Between guest and intruder: The political agency of the Palestinian community in Lebanon

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Abstract

Scholars commonly analyze Lebanon in terms of fragility or weakness. However, its history says that it is also a refugee country where multiple communities have settled after facing persecution. One of these communities is the Palestinian, which arrived in Lebanon in the mid-20th century. Over the years, Palestinian refugees have developed multiple and intertwined means of political agency in this country. This research aims to understand which have been these means, how they have been used, and what have been their potential effects on Lebanon's domestic politics.

Keywords: Lebanon, refugees, Palestinians, political agency

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"Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted."

Edward Said – Reflections on Exile

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1. List of abbreviations

ANM: Arab Nationalist Movement

ASAP: Arab Socialist Action Party

LNM: Lebanese National Movement

LNRF: Lebanese National Resistance Front

LPDC: Lebanese–Palestinian Dialogue Committee

OCAL: Organization of Communist Action in Lebanon

PFLP: Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine

PLA: Palestinian Liberation Army

PLO: Palestine Liberation Organization

PRC: Palestinian Return Centre

PRCS: Palestine Red Crescent Society

UAR: United Arab Republic

UNRWA: United Nations Relief and Works Agency

2. Introduction

Lebanon's contemporary history has partially revolved around the presence of refugee migrants. Today, this tiny republic hosts around 2 million of them, constituting 30% of its population[1]. One of the largest refugee communities there is the Palestinian, whose total number remains unclear. Whereas UNRWA (which administers 12 refugee camps in this country) estimates around 500.000, the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC) affirms that it is no more than 250.000[2].

Palestinians started to seek asylum in Lebanon after being expelled from Mandatory Palestine in 1948, representing "the longest-lasting refugee exile group in modern history"[3]. They have found themselves in prolonged exile throughout this period, calling this forced exodus *Nakba* (tragedy)[4] while struggling for statehood and claiming their "right to return" as stipulated in the UN Resolution 194[5].

In Lebanon, Palestinian integration has been one of the permanently debated issues of its domestic politics[6]. The state has rejected settlement (*al-tawteen*), excluding Palestinians from citizenship on demographic, political, and socio-economic grounds[7]. Indeed, the presence of this community has been seen as a disruptive element to the already fragile Lebanese reality[8].

Nevertheless, refugee presence in Lebanon is not something new. Long before its constitution as a republic in the first quarter of the last century, this country consisted of multiple forms of governance shaped by different refugee communities coexisting in

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[1] UNHCR. "Lebanon: fact sheet" (2021). https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/1262 (last access Feb. 4th, 2022).

[2] Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee. "Population and Housing Census in Palestinian Camps and Gatherings in Lebanon 2017" (2017): https://www.lpdc.gov.lb/DocumentFiles/Key%20Findings%20report%20En-636566196639789418.pdf (last access June 4th, 2022).

[3] Knudsen, Are. "Islamism in the diaspora: Palestinian refugees in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 18, No. 2 (2005): 5.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Halabi, Zeina. "Exclusion and identity in Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps: a story of sustained conflict". *Environment & Urbanization* Vol. 16, No. 2 (2004): 44.

[6] ReliefWeb. "The Palestinians' purgatory in Lebanon" (2007): https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/palestinians-purgatory-lebanon (last access May 17th, 2022).

[7] Bekah, Armend & Antara, Lina. "Political Participation of Refugees: Bridging the Gaps". *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance* (2018): 34

[8] El Khazen, Farid. "Permanent Settlement of Palestinians in Lebanon: A Recipe for Conflict". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol.10, No. 3 (1997): 280.

juxtaposition. The arrival of Maronites, Shiites, and Druze in the 11th century, Greek Catholics in the 18th, Greek Orthodox in the 19th, Armenian, Kurds, and Palestinians in the 20th, and more recently, Syrians, are only some examples. Yet most analyses of Lebanon's history have revolved around the relationship between fragility and sectarianism, without emphasizing its specific role in hosting refugees.

The paradox here is that Lebanon is never depicted as a refugee country despite this role throughout most of its history. However, this historical reality has clashed with the permanent state rejection of conceding civic and political rights to some refugee communities, such as the Palestinian. A question therefore arises as to whether this community has politically responded to this exclusionary situation and if so, how. In this way, the present study seeks to analyze how Palestinians have used political agency in Lebanon and whether or not this has affected the country's domestic politics. With that purpose in mind, the research question will be: "How has the Palestinian refugee community engaged with politics in Lebanon since its arrival in 1948?".

By using a narrative-constructivist methodology, it will be argued that, throughout the years, Palestinians have used primarily three main mechanisms of political agency: student activism, transnational guerrilla warfare, "rebelocracy", and non-partisan grassroots initiatives. Indeed, exclusion from citizenship and other formal means of political agency (such as the right to vote) has promoted the use of alternative informal ways. This argument provides a different narrative of the refugee experience: refugees can become active political agents instead of being characterized by social passivity and victimhood. Palestinian presence in Lebanon proves that, helping to hypothesize that this community has been able to shape Lebanese domestic politics.

This research will be divided into four parts. The following section will consist of a literature review, analyzing the state-of-the-art academic literature on Lebanon and the Palestinians in this country. In turn, it will be challenged the assumption that Lebanon is only a fragile and sectarian state by nature. This will be followed by a brief conceptual analysis justifying two main elements: why Lebanon should be understood as a refugee country and what political agency and "rebelocracy" mean. The third section will try to understand the Palestinian political agency in Lebanon and whether it has shaped or not the domestic politics of this country. Last, some brief conclusions will be drawn.

3. Literature review

More than one century has passed since the creation of modern Lebanon, a country whose social, economic, demographic, and sectarian bounds have been commonly analyzed in terms of fragility or weakness. This has led authors, such as Joseph Bayeh, to argue that "most of the literature on Lebanon focuses extensively, if not exclusively, on its divided nature and the impact of this on its political developments"[9].

Indeed, Michael C. Hudson, one of the world's leading scholars analyzing Lebanon's history, tagged Lebanese polity as "archaic, inefficient and divided"[10]. According to him, family alliances and clientelism have historically fostered fragmentation and divided the country along sectarian lines[11]. Similarly, Kamal Salibi (who is, according to Alexander Henley, Lebanon's most famous historian)[12], affirmed: "in all but name, Lebanon today is a non-country where people have always remained divided"[13].

Following the different academic definitions inspired by Joel S. Migdal's *Strong societies and weak states* (1989), fragility means that a country (in this case, Lebanon) has an inefficient administration and corrupted institutions (illegitimate political institutions), a lack of monopolized legitimate use of violence (physical insecurity), a national economy with low levels of social welfare (bad economic management), and political destabilization as a result of identity cleavages (undermined national identity)[14].

Even though these variables correspond to the current reality of Lebanon, they are necessary but not sufficient conditions to understand its historical nature. Hence, this study attempts to go beyond the classical categorization of this country as a fragile or divided state and do its bit by looking at it from a different perspective: as a refugee country. After an exhaustive analysis of multiple secondary sources, this has been found to be an element overlooked by scholars.

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[9] Bayeh, Joseph. "Unipolarity and the 'Second Republic'". In *A History of Stability and Change in Lebanon: Foreign Interventions and International Relations* (2017): 3.
[10] Hudson, Michael C. Introduction to *The Precarious Republic: Modernization in Lebanon* (1968): 3.
[11] Ibid., 5.
[12] Henley, Alexander. "The Maronites". In *Routledge Book of Minorities in the Middle East* (2018): 91.
[13] Salibi, Kamal. Introducition to *A House of Many Mansions: A History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (1988): 2.
[14] Thakur, Monika (2012). "Fragile states: bridging the gap between theory and reality". *London School of Ecnomcis and Political Science* Vol. 3, No. 3 (2012): 394.

Labeling Lebanon in this way allows challenging the parameters of cosmopolitanism, which tends to wrongly frame cultural diversity and multi-national societies only within "Western" countries. Indeed, Will Kymlicka (one of the leading scholars on cultural diversity) has considered that multiculturalism has only taken place in "the West". According to him, symbols of diverse ethnocultural and national groups have been principally allowed in efficient liberal democracies[15].

Categorizing Lebanon as a refugee country is also an excellent way to find common ground between the parallel historiography of the country's different religious sects. As Yusri Hazran affirms, "sixty-five years after gaining independence, Lebanon still lacks an agreed, consensual, historical narrative"[16]. Christian historians have overemphasized the Phoenician roots of the country, Druze have considered themselves the real founding fathers, Sunnis have highlighted the role of the Islamic period, and Shiites have idealized Jabal Amil as their stronghold in southern Lebanon since the 7th century[17].

When it comes specifically to the refugee phenomenon in Lebanon, a growing body of literature has tended to analyze the overall situation from a single perspective: the relationship between fragility, security, and humanitarian action. As Armend Bekah and Lina Antara argue, this is the consequence of seeing refugees "as passive recipients of humanitarian aid, rather than as active political agents"[18]. This type of analysis can be divided into two perspectives. On the one hand, some, like Tamirace Fakhoury, assert that the lack of instruments protecting refugees has been a synonym of state fragility. According to this author, the way the Lebanese state has negotiated its reception politics proves its institutions' dysfunctionality[19]. On the other hand, there are authors, like Carmen Geha and Joumana Talhouk, who have sustained that the government's response

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[15] Kymlicka, Will. Introduction to *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and Citizenship* (2001): 2.
[16] Hazran, Yusri. "Between authenticity and alienation: The Druzes and Lebanon's history". *School of Oriental and African Studies* Vol. 72, No. 3 (2009): 460-461.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Bekah, Armend & Antara, Lina. "Political Participation of Refugees: Bridging the Gaps". *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance* (2018): 13.
[19] Fakhoury, Tamirace. "Governance strategies and refugee response: Lebanon in the face of Syrian displacement". *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 49, No. 7 (2017): 681.

to refugee presence has contradicted the logic of a weak state: its move from mere United Nations recipient to active policy shaper would confirm this idea[20].

