government entered a new phase when the Gulf States accused the Palestinians and the PLO of supporting the Iraq invasion of Kuwait (Schulz, 2003: 66). The consequences of the war forced more than half of the Palestinians in Kuwait for fear of persecutions (Schulz, 2003: 67).

Palestinian refugees in Libya

Palestinians in Libya hold special status which gives them the right of residency, the right to leave, and the right to participation in the workforce. Of all Arab countries Libya was the most welcoming and accepting of Palestinians (Zureik, 1996: 50). The

situation worsened for the Palestinians after 1995 however when the Security Council place an embargo on Libya. The Libyan leader expelled thousands of Palestinians to the borders of Libya and Egypt (Takkenberg, 2003: 197). The majority of Palestinians were not allowed to enter Egypt and were kept on the borders until 1997 when Libya agreed to resettle them within its borders (Hasawi, 2008: 189). Palestinians in Libya were denied access to government health services and required to fund all medical cost (Shaml, 1996). In addition, they were denied the right to participate in the work force or to obtain housing or education (Shaml, 1996).

Palestinian refugees in Egypt

Given the geographical location of Palestine on Egypt's border, a significant number of Palestinians fled to Egypt after 1948. However there is a lack of reliable statistics on the number of refugees in Egypt (Zureik, 1996: 47). The estimated number of the Palestinians in Egypt ranges from 50 thousand to 100 thousand (Shiblak, 1993: 36), mainly in the government areas of Cairo, Giza and Alexandria (El Abed, 2006: 65). The majority of Palestinians living in Egypt come from the Gaza Strip. In 1956, another group of refugees arrived in Egypt as a result of the Suez crisis (Yasin, 1996). Furthermore, Palestinians were forced to flee to Egypt after the 1967 war, and Israeli forces deported approximately 1,800 Palestinian men to Egypt (Al-Sarragj, 1986: 40). There are also many Palestinian refugees from Arab countries who are unable to return home due to Israel's refusal to allow them to enter the region. This includes refugees expelled from countries such as Kuwait, Libya and Iraq (Shiblak, 1996: 39)

The plight of Palestinians in Egypt is strongly associated with the political affairs among governments in the Arab World (Bitar, 2008). During the Jamal Abdel Nasser era of nationalism Palestinians received fair treatment (El Abed, 2006: 66). However following Nasser's rule and the formation of the Sadat government the treatment of the Palestinians deteriorated. Indeed, their plight worsened as the crisis emerged between the PLO leadership and Egyptian rulers in 1975, specifically after the signing of an agreement with Israel by Sadat (Takkenberg, 2003: 185). The treatment of the Palestinians became more arbitrary and this increased the gap between the Palestinian refugees and Egyptian nationals. Moreover, the crisis led to legislative changes as the President banned equality in relations between Egyptians and Palestinians (El-Abed, 2003: 5).

Furthermore, Palestinians were treated as foreigners and strangers, and were not allowed to engage in education and government schools (Schulz, 2003: 63). This was a ministerial decision and the particular restrictions meant Palestinians had to obtain work permits before they participated in the work force (Al-Sharmani, 2008: 6). The social exclusion also extended to limitation being placed on the movement of Palestinians, travel restriction and their right to residency (Badil, 2009: 28). Regarding residency, Palestinian refugees in Egypt are divided into several categories according to the time of entry. For instance, Palestinians who have been residents for more than 10 years have to renew their residency once every three years; and refugees who entered between 1948 and 1953 have to renew their residency every five years (Yasin, 1996). In addition, all Palestinians are required to renewing their residency before leaving and must obtain a visa to return to the country (Yasin, 1996). Therefore, Palestinians abroad are constantly required to return to Egypt to renew their visa, either within six months of departure, or within one year (Bitar, 2008: 20)

It is worth mentioning that Palestinian refugees did not access UNRWA support as was the case in Lebanon and other countries (El-Abed, 2003). In fact, UNRWA operations did not reach the refugees in Egypt, nor did assistance from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (El-Abed, 2003: 1). Policies and regulations applied to Palestinian refugees are set by the State which also determines what rights they are afforded (Khalil, 2011: 694). El-Abed (2003: 4) argues that the policies of host countries within Arab States vary according to the onset of certain political events and the position of the PLO. Egypt's policies therefore shifted towards a reduction in the rights of Palestinians. Furthermore, Shiblak (1996: 40) contends that refugees who were born in Egypt or who have lived there most of their lives are not treated equally and must seek a visa when travelling in and out of Egypt (Shiblak, 1996: 40). The restrictions place on the movements of Palestinian refugees and the visa requirements included refusal of re-entry if the visa holder failed to renew the visa on time (Shiblak, 1996: 40). Family reunification rights for residency are also not exercised in Egypt (Shiblak, 1996: 44). Therefore, if a Palestinian refugee marries an Egyptian citizen he or she does not have automatic right to citizenship. Furthermore, restrictions included Palestinian refugees being denied the right to own property and additional regulations were introduced which required land and property owners to terminate their right within five years (Khalil, 2011: 703). This social exclusion also

extended to Palestinians being prevented from creating their own local community representatives (El-Abed, 2011: 2)

Conclusion

Palestinian refugees continue to be displaced in many Arab countries. This journey of statelessness persists due to the lack of stability in the region and as a result of changes in government, as well as due to the international community's failure to address the Palestinian's right of return. The practices among Arab governments appear to be similar in terms of the way they treat refugees. Despite international attention, segregation and exclusion of Palestinian refugees remained a problem at the time of drafting this article. Almost every Palestinian refugee community has been subjected to some form of harassment, discrimination, torture and mistreatment at the hand of officials or political factions in the host country. Host governments perceive Palestinians as a source of instability and as a potential threat. The plight of Palestinian refugees in host countries is made all the more unique due to their inability to return to Palestine or to resettle elsewhere. It is evident that Arab States restrict and regulate the access Palestinian refugees have to social and civil rights in different ways. Notwithstanding these differences, it remains the case that most refugees are treated as second class people without political, social and economic rights.

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