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## **Becoming Diaspora: A Comparative Analysis of Palestinian Diaspora Groups in New Jersey and Lebanon**

Reem Zidan Farhat

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**Becoming Diaspora: A Comparative Analysis of Palestinian Diaspora Groups in New Jersey and Lebanon**

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## **Abstract**

This study analyses the relationship of members of the Palestinian diaspora with their host countries and how these conditions affect their relationship to their Palestinian identity. The two case studies chosen are Palestinian communities in New Jersey suburbs and the Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon. In the case of Palestinians in Lebanon, their longing for return is shaped by the fact that they are essentially foreigners in Lebanon. Despite being the third or fourth generation of Palestinians born in Lebanon, these refugees are excluded socially, economically, and politically. Thus, their connection to Palestine is tied directly to their status as refugees. For Palestinian Americans, their American citizenship allows them to visit Palestine, where connections to their identity are formed in their youth. These connections are reinforced in diaspora spaces where Palestinian Americans connect to Palestine by creating ties to their heritage and to each other. Additionally, following the events of September 11, Palestinian Americans began to feel othered in the United States and sought refuge in those diaspora spaces, further affecting their relationship to their identity and with the United States.

## **Introduction**

In May of 1947, Zionist militias massacred at least 15,000 Palestinians, destroyed 530 villages, and exiled nearly 750,000 from their lands in Palestine (Peteet, 2005). The event is called the “Nakba,” the Arabic word for catastrophe and sparked the creation of the Palestinian diaspora. Forever marked in the memory of Palestinians, this event was a turning point in Palestinian history, -it is seen as an “apocalyptic moment” and the start of the Palestinian story of exile (Peteet, 2007). A vast majority of Palestinian refugees fled to neighboring Arab countries Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon (Schulz and Hammer 2003). Following the dispersal of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, the United Nations responded with the creation of UN General Assembly’s Resolution 194 (III) which guaranteed all Palestinian refugees the right of return (Eloubedi, 2020). In an effort to respond to the needs of states overwhelmed by the numbers of Palestinian refugees, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, or UNRWA was created and continues to work with Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip until now.

In 1967, the second mass exodus, called the “Naksa” or setback in Arabic, occurred as Israeli militias forcibly expelled an upwards of 300,000 Palestinians from their land in the West Bank area and Gaza Strip (Schulz and Hammer 2003). Throughout the 1970s, Israel used forced migration as a means of punishment for Palestinians and through the subsequent decades to the 21st century, Palestinians have migrated out of Palestine as a result of economic constraints created by Israel’s ongoing occupation. Today, it estimated that more than 50 percent of Palestinians live in the diaspora. It is estimated that nearly 5.6 million of them live in Arab countries and about 700,000 live elsewhere (Labadi, 2018). As a result of this dispersal, Palestinians have to adapt to a number of cultural, social, and economic contexts. Because nearly a majority of Palestinians live in conditions of exile outside of Palestine, their ability to connect with their homeland and with each other is affected by the context in which they live.

This study examines the transnational experiences of Palestinians in the diaspora. It addresses the question: How is the transnational Palestinian diaspora shaped by the host country to which they

have located? To answer this question, I examined two Palestinian diaspora groups, the Palestinian American population of New Jersey and the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. These two populations are very different, and their experiences are mostly shaped by their citizenship status. Palestinian Americans have American citizenship while Palestinians in Lebanon do not have Lebanese citizenship. However, an analysis of these two communities provides critical insight into the way diaspora is formed. Factors such as feeling othered and ostracized in host countries, the creation of diaspora spaces, and physical markers of Palestinian identity serve to cultivate connections to Palestinian identity in the diaspora. Citizenship, and lack of it, greatly affect this connection and the relationship Palestinians in the diaspora have with the right of return. For Palestinian Americans, despite feeling othered in the United States post 9/11, citizenship and the privileges that come along with it allow for a level of integration in the host country. Conversely, due to a lack of citizenship, Palestinians in Lebanon are marked by a legal, social, and economic exclusion in Lebanon and confined to life in refugee camps. These two disparate experiences shape the way members of the Palestinian diaspora connect with their identities, with each other, with the host countries they live in, and manage their daily life needs.