All in all, scholars have not spent that much time analyzing how refugees in Lebanon have engaged in politics. Issues related to the political agency (a potential externality for host countries, according to Idean Saleyhan)[21] have been largely ignored. Rarely does one find up-to-date work providing in-depth analysis of this issue. An excellent example of this can be seen in the lack of contemporary studies on the Palestinian political agency in Lebanon. Most date back to between the 1960s and the 1990s and have only focused on the PLO's (Palestine Liberation Organization) role, ignoring other actors and mechanisms. For example, authors such as Are Knudsen explained how Palestinian refugees went from remaining politically passive during the early 1960s to becoming progressively politicized due to this organization[22]. Similarly, Abbas Shibak argued that the PLO presence in Lebanon could be divided into three different phases (securing of its base, rule in exile from Tunis, and confrontation after the Oslo Accords)[23].

In this way, then and today, there is a shortage of studies analyzing the Palestinian political agency in Lebanon before and after the PLO. Rex Brynen already stated years ago that "political activity in the Palestinian diaspora has taken various forms, ranging from participation in the political systems of host societies to local community organization and participation in a broader nationalist movement"[24]. This study aims to analyze these other "various forms" and their potential role in shaping Lebanese domestic politics. This will be pursued by creating new categories, inspired by Armen Bekah and Lina Antara's categorization of political agency means: formal (access to citizenship, electoral rights, and membership and association with political parties) and non-formal

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[20] Geha, Carmen & Talhouk Joumana. "From Recipients of Aid to Shapers of Policies: Conceptualizing Government-United Nations Relations during the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 32, No. 4 (2018): 645

[21] Salehyan, Idean. "The Externalities of Civil Strife: Refugees as a Source of International Conflict". *American Journal of Political Science* Vol. 52, No. 4 (2008): 789-790.

[22] Knudsen, Are. "Widening the Proection Gap: The 'Politics of Citizenship' for Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon, 1948-2008". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 22, No. 1 (2009): 54.

[23] Shiblak, Abbas. "Palestinians in Lebanon and the PLO". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol.10, No. 3 (1997): 267

[24] Brynen, Rex. "The Politics of Exile: The Palestinians in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 3, No. 3 (1990): 204.

(consultative bodies, civil society organizations, protests and grassroots initiatives, and other means of transnational political activism)[25].

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[25] Bekah, Armend & Antara, Lina. "Political Participation of Refugees: Bridging the Gaps". International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2018): 11.

4. Methodology

The present study constitutes a within-case analysis using mainly a narrative-constructivist methodology. The combination of narrative analysis and constructivism allows comprehending the different levels involved in stories and exploring how people explain their lives. Rather than using the latter from a single perspective, this poststructuralist-rooted methodology acknowledges the complexities of social phenomena and how stories can be understood differently[26]. Therefore, this research is not aimed to explain a social phenomenon through multiple independent variables (what Xs caused Y in Z), as a process-tracing methodology would do[27]. Contrarily, it tries to understand certain realities that result from subjective choices tied to a particular context[28].

As Cigdem Esin et. al. explain, there is no single way to implement this methodology[29]. Hence, there is a need to clarify how narratives have been selected. Primary qualitative data has been collected from two semi-structured interviews, allowing the interviewees to construct their discourses on different topics while raising general and indirect questions. These have been held with one of the founders of the Palestinian NGO Beit Atfal Assomoud (which works with Palestinian children in Lebanon) and a former member of the ANM (Arab Nationalist Movement) and the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine); from now on, K.A. and F.B. respectively[30]. Other primary data has also been employed: news articles and statements from Palestinian and Lebanese political leaders.

Secondary sources (relevant academic literature) have had two main aims. On the one hand, developing the conceptual analysis (explaining why Lebanon should be primarily considered a refugee country and what political agency and "rebelocracy" mean). On the

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[26] Esin, Cigdem; Fathi, Mastoureh & Squire, Corinne. "Narratives Analysis: The Constructionist Approach". In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* (2013): 2.

[27] Mahoney, James. "Process Tracing and Historical Explanation". *Security Studies* Vol. 24, No. 2 (2015): 201.

[28] Pihlainen, Kalle. "Rereading narrative constructivism". *Rethinking History. The Journal of Theory and Practice* Vol. 17, No. 4 (2013): 511.

[29] Esin, Cigdem; Fathi, Mastoureh & Squire, Corinne. "Narratives Analysis: The Constructionist Approach". In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* (2013): 6.

[30] The interviews can be found on the appendices.

other hand, understanding the means of political agency used by Palestinians in Lebanon since their arrival in 1948 and if they have shaped or not Lebanon's domestic politics.

5. Conceptual framework

As Carolyn Cartier has explained, maritime cities have historically been attractive for developing cosmopolitan societies with a high level of economic activity[31]. Indeed, Lebanon is today a small republic located on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean that, throughout its history, has economically benefited from its coastal geographical position. Its capital, Beirut, became a leading Eastern Mediterranean port and one of the most economically dynamic cities of the Levant since the end of the mercantilist era[32]. This situation attracted multiple refugee communities from nearby regions that saw there a source of economic opportunity, engendering complex cultural formations.

Some of these communities were the Maronite and the Druze. The earlier started to seek refuge in Lebanon during the 7th century[33]. In contrast, the latter did not settle as a refugee community until facing persecution from Wahhabi raids in Syria in the 19th century[34]. The urge for autonomy of the Maronites and the Druze fueled their dominance in Lebanon during the different stages of the Ottoman pre-state era[35]: the Emirate, the *kaymakamate and the mutesarrifate.*

During the first feudal political system under Ottoman rule, the Emirate of Mount Lebanon (which came into existence in 1590), specific patterns of cooperation and co-existence were established between the Maronites and the Druze. Their administrative system was composed of districts (*muqata'as*) in which political authority was distributed among autonomous feudal families (*muqata'jis*)[36]. Later, a massive expansion of Maronite territories took place, becoming the most widespread community in the 17th and 18th centuries [37]. The Maronite's high level of economic activity enabled this sect to maintain autonomy under the Ottomans. This reality served decades later as basis for a

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[31] Cartier, Carolyn. "Cosmopolitics and the Maritime World City". *Geographical Review* Vol. 89, No. 2 (1999): 278.
[32] Issawi, Charles. "Economic Development and Liberalism in Lebanon". *Middle East Journal* Vol. 18, No. 3 (1964): 281.
[33] Salibi, Kamal. "The mountain refuge". In *A House of Many Mansions: A History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (1988): 137.
[34] Ibid., 138.
[35] Bayeh, Joseph. "The European System and Pre-State Lebanon". In *A History of Stability and Change in Lebanon: Foreign Interventions and International Relations* (2017): 20.
[36] Hamzeh, Ahmad. "Clientelism, Lebanon: Roots and Trends". *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37 No.3 (2001): 168.
[37] Salibi, Kamal. Introduction to *The modern history of Lebanon* (1965): 20.

new political movement: Lebanism (or Lebanese nationalism), which seeks French protection and claims Lebanon's allegedly ethnic and cultural distinctiveness from the rest of the Arabs[38].

An alliance between the Maronites and the Druze persisted for many years. During the brief *kaymakamate*-system (1842-1858), hostilities and divisions took place (changing the clientelist networks from personal to sectarian), but a new peaceful political structure emerged in the 1860s: the *mutesarrifate* of Mount Lebanon. This time, the term "Lebanon" acquired official use[39]. A new constitution was created, and the feudal power was officially abolished[40]. This system remained until the end of the Ottoman hegemony in Lebanon when the French Mandate of Greater Lebanon was established[41]. The latter's implementation in 1923 materialized Lebanism eternal aspiration.

The Maronites and the Druze have not been the only communities soughing refuge in Lebanon and becoming active political agents. Armenians and Kurds, for example, boosted Beirut's economic growth and coexisted in the same neighborhoods, such as Burj Hammoud [42] [43]. These two communities were vital in promoting urbanization processes and population concentration in the capital. Even though they both saw themselves as nations in temporary exile (awaiting their return to their respective homelands), they became an active part of the Lebanese society. Whereas Armenians became citizens by obtaining nationality through the French Mandate's citizenship law (speaking now of Lebanon as their fatherland)[44], stateless Kurds did so by feeding into middle-class families and contributing to the internal growth of the service economy[45]. Both communities became active political agents by establishing political parties and cultural means. In the case of Armenians, the most important political organizations have been

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[38] Salibi, Kamal. "The mountain refuge". In *A House of Many Mansions: A History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (1988): 139.

[39] Salibi, Kamal. Introduction to *The modern history of Lebanon* (1965): 12.

[40] Hamzeh, Ahmad. "Clientelism, Lebanon: Roots and Trends". *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 37 No. 3 (2001): 170.

[41] Hakim, Carol. "The French Mandate in Lebanon". *The American Historical Review Vol*. 125, No. 5 (2019): 1691.

[42] Hudson, Michael C. Introduction to *The Precarious Republic: Modernization in Lebanon* (1968): 5.

[43] Hourani, Guita. "The Kurds of Lebanon". In *The Kurds of Lebanon: Socioeconomic Mobility and Political Participation via Naturalization* (2011): 29.

[44] Nalbantian, Tsolin. Introduction to *Armenians beyond diaspora* (2020): 3.

[45] Hourani, Guita. "The Kurds of Lebanon". In *The Kurds of Lebanon: Socioeconomic Mobility and Political Participation via Naturalization* (2011): 28.

the right-wing *Dashnak* and the two left-wing *Hnchaks* and *Ramgavars*[46]. The Kurds have mainly represented their identity through the ethnic nationalist party *Khoyboun*[47].

