

The Legal Exclusion of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

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RESEARCH QUESTION

Why has the Lebanese government not improved the legal rights and protections of Palestinian refugees since their entry into the country in 1948?

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are unique:

- ❖ Three-generations worth reside in refugee camps
- ❖ Lack legal status and social, political, and economic rights
- ❖ Their plight is neglected due to the influx of Syrian refugees

LITERATURE REVIEW

Daniel Meier & Nur Masalha

- ❖ The state weaponizes *tawteen* (naturalization) to maintain anti-integration policies
- ❖ Human rights are framed as a pathway to naturalization

Simon Haddad & Waleed Serhan

- ❖ The presence of predominantly Sunni Muslim Palestinian refugees threatens the fragile demographic balance of a state founded upon sectarian power-sharing



Figure 1. Cartoon depicting a man being crushed by the word “displaced” published in *Tele Liban*

FROM SYMPATHY TO SCAPEGOATS

PRE-CIVIL WAR ERA

- ❖ Government & citizens welcomed refugees
- ❖ Affluent Palestinians were naturalized and contributed socially, economically & culturally
- ❖ The 1969 Cairo Agreement legitimized the presence of Palestinian armed militias
- ❖ Palestinian militias received full governmental support

POST-CIVIL WAR ERA

- ❖ Post-war era marked the start of increasing restrictions
- ❖ Post-war rhetoric downplayed the negligence of the state and blamed the Palestinians for their involvement

INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION GAP

Palestinian refugees occupy a unique status internationally

- ❖ Are the only refugee group that falls under the auspices of UNRWA
- ❖ Are not protected by the 1951 Refugee Convention
- ❖ UNRWA’s chronic financial crisis affects vulnerable Palestinians who rely entirely on its services

DOMESTIC LAW & HUMAN RIGHTS

Domestic mistreatment is a byproduct of the international protection gap

- ❖ Palestinians are barred from buying or transferring property, working in 36 professions, and accessing any government services available to citizens
- ❖ UNRWA is the sole provider for services, including education and health care
- ❖ All 12 official refugee camps suffer from severe poverty, overcrowding & deficient infrastructure
- ❖ Children are commonly exploited for cheap labor



Figure 2. Photo of the Shatila Refugee Camp, taken by Mohammed Asad, 2012

CONCLUSIONS

- ❖ What was once the Palestinian *cause* evolved into the Palestinian *problem*
- ❖ Solutions include increasing donor funding for UNRWA and alleviating restrictions on employment opportunities
- ❖ International pressure should be placed on Lebanon to ratify the Refugee Convention and its Protocol

Bibliography

Figure 1. Abou Jaoude, Elias, and Joey Ayoub. “Refugees in Lebanon Are Still Being Scapegoated in the Media and in Academia.” *Global Voices*, December 14, 2017. <https://globalvoices.org/2017/12/14/refugees-in-lebanon-are-still-being-scapegoated-in-the-media-and-in-academia/>.

Figure 2. Webster, Nick. “Special Report: Mental Health in Focus as Beirut’s Refugee Camp Workers Feel the Strain.” *The National*. The National, August 12, 2019. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/special-report-mental-health-in-focus-as-beirut-s-refugee-camp-workers-feel-the-strain-1.897378>.