Understanding the effect of each community's host country on the community in question is crucial to understanding the Palestinian diaspora as a whole. An analysis of two very different diaspora communities shows the impact a host country has on the way that Palestinian identity is expressed in different contexts. This thesis is broken up into four parts, a review of the existing literature on the Palestinian Diaspora, two case studies on Palestine and Lebanon, including respective histories of Palestinian presence in those countries, and a discussion of the findings and larger implications.

## **Methodology**

My interest in this research stems from being a member of the New Jersey Palestinian community. I often reflect on the Palestinian diaspora and the way Palestinians connect to their identity, and how that differs from one immigrant community to another. Despite sharing a unified ethnic identity, the Palestinian diaspora is vast and spread all over the globe, and as such, the experiences of this community are varied and unique. My experience is limited in that I only know what is like to be part of the Palestinian American diaspora, and more specifically the New Jersey community, where there is no lack of other Palestinians. I understand that my experience would be very different if I lived in another state, one where the Palestinian community is much smaller. I am also deeply aware that my experience is nothing like that of the Palestinians who became refugees in neighboring Arab countries. The Palestinian community in Lebanon, for example, is known in the diaspora to have a very dismal experience. As such, I was interested in researching the differences between the two very different communities.

For the New Jersey case study, most of my research was compiled from interviews with members of the community, informal conversations with acquaintances, or through participant observation. I formally interviewed five Palestinian Americans for the purpose of this thesis. All fell in the age range of 18-30, as the focus of my research is on the second generation. I have been an active member and volunteer at the Palestinian American Community Center in Clifton, NJ since the organization's inception in 2014. As such, much of my research comes from having worked in and with the community.

For the case of Palestinians in Lebanon, I had originally intended to interview citizens living in refugee camps. However, upon conducting more research I opted to not contribute to the “over-research” of this community, especially when much of the information I wanted to analyze was already available. As such, I gathered information from various sources in order to compile refugee narratives from camps in Lebanon. A majority of the narratives I compiled came from the Shatila refugee camp, located on the southern side of Beirut, the Lebanese capital. I also interviewed Tala Ismail, a Palestinian American whose family fled to Lebanon in 1948 and who has volunteered in refugee camps in Southern Lebanon. Her mother grew up in Ein al Hilweh refugee camp, located outside the city of Saida, and as such I have included narratives from there as well.

A limitation of this research is the small sample size of interviewees. The participants were all of similar economic and social backgrounds and ran in the same social circles. Consequently, it is difficult to tell if the parallels in their narratives come from sharing an ethnic identity or if they are a result of the sample. Although inclusion of broader research on this community was included to mitigate the effects of the small sample size, it is still an important limitation to note. Additionally, since I conducted formal interviews for my New Jersey case study and not for the Lebanon case study, there may be a difference in the way the two studies are interpreted. Because I do not personally know the people whose narratives are included, there is a crucial bit of context missing.

## **Literature Review**

Before discussing the Palestinian diaspora, it is important to understand the term diaspora and its use in a Palestinian context. The term diaspora originates in the Greek translation of the Bible and means “to sow widely.” It initially described the dispersal of the Greeks into present day Turkey through military conquest and colonization. As such, Cohen distinguishes this original meaning of diaspora from what he calls “victim diaspora” (Jewish, African American, Armenian and Palestinian). He notes that a “scarring historical event” is indicative of a victim diaspora, -in the case of Palestinians that event would be the Nakba (Cohen, 1996).

In the contemporary nation state, one where nationalism is both prized and prioritized, the diaspora has allowed “the space for multiple affiliation.” As such, when dispersed globally the diaspora results in the creation of overlapping communities (Cohen, 1996). In the case of Palestinians who collectively assert the right of return, belonging is mitigated. Even in cases of immigration when Palestinians willingly leave the homeland, political and economic conditions as a result of the occupation make those conditions ones of exile. For example, many Palestinians who immigrated to the United States did so of their own accord but still identify as exiles (Serhan, 2009).

In “The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of identities and politics of homeland,” Schulz and Hammer define diaspora as “a group of people that has been dispersed or has expanded to at least two countries of the world” (Schulz and Hammer 2003, 9). They assert that for the term to apply to a group of people, there must be a strong connection with other members of the group

and to memories of the homeland, even if generations of the diaspora have been long removed from that land. Diaspora communities are connected through a transnational existence.