In this way, the role of Maronites, Druze, Armenians, and Kurds in Lebanon proves that refugees can become active political agents and shift the domestic politics of hosting countries. According to Virginia Sanchini et. al., a political agent is someone politically capable of participating in an exercise of political power[48]. Scholars have disagreed on which political agency means are more important, especially regarding economic and refugee migrants. For example, whereas Silvia Mocchi has affirmed that citizenship acquisition, the capability to elect a representative, and the creation of advisory bodies are the most critical elements[49], Elettra Repetto has sustained that this is not sufficient to become a recognized political actor: those who are deprived of these rights can also become active political agents in the polity[50].

Considering all these elements, the next chapter aims to understand how Palestinians have used political agency in the refugee country of Lebanon. It is at this point that the concept of "rebelocracy" (or "the rule of rebels") will become especially relevant. For Ana Arjona, it is a situation where a non-state armed group becomes the de facto ruler in a specific area, intervening in a broad myriad of state activities (security, social services, education, and taxation, among others) [51]. Although she limits this type of political agency to wartimes, this study will also prove that it can be extended to peace times.

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[46] Nalbantian, Tsolin. Introduction to *Armenians beyond diaspora* (2020): 3.
[47] Hourani, Guita. "The Kurds of Lebanon". In *The Kurds of Lebanon: Socioeconomic Mobility and Political Participation via Naturalization* (2011): 28.
[48] Sanchini, Virginia & Pongiglione, Francesca & Sala, Roberta. "On the notion of political agency". *Phenomenology and Mind* No. 16 (2019): 11.
[49] Mocchi, Silvia. "Citizenship and Political Agency. A focus on forms of participation for immigrants at the local level". *Phenomenology and Mind* No. 16 (2019): 47.
[50] Repetto, Elettra. "The metamorphosis of aliens into political agents". *Phenomenology and Mind* No. 16 (2019): 68.
[51] Arjona, Ana. "Wartime Institutions: A Research Agenda". *Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol. 58, No. 8 (2014): 1375.

6.   The political agency of the Palestinian community in Lebanon

By 1947, Britain had turned over its Mandate on Palestine to the United Nations[52]. Although that same year, the Arab Palestinians constituted more than two-thirds of the Mandate's population (possessing about 90% of the privately-owned land), Resolution 181 divided the country into two areas[53]. Due to the consolidation of this plan and the proclamation of the state of Israel in 1948, two waves of fighting developed between 1947 and 1949 in what is known as the First Arab-Israeli War. According to Adel Manna, "it is impossible to understand the Palestinians' contemporary history without fully comprehending how this war changed their world"[54].

Certainly, the outbreak of this war led to a massive humanitarian crisis that continues today. About 400.000 Palestinians were driven out of their lands in 1948, and one year later, these numbers increased to around 700.000[55]. Lebanon hosted, between these two years, 100.000 of them (comprising wholly 10 percent of the country's population). These numbers grew by new influxes after the Six-Day War in 1967 and the 1970-71 war in Jordan, rising to 400.000 people[56]. Due to the Israeli invasion in 1982 and the securitization policies implemented by the Lebanese government, many of these Palestinians left Lebanon over the years[57]. Today, their total number remains unclear.

Even though Palestinians are entitled (as refugees) to exercise social and political rights in international law, Lebanon has refused to offer them full citizenship[58]. Christian Palestinians have mostly acquired it (becoming integrated into the social life)[59], but the Lebanese state has permanently regarded Palestinian presence (predominantly Sunni) as

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[52] Anderson, Perry. "Scurrying Towards Bethlehem". *New Left Review* Vol. 10 (2001): 6.
[53] Albanese, Francesca P. "A Historical Overview of the Palestinian Refugee Question". In *Palestinian Refugees in International Law* (2020): 28.
[54] Manna', Adel. "The Palestinian Nakba and its Continuous Repercussions". *Israel Studies* Vol. 18, No. 2 (2013): 90.
[55] Anderson, Perry. "Scurrying Towards Bethlehem". *New Left Review* Vol. 10 (2001): 7.
[56] Brynen, Rex. "The Politics of Exile: The Palestinians in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 3, No. 3 (1990): 205.
[57] El Khazen, Farid. "Permanent Settlement of Palestinians in Lebanon: A Recipe for Conflict". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol.10, No. 3 (1997): 283.
[58] Manna', Adel. "The Palestinian Nakba and its Continuous Repercussions". *Israel Studies* Vol. 18, No. 2 (2013): 94
[59] Hudson, Michael C. "Palestinians and Lebanon: The Common Story". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol.10, No. 3 (1997): 246.

a security issue and a threat to the precarious sectarian balance[60]. Consequently, Palestinians were first housed in Armenian facilities pending repatriation. Since a short-term return became unrealistic, they were later moved to make-shift refugee camps operated by UNRWA[61]. Many families moved out of these camps, either to self-administered ones or urban areas[62].

Contrary to the situation of Armenians and Kurds, the state limited Palestinian attempts to pursue any sort of political activity[63]. Even though they remained relatively politically passive during their first years[64], these policies did not prevent the long-term spread of Palestinian political agency. The situation of social exclusion progressively politicized the community, exploring various informal and hybrid alternatives to safeguard their voice. This research will divide these means into four types: student activism, transnational guerrilla warfare, "rebelocracy", and non-partisan grassroots initiatives.

6.1. From student activism to transnational guerrilla warfare (1950s-1960s)

Political agency among Palestinians in Lebanon first emerged in student political activism. Pan-Arabism, represented by Egypt's president Gamal Abdel Nasser, became the ideological umbrella for that. Political bonds were forged between Palestinian refugees and pan-Arab Lebanese supporters, polarizing vis-à-vis another half of the local population. The actor in charge of building these bridges was the ANM (Arab Nationalist Movement), which was created in 1951 at the American University of Beirut as a students' association[65]. The ANM, in the beginning, predominantly mobilized Palestinian students appalled by the Arab disaster of 1948[66]. Its main strength resided among

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[60] Brynen, Rex. "The Politics of Exile: The Palestinians in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 3, No. 3 (1990): 206.

[61] Knudsen, Are. "Widening the Protection Gap: The 'Politics of Citizenship' for Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon, 1948-2008". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 22, No. 1 (2009): 54.

[62] Brynen, Rex. "The Politics of Exile: The Palestinians in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 3, No. 3 (1990): 207.

[63] Ibid., 213.

[64] Manna', Adel. "The Palestinian Nakba and its Continuous Repercussions". *Israel Studies* Vol. 18, No. 2 (2013): 94.

[65] Dawisha, Adeed. "Consolidating Arab Nationalism: The Emergence of "Arab" Egypt". In *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Dispair*: 156.

[66] Brynen, Rex. "The Politics of Exile: The Palestinians in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 3, No. 3 (1990): 211.

secondary schools, youth associations, intellectual circles, and cultural and sports clubs[67]. As explained by F.B., interviewed for this study:

"My high school was located near Tel al-Zaatar, in Bourj Hammoud. There, I started to be engaged with Lebanese left-wing movements and later with the Arab Nationalist Movement. We lived not only economic marginalization but also political. This is one of the primary reasons I started to fight for my people."

Led by George Habash, a Christian Palestinian refugee that later became the leader of the PLO's Marxist organization Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)[68], the ANM saw pan-Arab unity as the precondition to achieve the liberation of Palestine. The same Habash stated in an interview held in 1998:

"The idea crystallized in our minds that it was not possible to liberate Palestine without first achieving Arab unity. The organization we had in mind could be run only by determined men who would forsake their personal careers and dedicate themselves to the cause. Thus, the nucleus of ANM began to form. Of course, a very broad Arab nationalist trend already existed. What characterized the ANM was the belief that the liberation of Palestine required Arab unity. We believed that the movement had to be very tightknit." [69]

While the ANM expanded its structures (opening other offshoots in Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq)[70], it shifted its form of political agency to a transnational guerrilla movement. It was especially after the Amman Conference in 1954 that it rapidly transformed into a secret and paramilitary network inspired by German and Italian nationalisms. Governed by a system of secrecy and obedience, it introduced a hierarchical structure called "flexible centralism", inspired by communist parties' "democratic centralism"[71].

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[67] Sayigh, Yezid. "Reconstructing the Paradox: The Arab Nationalist Movement, armed struggle and Palestine, 1951-1956". *Middle East Journal* Vol. 45, No. 4 (1991): 613.
[68] Ibid., 609.
[69] Habash, George & Soueid, Mahmoud. "An Interview with George Habash". *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1998): 90.
[70] Sayigh, Yezid. "Reconstructing the Paradox: The Arab Nationalist Movement, armed struggle and Palestine, 1951-1956". *Middle East Journal* Vol. 45, No. 4 (1991): 609.
[71] Sourani, Ghazi. "The Arab Nationalists Movement: a march for struggle" (2022): https://hadfnews.ps/post/94698/%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%88%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8-%C2%A0-

ANM's Lebanese branch played a crucial role. This was proved in an important event in which, voluntarily or involuntarily, it became involved: the 1958 crisis. This crisis was the consequence of multiple intertwined political and social factors: the illegal re-election of Emille Chamoun as president of Lebanon, the formation of the UAR (United Arab Republic) in February 1958 between Egypt and Syria, and the assassination of a left-wing editor from the pan-Arab newspaper *al-Tiligraph*[72]. Moreover, another reality fueled the increasing polarization: the Palestinian refugee presence[73]. In a context of increasing hostilities between Maronites and Muslims and Marxist and pro-status quo factions, the crisis was translated into a brief civil war.

The ANM joined the ranks of the Lebanese pan-Arab opposition (the National Front), which also included some dissident Christian leaders, Armenians, and Shiites[74]. During the conflict, it widened its base somewhat by being provided with training and weapons from the Syrian army and small arms and explosives from the Egyptian government[75]. After some years of certain political passivity, the adhesion to the Lebanese opposition demonstrated that Palestinians in Lebanon began to take control of their affairs and involve themselves in Lebanese politics.

Lebanese Maronite nationalists found increasingly alarming the Palestinian guerrilla political agency. In southern Lebanon, violent conflicts emerged. The pro-establishment militias, primarily composed of the *Hizb al-Kataeb al-Lubnaniya* (Lebanese Phalangist Party)[76], became openly hostile to Arab nationalism and unsettled by the Pan-Arab orientation of the Palestinian community. Indeed, they saw their presence as a threat to Lebanon's stability and a dangerous source of Pan-Arab radicalism[77]. As stated by the Maronite far-right leader Etienne Saqr some years later:

%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%86%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%84 (last access June 1st, 2022).

[72] Sorby, Karol R. "Lebanon: the crisis of 1958". *Asian and African Studies* Vol. 9, No. 1 (2000): 86.

[73] Ibid., 83.

[74] Salibi, Kamal. "The Lebanese Crisis in Perspective". *The World Today* Vol. 14, No. 9 (1958): 369.

[75] Knudsen, Are. "Widening the Protection Gap: The 'Politics of Citizenship' for Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon, 1948-2008". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 22, No. 1 (2009): 54.

[76] Sorby, Karol R. "Lebanon: the crisis of 1958". *Asian and African Studies* Vol. 9, No. 1 (2000): 85.

[77] Brynen, Rex. "The Politics of Exile: The Palestinians in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 3, No. 3 (1990): 207.

"There is no room for any Palestinian in Lebanon – no Palestinian baby, no

Palestinian woman. No Palestinian will remain on Lebanese soil. That's final. They

have a problem, so let them go to their Arab brothers since they claim them as brothers.

I cannot accept a half million Palestinians in my house." [78]

The neutrality of the Lebanese army in the conflict and the intervention of the United States led to the de-escalation of violence, putting an end to the crisis[79]. In any case, what became a reality, was that the "Palestinian phenomenon" had come to stay in Lebanon. Over the following decades, the country's domestic political evolution eventually confirmed this reality. The role of the ANM marked a crucial precedent in this sense, paving the way for the continuation of the Palestinian political agency during the coming decades.

6.2. "Rebelocracy" (1970s-today)

6.2.1. "Rebelocracy" under the PLO

After the failure of the United Arab Republic in 1961, support for Nasser waned in the Arab world. Within the ANM, internal divisions emerged between Nasserists, Palestinian nationalists, and Marxists. The disastrous defeat in the 1967 Six-Day War finally confirmed these divergences[80]. This situation gave birth to many Marxist offspring in Lebanon, such as the Organization of Communist Action in Lebanon (OCAL) and the Arab Socialist Action Party (ASAP)[81]. As explained by F.B.:

"The main reason for ANM dissolution was the internal disagreements. We especially

disagreed over the type of analysis we should make towards our situation. Personally, I

thought it was impossible not to carry out a Marxist analysis. I had (and still do have)

more in common with a Lebanese worker than with a rich Palestinian."

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[78] Middle East Research and Information Project. "There is no room for any Palestinian in Lebanon" (1983): https://merip.org/1983/10/there-is-no-room-for-any-palestinian-in-lebanon/ (last access June 1st, 2022).
[79] Salibi, Kamal. "The Lebanese Crisis in Perspective". *The World Today* Vol. 14, No. 9 (1958): 379.
[80] Dawisha, Adeed. "Consolidating Arab Nationalism: The Emergence of "Arab" Egypt". In *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From* Triumph *to Dispair*: 156.
[81] Brynen, Rex. "The Politics of Exile: The Palestinians in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 3, No. 3 (1990): 211.

The creation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Jerusalem in May 1964 and the move of its headquarter to Beirut some years later[82] brought about a definitive shift in the Palestinian political agency in Lebanon. The ANM was already a thing of the past, and the PLO became the new leading political agent. However, the latter's hegemony did not begin until 1971, when Yasser Arafat and thousands of supporters arrived from Jordan after a violently crushed revolt by Jordan's King Hussein's army[83]. This event, which led to a civil war (known to Palestinians as "Black September"), sent thousands of Palestinian refugees to Lebanon[84], initiating what Marina Eleftheriadou has called "the Lebanon era in the Palestinian national liberation struggle"[85]. In the words of F.B.:

"From 1970 to 1971, there were the killings in Jordan. More than 20.000 Palestinians died. King Hussein of Jordan kicked out the Palestinians, and the PLO moved its headquarters to Lebanon. This situation benefited the Palestinians living there. Before that, they lived under constant humiliation. But when the PLO settled in Lebanon, it could help the people of the camps while reaching agreements with the Lebanese left-wing. Hence, it motivated many people to engage with its activities."

The event that defined PLO's ascendancy in Lebanon was the Cairo Agreement, signed in November 1969 between the Lebanese government and Yasser Arafat[86]. This accord was created due to the state's increasing incapability to hold the Palestinian *fedayeen* (fighters) presence in different country areas and allowed the PLO to gain recognition and legitimacy for its military presence[87]. De facto political authority in the refugee camps passed into the hands of this new political agent, where it established parallel institutions and a multilevel governance system with political parties (Fatah and the PFLP mainly). An official military wing (the Palestine Liberation Army), propagandistic tools (a Department of Information and Culture, the radio network Voice of Palestine and the

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[82] Eleftheriadou, Marina. "Building a Proto-State on Quicksand: The Rise and Fall of the Palestinian State-in-Exile in Lebanon". *Middle East Journal* Vol. 75 No. 1 (2021): 102.

[83] Dawisha, Adeed. "Consolidating Arab Nationalism: The Emergence of 'Arab' Egypt". In *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Dispair*: 156.

[84] RefWorld. "Chronology for Palestinians in Lebanon" (2004). https://www.refworld.org/docid/469f38b42.html (last access May 2nd, 2022).

[85] Eleftheriadou, Marina. "Building a Proto-State on Quicksand: The Rise and Fall of the Palestinian State-in-Exile in Lebanon". *Middle East Journal* Vol. 75 No. 1 (2021): 99.

[86] Sayigh, Rosemary. "The Palestinian Revolution". In *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (1979): 163.

[87] Knudsen, Are. "Widening the Protection Gap: The 'Politics of Citizenship' for Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon, 1948-2008". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 22, No. 1 (2009): 55.

News Agency WAFA), and academic journals (the Palestine Research Center) were also created[88].

Nonetheless, two means specially allowed the PLO to consolidate itself as the principal political agent among Palestinians in Lebanon: social services provision and guerrilla warfare. Overall, they constituted the basis for what here is called "rebelocracy". This strategy was used decades later by multiple Islamist organizations that instrumentalized the banner of Palestinian nationalism to gain local support in Lebanon.

Social services and community self-help were mainly in the hands of PLO's committees and popular affiliated organizations (known as General Unions)[89]. They were in charge of forging links with Lebanese trade unions, operating women's centers in the refugee camps and, at the same time, organizing protests against the government's restrictions and lobbying UNRWA[90]. Their activities were complemented by those of humanitarian organizations, such as the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS), which nowadays still provides free health care to both Palestinians and Lebanese[91]. As explained by K.A.:

"Since I was informed that there were children in the camp, we organized a meeting with the PLO's General Unions and other colleagues (Lebanese and Palestinians specialized in psychology, education, and social work). We discussed what we could do with those children. The PLO's leadership (head by Yasser Arafat) finally approved the organization's creation very rapidly [...] I should kindly mention that Beit Atfal received substantial support from the General Unions and the PLO's leadership: financially (salaries and staff) and through the provision of needs for the children (clothes, for example)."

In this way, the provision of social services to Palestinians legitimized PLO's activities in Lebanon. Indeed, they served to gain support for its guerrillas' activities, which quickly assumed control of the organization. The refugee camps were vital in this sense, providing

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[88] Eleftheriadou, Marina. "Building a Proto-State on Quicksand: The Rise and Fall of the Palestinian State-in-Exile in Lebanon". *Middle East Journal* Vol. 75 No. 1 (2021): 109.
[89] Brynen, Rex. "The Politics of Exile: The Palestinians in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 3, No. 3 (1990): 215.
[90] Ibid., 216.
[91] Eleftheriadou, Marina. "Building a Proto-State on Quicksand: The Rise and Fall of the Palestinian State-in-Exile in Lebanon". *Middle East Journal* Vol. 75 No. 1 (2021): 107.

ideological mobilization and military training. The impoverished and abandoned young Palestinians offered a human basis for that[92].

Mass organization to join the guerrillas lead to the rise of two dominant political factions: one in the form of right-wing nationalism (Fatah) and another advocating for Marxist doctrines (the PFLP)[93]. This demonstrated that Palestinians did not speak with a single voice and lacked homogeneous decision-making authority. Fatah became the largest of these two factions, being PLO's leader in Lebanon[94]. In the words of Leila Khaled (a famous Palestinian PFLP member born in Lebanon):

"Fatah began to occupy a central role in our lives despite its many defects and problems. Its supreme virtue, however, was incontestable: it was a fighting organization in a time when others only talked about the theories of war; it was created by Palestinians to take up armed struggle." [95]

Both Fatah and the PFLP became, as PLO organizations, crucial in the most devastating event of Lebanon's contemporary history: the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). This war emerged due to multiple circumstances: internal political instability inherited from previous decades, divisions between Christians and Muslims, and polarity between left and right-wing forces. These elements were fueled by external powers (Israel and Syria) soughing to expand their influence in the region. However, contrarily to the 1958 crisis, the Palestinian political agency no longer played a complementary role. It had, in effect, multiple consequences for the evolution of Lebanon's domestic politics. In this context, the PLO joined the anti-status quo forces mainly represented by Arab nationalists and left-wing forces: the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) and the Lebanese National Resistance Front (LNRF)[96] [97]. As described by F.B.:

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[92] Sayigh, Rosemary. "The Palestinian Revolution". In *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (1979): 156.

[93] Brynen, Rex. "The Politics of Exile: The Palestinians in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 3, No. 3 (1990): 208.