Transnationalism is a long distance network that is maintained through transnational activities and maintaining social interactions within the diaspora. In the Palestinian diaspora, the one unifying symbol is the homeland itself. Schulz and Hammer examine the ways in which both the “destitute” Palestinians in Lebanese refugee camps and the relatively wealthy Palestinian American community both share the same transnational identity (Schulz and Hammer 2003). Through transnational activities, such as actually visiting the homeland for some Palestinians, or just watching Palestinian channels and communicating with relatives, the identity is maintained.

Studies of the Palestinian diaspora are growing both in depth and scope. The Palestinian refugee community living in Lebanon has been a large presence since the Nakba in 1948. The situation in Lebanon is particularly volatile for Palestinians and has been often described as worst case scenario for Palestinian refugees. The Lebanese sectarian government makes integration of any foreigners intensely politicized, while the PLO’s involvement in and eventual abandonment of camps, and conflicts such as the Civil War have only increased tensions with the Palestinians in Lebanon. Today, Palestinians in Lebanon are excluded from the vast majority of professions such as jobs in law, engineering, or medicine. They are denied citizenship and most of them have never lived outside of refugee camps.

The work of anthropologist Rosemary Sayigh is essential to understanding Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Sayigh’s “A House is Not a Home” speaks on the idea of permanent impermanence and the long-term effects of a community being in exile. In her 1979 book, “From Peasants to Revolutionaries” Sayigh describes the identity of the Palestinians living in Lebanon and how they assert their connection to that identity through holding onto the right of return.

Similarly, Julie Peteet’s “Landscape of Hope and Despair” examines how Palestinians in Ein al Hilweh refugee camp have held onto their identity by tracking the refugee experience in Lebanon from the 1950s until the early 2000s. She notes the hardships Palestinians in Lebanon have faced, both in terms of actual violence endured living in camps and Lebanon’s “concerted attempts to make life so unbearable that they will leave” (Peteet 2005, 220). She describes refugee camps as spaces of “misery and confinement” but also as spaces where Palestinians can develop and pass on identity. She notes that the construction of the refugee identity is one where refugees’ identification as refugees was not a marker of victimization but a resistance in itself to uphold the right of return (Peteet 2005, 211).

Diana Allan’s “Refugees of the Revolution” is an examination of everyday life in the Shatila refugee camp. Allan asserts that although Palestinians in Lebanon are now third or fourth generation refugees, camps residents still evoke a sense of collective memory to keep them connected to the Homeland. Their connection stems from oral history that is passed down from elder community members who tell stories of the Nakba and then pass those stories on to their children who share it with the next generation. Commemorative activities take place in the camps and there is a focus on a collective sense of loss. The homeland is romanticized as the final goal.

Allan also focuses on the idea of the right of return and what it means to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. She writes, “Upholding the ‘right of return’ (haq al awda) and ‘refugee’ status over naturalization or permanent exile has become a core tenet of the community’s political identity” (4). Since the “right of return” has been used by the Lebanese government to deny Palestinians citizenship and by default a myriad of rights such as upward mobility and land ownership, residents of the camp have a unique relationship with the idea. While they uphold their right of return, Allan observed that many of these refugees just want rights in the meanwhile, and do not view that as oppositional.

Sergio Bianchi’s “Advocating ‘Dignity’ and ‘Return’ for Lebanon’s Palestinians” analyzes the ways in which diaspora language is employed in order to advocate for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. In particular, the language is used in order to promote the enhancement of Palestinian economic rights in Lebanon. It is used in direct opposition to the Lebanese narrative that a legal assimilation of Palestinian refugees to Lebanon would forfeit the right of return. The language used by these NGO’s suggests that a diasporic existence is one in which Palestinians can maintain their identities regardless of where they live. Bianchi refers to this as a rejection of “the dichotomy of naturalization vs. return” and instead viewing an establishment of an “in-between” state of existence where the right of return is upheld and refugees have the opportunities for societal mobility (Bianchi 2014, 136).

The Palestinian community in Lebanon is considered by some scholars to be an “over-researched community” (Sukarieh and Tannock 2013). In an article published on Al Shabaka, a non-profit organization which aims to educate about the Palestinian community, anthropologist Mayssun Sukarieh quoted Rabie, a 27-year-old Palestinian man living in the Shatila refugee camp on the phenomena of being an over-researched community. He said, “By now, 30 researchers have given me a voice. My voice has been given in English, Dutch, French, Swedish, Arabic, and Spanish. But I’ve never heard it back, and I don’t think I ever will” (Sukarieh 2014). His statement referenced the phenomena of researchers coming to refugee camps and asking refugees to share their experiences with the promise that doing so may change their conditions.