[94] Hudson, Michael C. "Palestinians and Lebanon: The Common Story". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol.10, No. 3 (1997): 251

[95] Khaled, Leila. "Exile in Kuwait". In *My people shall alive* (1971): 38.

[96] Brynen, Rex. "The Politics of Exile: The Palestinians in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 3, No. 3 (1990): 213.

[97] Eleftheriadou, Marina. "Building a Proto-State on Quicksand: The Rise and Fall of the Palestinian State-in-Exile in Lebanon". *Middle East Journal* Vol. 75 No. 1 (2021): 106.

"In Lebanon, we distinguished the friend from the enemy. One thing that we had pretty clear was that the Lebanese left-wing was always backing us up. Contrarily, our enemies were the Christian phalangists, imperialism, the state of Israel, and other Arab reactionary forces led by Saudi Arabia".

When the civil war broke out, Palestinians had to confront again the Maronite far-right forces and the Lebanese state (now under the umbrella of the Lebanese Front), which Israel and its counterinsurgency supported[98]. The event that symbolized to a significant extent this opposition was the destruction of different Palestinian refugee camps: Tel al-Zaatar in 1976 and Sabra-Shatila in 1982[99]. According to F.B., the massacre in Tel al-Zaatar provoked Fatah's initial stance of non-intervention no longer untenable:

"The Lebanese Forces warned that they would enter Tel al-Zaatar. Consequently, Yasser Arafat was allegedly afraid that many Palestinians would die if Fatah participated in the conflict. Nevertheless, thousands ended up dying due to the massacres. The Palestinian Christian camp of Jisr El Basha was also destroyed."

The growing hostility of the Syrian-supported Shiite Amal (*Afwaj al-Muqawama al-Lubnaniyya*) added new problems to the PLO. A war known as "The War of the Camps" broke out from 1982 until 1987 between the PLO and the Shiite militias, claiming more than 2.000 lives[100]. Part of the Lebanese Shiites, who had initially benefited from PLO's social services, was now against its presence. The reason was the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982[101], for which the Palestinians and their political agent PLO were blamed. Shiite militias launched a series of attacks against the refugee camps to prevent a resurgence of Palestinian armed presence[102]. In a public statement made by Amal's spokesman:

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[98] Ibid.

[99] Brynen, Rex. "The Politics of Exile: The Palestinians in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 3, No. 3 (1990): 210.

[100] Knudsen, Are. "Islamism in the diaspora: Palestinian refugees in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 18, No. 2 (2005): 2.

[101] Eleftheriadou, Marina. "Building a Proto-State on Quicksand: The Rise and Fall of the Palestinian State-in-Exile in Lebanon". *Middle East Journal* Vol. 75 No. 1 (2021): 114.

[102] Brynen, Rex. "The Politics of Exile: The Palestinians in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 3, No. 3 (1990): 213.

"In the name of God, Amal has been a victim of the fake campaigns made by the PLO in front of the Arab and internal public opinion. The truth, day after day, shows that the men of Arafat have been committing a brutality against us." [103]

Besides internal opposition, one of the significant consequences of the Lebanese Civil War was the country's occupation by external powers under the pretext of PLO's presence. Allegedly fearing a wholesale Palestinian takeover of the country, Hafez Al-Assad decided to incorporate Lebanon into Syria, except for the southern "security zone" (under the Israeli forces and the Lebanese Army)[104]. Similarly, Israel invaded the south of the country in 1978 to theoretically distance the PLO from the border[105] and, as mentioned before, larger areas in 1982, provoking the departure of the PLO leadership[106].

This latter defeat put an end to PLO's activities in Lebanon, deeming its presence illegal[107]. Even though Arafat stated then that "We are now stronger than any period before"[108], the reality was far from that. The PLO continued to hold political agency through its "rebelocracy" but with a decline in its service institutions[109]. Moreover, the signing of the Oslo Accord with Israel in 1993 increased internal disenchantment and dissidence[110], showed in the violent clashes between Fatah and PFLP members. As stated in 1998 by the PFLP leader George Habash:

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[103] AP Archive. "Lebanon Amal Spokesman Denounces Palestinians" (1987): http://www.aparchive.com/search?startd=&endd=&allFilters=&query=Amal+PLO&advsearchStartDateFilter=&advsearchEndDateFilter=&searchFilterHdSDFormat=All&searchFilterDigitized=All&searchFiltercolorFormat=All&searchFilteraspectratioFormat=All (last access June 4th, 2022).

[104] Nisan, Mordechai. "The Syrian occupation of Lebanon". *Ariel Center for Policy Research* No. 96 (2000): 53.

[105] Eleftheriadou, Marina. "Building a Proto-State on Quicksand: The Rise and Fall of the Palestinian State-in-Exile in Lebanon", Middle East Journal Vol. 75 No. 1 (2021): 116.

[106] Hudson, Michael C. "Palestinians and Lebanon: The Common Story". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 10, No. 3 (1997): 256.

[107] Danish Refugee Council. "Survey Report on the Situation of non-ID Palestinian Refugees: Lebanon" (2007): 24.

[108] AP Archive. "Beirut Arafat Interview" (1982): http://www.aparchive.com/metadata/youtube/6ede1fc4f2f643ef858d70fc9dcdb2aa (last access June 2nd 2022).

[109] Knudsen, Are. "Islamism in the diaspora: Palestinian refugees in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 18, No. 2 (2005): 4.

[110] Relief Web. "The Palestinians' purgatory in Lebanon" (2007): https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/palestinians-purgatory-lebanon (las access June 2nd 2022).

"The crucial thing is that we don't participate in any institutions involved with making policy or negotiating with the [Zionist] enemy, since we don't acknowledge the Oslo Agreements." [111]

When the Lebanese Civil War ended in 1990, Palestinians in Lebanon had been abandoned to their fate. The progressive demise of the PLO turned the camps into a no man's land, where political fragmentation has been feeling acutely to this day. Various religious Islamist groups have been taking over this space by exploiting such political divisions[112], using the same strategy as the PLO: "rebelocracy".

6.2.2. "Rebelocracy" under Islamist groups

Since the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1990, rarely has an issue such as the rejection of Palestinian presence generated greater consensus in the Lebanese political class. Due to the PLO's role, many have blamed the Palestinians for the country's misfortunes, breeding mistrust and reproducing legal discrimination[113]. The annulment of the Cairo Agreement in 1987 by the Lebanese Parliament supposed the reversion of Palestinian status to foreign residents[114]. In the same direction, the Taif Agreement (the accord that ended the war) stated that "there shall be no settlement of non-Lebanese in Lebanon"[115].

Altogether, the camps have become a breeding ground for Islamist groups trying to fill the vacuum left by the PLO[116]. The youth of the camps, socially disaffected and politically disoriented by the signing of the Oslo Accords[117], has served to establish small "rebelocracies" and transfer multiple varieties of Islamism. Indeed, social services

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[111] The Free Arab Voice. "Interview with Dr. George Habash" (1998): http://www.freearabvoice.org/EL-Hakim.htm (last access June 4th, 2022).

[112] Rougier, Bernard. Introduction to "Everyday Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam Among Palestinians in Lebanon" (2004): 18.

[113] Knudsen, Are. "Widening the Protection Gap: The 'Politics of Citizenship' for Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon, 1948-2008". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 22, No. 1 (2009): 56.

[114] Boustany, Nora. "Lebanon annuls PLO Agreement" (1987): https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1987/05/22/lebanon-annuls-plo-agreement/20c11566-8919-4f64-9027-69cd3a6fa7b5/ (last access June 3rd, 2022).

[115] El Khazen, Farid. "Permanent Settlement of Palestinians in Lebanon: A Recipe for Conflict". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol.10, No. 3 (1997): 275.

[116] Abbas, Mahmoud; Shaaban, Hussein; Sirhan, Bassem; Hassan, Ali. "The Socio-economic Conditions of Palestinians in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol.10, No. 3 (1997): 387.

[117] Rougier, Bernard. "The Struggle against al-Ahbash". In *Everyday Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam Among Palestinians in Lebanon* (2004): 123.

provision and guerrilla warfare have been the two primary means to gain influence in a context of social isolation. Entering into conflict between them, different organizations have seen themselves as the "vanguard" of Islam[118], sharing their messages and discourses in places of worship and Islamic educational institutions[119].

Even though some of these groups are not composed of Palestinians, they have contributed to deteriorating the image of the camps, branded as "security islands" (a euphemistic way to say that they are beyond the reach of the state control)[120]. This has been principally the case in the refugee camps of Ain-al Hilweh (near the southern coastal city of Sidon) and Nahr al-Bared (close to the northern city of Tripoli)[121]. For example, in May 2007, intense fighting broke out for 15 weeks between the Lebanese Internal Security Forces and Army and the Salafist militia Fatah al-Islam, provoking more than 30.000 families to become homeless and the killing of over 40 Palestinian civilians and 500 combatants[122]. It was the first time a Palestinian refugee camp was crushed during the post-civil war era.

Before the Lebanese Civil War, political Islamism constituted a marginal ideology with no significant political or social influence in Lebanon[123]. But today, this ideology is defended by multiple organizations that, with divergent ideologies and political agendas, have used the banner of "Islamo-Palestinianism"[124] to become new political agents among refugees. More than twenty Islamist groups and parties are enjoying support among the Palestinian refugees of Lebanon today, inside and outside the camps[125]. These can be Lebanese (such as Hezbollah and *Jamaa al-Islamiyaa*), offshoots of movements originating outside the country (such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad) or created in the same

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[118] Rougier, Bernard. Introduction to *Everyday Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam Among Palestinians in Lebanon* (2004): 21.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Knudsen, Are. "Islamism in the diaspora: Palestinian refugees in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 18, No. 2 (2005): 5.
[121] Nahr al-Bared, 20 kilometers north of Tripoli, was the first refugee camp to gain "freedom" during PLO's hegemony era.
[122] Dakroub, Hussein. "Three-month battle ends as army takes over refugee camp" (2007): https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/sep/03/syria.lebanon (last access June 3rd, 2022).
[123] Pall, Zoltan. "Salafi Expansion in the 1990s". In *Salafism in Lebanon: Local and Transnational Movements* (2018): 64.
[124] Rougier, Bernard. "From Iranian Influence to Sunni Affirmation". In *Everyday Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam Among Palestinians in Lebanon* (2004): 51.
[125] Knudsen, Are. "Islamism in the diaspora: Palestinian refugees in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 18, No. 2 (2005): 9.

Palestinian camps (such as Osbat al-Ansar and Fatah al-Islam)[126]. The most important ones have been Hezbollah and Hamas in terms of support.

Hezbollah's support of the Palestinian population dates back to the previously mentioned "War of the Camps". During the conflict, the Shia organization joined the pro-Palestinian side, confronting the fellow Shia Amal[127]. Since then, it has always considered the defense of the "Palestinian cause" an essential element of its regional strategy[128]. Its strongly anti-Israeli stance and the provision of social services have served as a basis for that, consolidating its "rebelocracy" in multiple areas of the country. Although Hezbollah's primary constituency is the Lebanese Shia[129], it has made its presence known in the Palestinian camps[130]. As explained by F.B.:

"Hezbollah has had an increasing influence since the 1990s, given that it is considered a member of the "resistance axis" against Zionism. It has been helping Palestinians, both politically and economically, by providing protection to the camps and improving the living conditions as a precondition for an effective campaign in favor of our right to return."

Eloquent examples of the support received by this political agent can be traced back to 2006, when Palestinians from the Shatila and Bourj el Barajneh camps attended a Hezbollah demonstration just after the Shia organization kidnapped two Israeli soldiers in July 2006. Moreover, every year, the logistical support to Palestinian demonstrators in Lebanon commemorating the Nakba in front of the Israeli border has been a rule[131]. According to George Habash, the secrets of Hezbollah's success among Palestinians are the next ones:

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[126] Ibid., 1.
[127] Ibid., 10.
[128] Rougier, Bernard. "From Iranian Influence to Sunni Affirmation". In *Everyday Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam Among Palestinians in Lebanon* (2004): 51.
[129] Knudsen, Are. "Islamism in the diaspora: Palestinian refugees in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 18, No. 2 (2005): 10.
[130] Rougier, Bernard. "From Iranian Influence to Sunni Affirmation". In *Everyday Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam Among Palestinians in Lebanon* (2004): 52.
[131] Salih, Ruba. "From Bare Lives to Political Agents: Palestinian Refugees as Avant-Garde". *Refugee Survey Quarterly* Vol. 32, No. 2 (2013): 85.

"There are four basic elements. In the first place, Hizballah is operating on its own territory, amidst its own people. Secondly, there is the secrecy that surrounds its military apparatus and leadership, its refusal to adopt fixed positions, and its brilliant use of maneuver for strategic and tactical purposes. Thirdly, Hizballah has a unified leadership. And in the fourth place, Hizballah has benefitted from our experiences, both positive and negative, so that it has not fallen into the same errors that we did. Hizballah is the crowning achievement of our bitter and bloody experiences."[132]

As stated before, many other Islamist groups, usually in violent conflict between them, have also tried to become active political agents among Palestinians. One of these organizations is Hamas, which opened its offices in Lebanon in 1998[133]. Authorized by the Syrian regime, which occupied Lebanon during that time, it opened a political bureau there, taking over the religious networks set up by Lebanese organizations such as *Jamaa Islamiyya*[134]. Since then, it has become prevalent among Palestinian refugees.

Hamas has been providing social services for Palestinian refugees through institutions such as the Palestinian Return Centre (PRC)[135]. Moreover, its deliberate criticism of the PLO's leaders, targeting their actions in Lebanon since the Oslo Agreements, has been a primary reason for its support among Palestinians, increasing its adherents[136]. However, the lack of a specific Lebanese political dimension to its ideology is one of the reasons why it has not expanded its support as much as Hezbollah has[137].

Last, despite not embracing the "Palestinian cause" initially, Salafi-jihadist groups rejecting nationalism in the first instance have linked their vision with Palestinian organizations such as Hamas[138]. This is the case of Islamic Jihad, which established close

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[132] Habash, George & Soueid, Mahmoud. "An Interview with George Habash". *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1998): 96.

[133] Pall, Zoltan. "Salafi Expansion in the 1990s". In *Salafism in Lebanon: Local and Transnational Movements* (2018): 71.

[134] Rougier, Bernard. "The Struggle to Control the Camp". In *Everyday Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam Among Palestinians in Lebanon* (2004): 155.

[135] S Sajad, Ibrahim. "Hamas and the Right of Return of the Palestinian Refugees: A Standstill in the Peace Talks". *India Quarterly* Vol. 62, No. 2 (2006): 141.

[136] Rougier, Bernard. "The Struggle to Control the Camp". In *Everyday Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam Among Palestinians in Lebanon* (2004): 158.

[137] Sajad, Ibrahim. "Hamas and the Right of Return of the Palestinian Refugees: A Standstill in the Peace Talks". *India Quarterly* Vol. 62, No. 2 (2006): 141.

[138] Rougier, Bernard. "The Struggle to Control the Camp". In *Everyday Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam Among Palestinians in Lebanon* (2004): 57.

links to al-Qaeda and was involved in terrorist activities, such as those of the 1990s, when it bombed theatres, nightclubs, and liquor stores in different places of Lebanon[139]. Although its support among Palestinians has been minimum, part of its members has been recruited from the refugee camps[140]. Similar to Hamas and Hezbollah, it has complemented its guerrilla warfare by establishing social services, cultural clubs, kindergartens, and clinics in the refugee camps[141].

6.3. Non-partisan grassroots initiatives (1990s-today)

Other mechanisms of political agency used by Palestinians in Lebanon deserve scrutiny. They compose what here is called "non-partisan grassroots initiatives". The initiatives in question have specially developed during the last years, and their focus has been on humanitarian action and labor rights outside any partisan agenda. They have constituted a way to interact, build bridges with the local communities, and activate support networks by implementing democratic representation and participation[142]. These initiatives can be divided into NGOs and civil rights protests.

The increasing relevance of these means is not only the consequence of the PLO's decadence but also of the consultative bodies' inefficiency, which are allegedly aimed at promoting dialogue between Lebanese and Palestinians. Indeed, the special committee formed in 1991 by the Lebanese government to improve relations after the civil war was soon shelved, unable to make any progress[143]. In the same way, the Lebanese–Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC) (created after the end of the Syrian occupation of Lebanon in 2005) made no significant advances besides reopening the PLO's office in Beirut in 2006[144]. K.A. confirmed this:

"In the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee, we speak together, Lebanese and Palestinians, about different projects, proposals, and problems we face. For example,

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[139] Knudsen, Are. "Islamism in the diaspora: Palestinian refugees in Lebanon". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 18, No. 2 (2005): 15.
[140] Ibid., 14.
[141] Ibid., 17.
[142] Salih, Ruba. "From Bare Lives to Political Agents: Palestinian Refugees as Avant-Garde". *Refugee Survey Quarterly* Vol. 32, No. 2 (2013): 89.
[143] Knudsen, Are. "Widening the Protection Gap: The 'Politics of Citizenship' for Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon, 1948-2008". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 22, No. 1 (2009): 66.
[144] Ibid.

Palestinian nurses can work thanks to this committee […] However, the different Lebanese parties usually discuss the Palestinian situation without talking to us in the first instance. The Prime Minister comes and hires one speaker to head this committee, but nothing has been approved that has changed our status in Lebanon so far. So, in practice it's just paper, you know? Lebanese parties meet with Palestinian organizations, but nothing comes as it should be. The result is 0."

As analyzed in previous chapters, most Palestinian humanitarian organizations operating in Lebanon have historically been linked to the PLO. In this way, they have lacked the legal independence and operational procedures to qualify them as NGOs, being at the same time tied to particular political agendas and unable to implement their activities efficiently. As K.A. affirmed:

"When we returned to Lebanon in 1984, our board decided to be completely independent. Today, we do not take any money from the PLO or any political or religious group. We insist on that. If you are under the umbrella of any political party, the activities will be for the party and not for the people."

Today, the status of Palestinian NGOs in Lebanon (which require a special license granted by the Ministry of the Interior) is ambiguous. While they are legally Lebanese, in practice are Palestinian associations. Indeed, the nominal leadership comprises Lebanese citizens, but the executive bodies usually include Palestinian activists[145]. In the words of K.A.:

"You know, in Lebanon, Palestinians are not allowed to establish their own NGOs. This is the reason we have two names, and Beit Atfal is the Palestinian one. But officially, we are registered as a Lebanese NGO to the Ministry of Interior with a different name. Since we have a registration number, we can have a budget. Today, in Lebanon, there are around 18 NGOs that are officially Lebanese but work with the Palestinians. In our organization, I am the only Palestinian on the direction board."

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[145] Suleiman, Jaber. "Palestinians in Lebanon and the Role of Non-governmental Organizations". *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 10, No. 3 (1997): 401.

In 1993, several Palestinian NGOs initiated a dialogue to improve coordination[146]. One year later, a committee announced the formation of an umbrella organization: the "Coordination Forum of the NGOs working among the Palestinian Community". This includes the vast majority of the NGOs legally registered with the Lebanese state and act as political agents within the Palestinian community[147]. K.A. stated:

"If we coordinate? Of course. We are living together in the same camps, so obviously we coordinate. I can say that, since the Oslo Accords in 1994, the majority of the national NGOs were less focused on Lebanon and more towards the West Bank and Gaza. Therefore, we decided to have a forum that coordinates all the NGOs: the Palestinian NGOs Forum. I was a general coordinator for this forum for many years. Today, we still blend together. We are members of this forum and the Palestinian Happy Camp Forum."