Much of the research on the Palestinian community in Lebanon can be divided into two categories: (1) ethnographic research on the refugee community and their connection to their identity and the right of return and (2) historical analysis of the effect of Palestinian resettlement to Lebanon on the Lebanese society and an analysis of the plight of refugees. Although many studies incorporate both aspects, I will focus on the former in order to create an accurate conception of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

If the Palestinian diaspora in Lebanon is considered an “over-researched” community, the opposite can be said of the Palestinian American community. The Palestinian American community is comparatively newer and much smaller than the community in Lebanon. Unlike the Palestinian community in Lebanon, it is not the focus of academic research.

Studies on Palestinian Americans, and especially the New Jersey community, are few and far in-between. Randa Serhan’s “Suspended Community: An Ethnographic Study of Palestinian-Americans in New York and New Jersey” is the most comprehensive study of this community. Her study is a product of eight years of ethnographic research in the Palestinian American New

Jersey and New York communities. Serhan focuses on three methods of building community, surveillance and gossip, financial transaction, and competition. She begins her study by establishing the difference between immigrants and exiles, and firmly establishes the Palestinian American community as the latter. Serhan defines exile as “absence of attachment to one's present home or host society; a stubborn rejection of living in the present and letting go of the [nostalgic] past” (Serhan 2009, 17).

Serhan asserts that Palestinian Americans employ the use of tradition in order to project their national identity. Particularly, marriage is used to preserve the Palestinian identity because Palestinians are encouraged to only marry other Palestinians. For many families, this also goes further to being encouraged to only marry from within their village. She also examines the way visiting Palestine and experiencing the occupation firsthand reinforces the Palestinian identity of the second generation. She emphasizes that community members seem “to have been raised by the same set of parents” due to a very unified narrative (Serhan 2009, 216). Serhan describes the Palestinian community as having adopted an “us vs. them” mentality which distinguished them from other Arabs, other immigrant communities, and the “average American” (read: white). They viewed these other communities as threats to their identities, and thus reinforced their own community building efforts.

The Palestinian American community is a “trust network” which Serhan defines as “ramified interpersonal connections, consisting mainly of strong ties within which people set valued, consequential, long-term resources and enterprises at risk to the malfeasance, mistakes, or failures of others” (248). She notes that the Palestinian American community is “suspended” through a system of interpolitical boundaries they impose on themselves.

Thea Renda Abu El-Haj’s “Unsettled Belongings” chronicles the ways in which second generation Palestinian American youth have engaged in activities and practices which reinforce their sense of identity. Although her book focuses on the ways in which nationalism is defined and enforced in public schools, and how that affects second generation Palestinian Americans growing up in a post 9/11 world, it offers vast insight on the effect of 9/11 on this community. Abu El-Haj focuses on how the United States’ process of exclusion of minority groups, especially “Muslim” presenting groups post 9/11 contributed to a sense of rejection of Palestinian Americans that also encouraged stronger ties to their Palestinian identities. Her book discusses the ways in which second generation Palestinian Americans use citizenship to their advantage. Their United States citizenship is the means through which many of them are able to visit Palestine. It also gives them unalienable rights which they use to advocate for justice, both in Palestine and for oppressed groups in the United States.

Palestinian American scholar Rabab Abdelhadi has written extensively on the effects of 9/11 on the Palestinian American community. In her reflection “Where Is Home? Fragmented Lives, Border Crossings, and the Politics of Exile,” Abdelhadi writes about the lack of safety for people who were visibly Muslim following the attacks on 9/11. She cites passing as a survival mechanism and compares it to her experiences in Palestine where hiding markers of Palestinian identity in front of Israeli soldiers was a method of surveil and ensuring one’s safety (Abdelhadi 2003, 94).

“Homelands and Diasporas: Holy Lands and Other Places” by Andrew Lei and Alex Weingrod examines the ways in which “homeland” and “diaspora” are employed by various communities, focusing on the Jewish and Palestinian diaspora, but also the ways in which this language has been used by other groups. This study will focus on their descriptions of the Palestinian American diaspora on particular.