Civil rights protests have also played increasing relevance as non-partisan grassroots initiatives. The best example can be traced back to July 2019, when thousands of Palestinians protested in Lebanon against the Ministry of Labor's decision to crack down on foreign workers without special permits[148]. Even though similar protests were organized in 2003 against the property law (which excludes Palestinians from getting any kind of property), the 2019 ones were different for three main reasons. First, they were the most recent manifestation of Palestinians' fight for civil rights in Lebanon. Second, they sought to move demonstrations from the camps into the cities' public space. Last, as sustained here, they spread less along traditional party lines and more around non-partisan class solidarity, transgressing the division of the camps between PLO and Islamist factions [149] [150].

Certainly, the 2019 protests provoked a new upsurge of the Palestinian political agency in Lebanon. This crystallized in the organization of collective political action through

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[146] Ibid., 402.
[147] Ibid.
[148] El-Ashkar, Amena. "Palestinian refugees in Lebanon denounce new 'inhumane' work restrictions." (2019): https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/palestinian-refugees-lebanon-denounce-latest-work-restrictions (last access June 2nd, 2022).
[149] Makkawai, Moné. "Palestinian Strikes in Lebanon & Contemporary Urban Rights" (2019). https://www.araburbanism.com/magazine/your-decision-and-ours (last access May 18th, 2022).
[150] Kortam, Marie. "Lebanon: Anger in Palestinian Refugee Camps Gives Rise to a New Mobilization for Dignity". *Arab Reform Initiative* (2019): 7

public demonstrations and marches, inside and outside the camps, combined with a general strike: a call for a boycott of Lebanese goods, the closure of Palestinian camps for three days, and protests in front of foreign embassies and the Ministry of Labor. Rallies were also organized under the slogan "Rejecting the arbitrary policy towards our people to the point of eliminating our humanity". The call for civil rights revolved around three main pillars: revoking the Minister of Labor's decision and allowing Palestinians to own a house and practice the professions legally banned to them[151]. As explained by K.A., these protests were highly relevant:

> *"Now, we are not allowed to work on 36 jobs. Before the protests, it was 72."*

Within the Lebanese society, reactions varied from support for the popular movement (joining the marches in Beirut's streets and the refugee camps), to opposition to Palestinian presence as a whole (with the previously mentioned rhetoric of Palestinians as a threat to the domestic and demographic stability). In this latter direction, the Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs during that time, Gebran Bassil, called for the expulsion of Palestinians from the country[152] [153]:

> *"Oh Lebanese, do not accept refugee camps, so the country can remain ours."*

Besides being non-partisan, both the NGOs and the protests have had a treat in common: the relevance of the youth and the transnational networks. Indeed, during the 2019 protests, the political consciousness among the Palestinian youth explained their involvement in a movement where they became active political agents[154]. A role they have also played within NGOs. As said by K.A.:

> *"There are always meetings with the Lebanese and Palestinian youth. And now, the youth in the camps are very active by playing a positive role in making a change. When*

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[151] Ibid., 3.

[152] Middle East Monitor. "Lebanon politician calls for expelling Palestine refugees" (2019): https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200721-lebanon-politician-calls-for-expelling-palestine-refugees/ (last access June 2nd, 2022).

[153] Global Voices. "Lebanon's Scapegoating of a Refugees Did not Start With Syrians, but With Palestinians" (2018): https://globalvoices.org/2018/02/01/lebanons-scapegoating-of-refugees-did-not-start-with-syrians-but-with-palestinians/ (last access June 5th, 2022).

[154] Kortam, Marie. "Lebanon: Anger in Palestinian Refugee Camps Gives Rise to a New Mobilization for Dignity". *Arab Reform Initiative* (2019): 2..

our children become 16 or 17 years old, they remain with us and become volunteers in our institution."

This has been complemented by establishing transnational networks in multiple countries, where the youth has also been crucial. During the 2019 protests, numerous rallies were also organized abroad (in Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, the UK, and the United States)[155]. In the same direction, K.A. affirmed:

"We also stay in contact with youth (Palestinian and non-Palestinian) from the U.S., Europe, etc. We have been working with them from the beginning."

Palestinians protested for over three months, overlapping with the start of the Lebanese Revolt in October 2019, which called for the resignation of the Lebanese government, the creation of a new electoral law, the implementation of economic reforms, and the end of neoliberal austerity, political sectarianism, and government corruption[156]. In this sense, though sidelining refugee demands, Palestinian participation in the Lebanese Revolt could be an extension of the 2019 labor protests. Palestinian refugees supported the protests while organizing their demonstrations, signaling their decision to obtain civil, socio-economic, and political rights[157]. This showed the relevance of this new mechanism of political agency outside the framework of any political party.

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[155] Ibid., 10.

[156] Chulov, Martin. "Lebanon's mass revolt against corruption and poverty continues" (2019): https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/20/lebanons-mass-revolt-against-corruption-and-poverty-continues (last access June 2nd, 2022).

[157] Kortam, Marie. "Lebanon: Anger in Palestinian Refugee Camps Gives Rise to a New Mobilization for Dignity". *Arab Reform Initiative* (2019): 10.

7. Conclusions

This research has proved how Palestinian refugees have maintained high degrees of political activity in Lebanon. During their first years there, the Palestinian political agency shifted from student activism to guerrilla warfare due to ANM's role. This agent converted Lebanon into something of a Palestinian transnational recruitment sanctuary. Years later, due to PLO's growth, guerrilla warfare transformed into a state-builder "rebelocracy", combining social services provision with violent activities. After the decadence of this actor, Islamist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas have used the banner of Palestinian nationalism to explore the same "rebelocratic" strategy. Simultaneously, non-partisan grassroots initiatives have been developing, demonstrating that Palestinian refugees can also use political agency outside the framework of any partisan agenda.

Excluding the non-partisan grassroots initiatives, it could be said that all the means of Palestinian political agency have had one main effect on Lebanese domestic politics: contributing to the state's incapability to hold a monopoly on the use of violence. This has led these refugees to be seen as the main perpetrators of institutional collapse, provoking the outbreak of two civil wars: one short in 1958 and another between 1975 and 1990 (the longest in Lebanon's contemporary history). In both conflicts, internal fragmentation was fueled by the country's occupation of foreign actors, turning it into a full-fledged regional competition.

In this way, even though it might be simplistic to conclude that Lebanon's last civil wars have been essentially Lebanese-Palestinian conflicts, it is impossible not to disengage them from the effects of Palestinian political agency. Indeed, the latter contributed to deepening communal divisions, mobilizing religious communities and militarizing the country. Still today, different Lebanese political actors (especially Maronites) blame Palestinian refugees for the country's past and present misfortunes.

It is noteworthy concluding that the new patterns of Palestinian political agency might be changing in Lebanon. As explained before, the spaces of political activity are progressively developing less within party lines and more through non-partisan agendas. At the same time, this has led these news initiatives to grow outside the refugee camps.

The 2019 demonstrations are proof of this. During that year, Palestinian refugees protested in different Lebanese cities to claim civic, political, and economic rights. Despite this, today, the "Palestinian question" is playing a minor role in Lebanon compared with decades ago, since the state has been refusing to participate in any multilateral negotiations over this issue.

There are two elements that deserve further analysis by scholars. On the one hand, the role of Palestinian NGOs in Lebanon. As exposed before, the fact that Palestinian refugees are not accorded freedom of association has made the distinction between "governmental" and "non-governmental" a challenging mission. This might explain why finding secondary sources on this topic is difficult. On the other hand, a comparative analysis of how Palestinians have used political agency in different countries needs closer examination. It might be a proper way to try to understand if they all continue sharing the same identity despite living outside their original homeland.

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9. Appendices

9.1. Interview with K.A.

Please, introduce yourself and explain how you ended up being one of the founders of Beit Atfal Assumoud.

My name is K.A., I am a Palestinian refugee forced to move to Lebanon in 1948. My town was called Amma, located near the Lebanese border (only 30 minutes by car). My family came to Lebanon and moved to different places: Beit Jbeil, Baalbek, Beirut, etc. My sisters stayed in the Tel al-Zaatar refugee camp, while I decided to go to a Lebanese area close to there, called Dekwaneh.

In 1976, there was a siege in the camp of Tel al-Zaatar. Palestinian refugees created this camp. However, after 1950, many Lebanese, Syrians, and Kurds moved there and lived with the Palestinians. During the siege, the camp was destroyed. At that time, I was already planning to create an educational and social center with the PLO. When the massacre started, I talked to my people, and they told me those fanatic snappers of the Christian forces were killing children. The criminals killed our brothers because they were Palestinians. They were always saying that they were fighting on behalf of the Christians. But I would like to mention that, near Tel al-Zaatar (in Jisr el-Basha), there was another Palestinian Christian camp.

Since I was informed that there were children in the camp, we organized a meeting with the PLO's General Unions and other colleagues (Lebanese and Palestinians specialized in psychology, education, and social work). We discussed what we could do with those children. The PLO's leadership (head by Yasser Arafat) finally approved the organization's creation very rapidly. We did not know where the children would go, but we were sure that a solution should be provided to them. And this is the reason we decided to establish a home for the children. I became one of the founders of Beit Atfal, staying on the direction board until today.

Could you briefly explain how your organization works?

Since many children have lost a family member, we hire people from the same refugee camps to take care of them and play the role of fathers. It works like a home, a family. I am still taking care of these kids.

If I am not wrong, only NGOs headed by Lebanese citizens are allowed to register with the state authorities. For instance, the legal status of Palestinian NGOs (such as yours) is ambiguous. How does this situation affect your activities?

In Lebanon, Palestinians are not allowed to establish their own NGOs. This is the primary reason we have two names, and Beit Atfal is the Palestinian one. But officially, we are registered as a Lebanese NGO to the Ministry of Interior with a different name. Since we have a registration number, we can have a budget. Today, in Lebanon, there are around 18 NGOs that are officially Lebanese but work with the Palestinians. In our organization, I am the only Palestinian board member.

Has your NGO participated in any consultative body with the Lebanese government?

Yes, there is the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee, which is under the umbrella of the UNDP. We speak together, Lebanese and Palestinians, about different projects, proposals, and problems we face. For example, Palestinian nurses can work thanks to this committee. Why? Because Lebanese nurses have moved to Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and other countries.

In this way, do you consider that the state hears your demands?

The prime minister hires one speaker to head this committee. The different Lebanese parties discuss the Palestinian situation, reach an agreement and transmit their opinion to the committee. However, nothing has changed our status in Lebanon so far. In practice, it's just paper, you know? Lebanese parties meet with Palestinian organizations, but nothing comes as it should be. The result is 0.

Your website says that one of your goals is to "provide the youth with a platform for self-expression and opportunities to open dialogues with youth from other countries". How does this work exactly?

There are always meetings with the Lebanese and Palestinian youth. And now, the youth in the camps are very active by playing a positive role in making a change. When our children become 16 or 17 years old, they remain with us and become volunteers in our institution. However, we also keep in touch with youth (Palestinian and non-Palestinian) from the U.S., Europe, etc. We have been working with them from the beginning. However, I am sorry to tell you that Palestinian youth dreams of leaving Lebanon. When I talk to them, they ask me: "Why should we study if we will not be able to work afterward?"

How did the decline of the PLO affect your activities?

I should kindly mention that Beit Atfal received substantial support from the General Unions and the PLO's leadership: financially (salaries and staff) and through the provision of needs for the children (clothes, for example). Due to the Israeli invasion in 1982, we were forced to leave Lebanon because we were sure that they would kill us. Then we moved to Syria. After the Sabra and Shatila massacres in 1982, we started a new project due to the number of children who lost one of their parents. We decided to create the Family Happiness Project, through which we support educationally and financially those kids until today. Constantly our projects have been revolving around the consequences of the massacres and the needs of the Palestinians.

When we returned to Lebanon in 1984, our board decided to be completely independent. Today, we do not take any money from the PLO or any political or religious group. We insist on that. If you are under the umbrella of any political party, the activities will be for the party and not for the people. Since the PLO became weak and had no influence in Lebanon, there was a big difference. We know that. Now, Palestinians are divided between PLO parties and pro-Syrian coalition parties.

Today, do you coordinate your activities with Palestinian popular committees and other NGOs?

Look, of course. We are living together in the same camps, so obviously we coordinate. I can say that, since the Oslo Accords in 1994, the majority of the national NGOs were less focused on Lebanon and more towards the West Bank and Gaza. Therefore, we decided to have a forum that coordinates all the NGOs: the Palestinian NGOs Forum. I was a general coordinator for this forum for many years. We are also members of the Palestinian Happy Camp Forum. There are also meetings between Lebanese and Palestinian parties, and the same for the NGOs. In Sidon, for example, we have a platform that coordinates Lebanese and Palestinian NGOs' activities.

In 2019, thousands of Palestinians protested against the Lebanese Ministry of Labor's plan to combat foreign labor without a permit. Palestinians were affected by this plan. How would you define these protests? Did they achieve their goal?

Now we are not allowed to work on 36 jobs. Before the protests, it was 72. Even though these protests were necessary, the real problem is that any minister can come, issue another plan, and worsen our situation.

Do you think that Palestinian presence still is a divisive element in Lebanese politics, as it was during the Civil War?

Before the Syrian refugees arrived, all the Lebanese constantly referred to us as a problem. Now, we are not a priority, especially for anti-Palestinian people. They are now focusing on the Syrians. We are nothing compared to the 1.5 million they compose. The difference between us and other refugees and migrants is that we spend our money in Lebanon. We do not send it to our homeland. Therefore, we are not supposed to be a problem. But I feel sad. Still, the Lebanese people do not want to understand the Palestinian situation. For example, anyone from France gets social and medical insurance or even owns a property. In contrast, the Palestinians are not allowed to do that. This is real discrimination. The Lebanese government and members of the Parliament say: "We are very proud of our democracy". But still, today, there are no human rights for us.

And do you perceive receiving support from any Lebanese political faction?

As you know, Lebanon is a particular case: the country's structure rests on religion. The prime minister must be Sunni, the president Maronite, and the head of the Parliament Shiite. Considering this, I can say the Lebanese are divided over our situation: some are anti-Palestinian, and others are pro-Palestinian. For example, Hezbollah is pro-Palestinian, but all the Lebanese Christian groups are against us. We know that. We know who is against us as humans. We are claiming Lebanese officers (ministers and others) that we do not want to be Lebanese. We are very proud of our nationality, and we wish to return to our country.

9.2. Interview with F.B.

Please, introduce yourself and explain how you ended up being a member of the Arab Nationalist Movement and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

My name is F.B. I was born in 1955 in a convent hospital of Beirut's eastern neighborhood Achrafieh. I was raised in a refugee camp called Tel al-Zaatar, which was destroyed in 1976 during the Lebanese Civil War. Before the destruction, around 40.000 people lived there under poor conditions. Around Tel al-Zaatar was created the central industrial area of Beirut. As I say, I was raised in this camp and saw inhuman and unfair situations that I could not understand from the beginning. I lived in a shanty town without light, safe water, or a sewerage system. I did not understand how the Lebanese state could treat us in such way. Members of the Lebanese secret service (called Deuxième Bureau in French) entered every day into the camp and hit kids and adults.

My high school was located near Tel al-Zaatar, in Bourj Hammoud. There, I started to be engaged with Lebanese left-wing movements and later with the Arab Nationalist Movement. We did not only live economic marginalization but also political. This is one of the primary reasons I started to fight for my people.

From your point of view, to what extent the Arab Nationalist Movement was relevant in terms of political mobilization among Palestinians in Lebanon?

As I say, as a Palestinian, I lived in a refugee camp. We did not have any kind of defense, economically and politically. We lived in a situation of constant repression, as the "forgotten". Therefore, these are the two main reasons the ANM was created: political and economic. We later expanded our fight to Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Yemen, and Palestine.

And why do you think the Arab Nationalist Movement was dissolved after scarce years of existence?

After five months of existence, the Lebanese branch of the ANM created multiple organizations, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and *Munathama al 'Amal* (Workers Organization). As you say, some years later, it was finally dissolved. The main reason was the internal disagreements in Lebanon and abroad. We disagreed over the type of analysis we should make towards our situation. As a former member of the PFLP, I thought it was impossible not to carry out a Marxist analysis. I had (and still do have) more in common with a Lebanese worker than with a rich Palestinian. In this way, the ANM was finally dissolved into multiple branches.

Who were your allies and enemies in Lebanon?

In the PFLP, we clearly distinguished the ally from the enemy. On the one hand, the enemies were headed by American imperialism, the artificial state of Israel, and the Lebanese reactionary forces (led by Saudi Arabia). Today, I must say, the situation is the same as in the 1960s and 1970s. The Lebanese reactionary forces are still going hand-in-hand with imperialism. On the other hand, our principal allies have always been the Lebanese left-wing (especially the Communist Party) and the Lebanese people. These are the only support we have ever had. Contrary to what others might think, the Lebanese citizens are not an enemy to us. It should be acknowledged by the Lebanese reactionary forces that we have always received a lot of support from the Lebanese people, and the Civil war proved that. The Lebanese Civil War did not start only due to the Israeli intervention: class struggle was also a significant reason.

After the ANM, the PLO became the primary political agent of Palestinians in Lebanon. Which mechanisms did it use to expand its influence?

This is a tough question. There is no single answer for that. From 1970 to 1971, there were the killings in Jordan. More than 20.000 Palestinians died. King Hussein of Jordan kicked out the Palestinians, and the PLO moved its headquarter to Lebanon. This situation benefited the Palestinians living there. Before that, they lived under constant humiliation. But when the PLO settled in Lebanon, it could help the people of the camps, while reaching agreements with the Lebanese left-wing. Hence, it motivated many people to engage with its activities. It is also important to point out that the PLO had a lot of money

when it arrived in Lebanon. This money came (and still today does so) from the National Fund.

Could you explain a little bit how this National Fund works?

We are 13 organizations in the PLO, right? So every month, each organization gets a certain amount of money. This money is destined to pay the martyrs' families, the political prisoners, the orphans, etc. It also creates job positions.

For you, what are the leading causes of PLO's decadence?

Even though today there is the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), the only legitime representative of the Palestinian people is the PLO, recognized as such by international law. PLO's failure is the consequence of internal fighting drawn for many years. Since the beginning, there has been a fight for internal hegemony. Finally, the Palestinian right-wing won and Fatah became the largest faction. They achieved the control of many camps while protecting them from outside interferences. However, it must be said that today, lots of Fatah members (especially those from the Al-Aqsa branch) acknowledge that the PLO is ultimately kidnapped by corruption and the musty right-wing.

Why do you think Fatah decided not to participate in the Lebanese Civil War in the first instance?

The Lebanese Forces warned that they would enter Tel al-Zaatar. Consequently, Yasser Arafat was allegedly afraid that many Palestinians would die if Fatah participated in the conflict. Nevertheless, thousands died due to the Lebanese Forces' massacres. The Palestinian Christian camp of Jisr El Basha was also destroyed. In my opinion, Fatah reacted late, also because it did not want to upset the Arab League. As you must know, the PLO was officially created by this regional organization.

How do the Palestinians engage with politics in Lebanon today?

In my opinion, the ideological orientation of the Palestinians is diverse and polarized. There are lots of parties and ideologies. Hamas is increasingly receiving more support. The PFLP still has support, but not to the same level as Hamas or Fatah. Moreover,

Hezbollah has had an increasing influence since the 1990s, given that it is considered a member of the "resistance axis" against Zionism. It has been helping Palestinians, both politically and economically, by providing protection to the camp and improving the living conditions as a precondition for an effective campaign in favor of our right to return.