An important analysis from this book is the discussion of Palestinian peripheral communities. They described Palestinian peripheral communities as, “familial networks sometimes with a family council, village clubs . . . national and nationalistic-religious networks usually based on the different popular organizations connected with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) or pro-Hamas” (12). These peripheral communities serve as the basis by which Palestinians maintain their transnational identities.

One large gap in research on Palestinian Americans is a lack of statistical data on the community. Arab Americans are considered “white” on the United States Census because early Arab immigrants (mostly Syrians) identified as white in order to receive American citizenship as per the 1790 Naturalization Act. The works of Vincent Parrillo and Matthew Jaber Stiffler serve as a historical outline of Arab American patterns of immigration in the United States and in New Jersey specifically. According to Stiffler, Syrian and Lebanese immigrants to New Jersey came to produce silk in Paterson in the early 1900s, which in turn drew other Arabs, namely Palestinians, to the area. Parrillo’s work tracked early patterns of settlement of Arab Americans in New Jersey. Many of those Arabs studied were Palestinian, with the exception of a few Lebanese immigrants.

While there is a wide array of research on the Palestinian diaspora, there is not much research that examines two diaspora communities simultaneously. Schulz and Hammer’s “The Palestinian Diaspora” comes closest to this objective, however since their research was done on a much wider scale, it is not an isolated analysis of two separate communities. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have been called the worst-case scenario for Palestinians in the diaspora, whereas Palestinian refugees in the United States have prospered economically. Analyzing these two groups side-by-side and understanding the relation between these diaspora groups and their host countries, as well as the host country’s relationship with these diaspora groups is essential to understanding how Palestinians in the diaspora form their transnational identities.

## **Case Study One: Palestinians in Lebanon**

### History of Palestinian Settlement in Lebanon

Tala Ismail was sitting in a cafe in Lebanon one summer, drinking coffee with her cousins and their Lebanese friends and speaking to them in her Palestinian Arabic dialect. They were suddenly interrupted from their conversation when an older Lebanese man in his mid-40s called out to her from across the room and yelled, “You dirty Palestinian woman with your dirty dialect, shut up.”

Ismail remembered feeling shocked and entirely unsure of how to respond. But for her, the experience served as a reminder of the type of prejudices Palestinians living in Lebanon face daily, despite their long history in Lebanon.

Following the events of the Nakba in 1948, when Zionist militias expelled over 700,000 Palestinians from their homeland and massacred an upwards of 13,000, over 100,000 Palestinians fled to Lebanon (Sayigh 2005, 22). These refugees mostly came from Northern Palestine, specifically Nazareth, Safad, Acre, Haifa, and Besan (Siklawi 2010, 598). At this time, many refugees settled near the southern border of Lebanon in Red Cross tents and temporary housing. They did not bring much with them, as they expected to return to their homes shortly.

The Palestinians were separated by social class and religious sects. Christians had an easier time adjusting, and many of them were granted naturalization in the 1950s because the president at the time, Camille Shamoun, aimed to increase the Christian minority. Palestinians lived on land set aside for them by the Lebanese government, which later became the camps constructed by the Red Cross and the United Nations Refugee Work Agency (UNRWA) (Sanyal 2009, 880). There were originally 15 refugee camps in Lebanon, and today, there are 12 still standing. Some refugee camps, such as the Shatila refugee camp, have been destroyed and rebuilt numerous times (Sayigh 2005, 23). In 2012, UNRWA estimated that there are 465,798 Palestinians living in Lebanon, with 233,509 of them registered as living in refugee camps (Allan 2013, 10).

In the decade following the Nakba, Palestinians in Lebanon lived in deplorable conditions. They upgraded their tents into brick and stone buildings, but the Lebanese government prohibited them from using concrete for roofs. A majority of these refugees worked in agriculture in Palestine, continuing that work in Lebanon and making less than minimum wage. The Lebanese government also established restrictions on Palestinians such as limiting freedom of movement, political expression, political activism, and employment throughout the 1950s and early 1960s (Shiblak 1997, 262). In 1964, Decree Number 17561 required all individuals to obtain a work permit from the Ministry of Labor and required individuals to join professional associations. However, this was impossible for Palestinian refugees because a prerequisite to join these associations was having citizenship (Bianchi 2014, 121).

In the years following this, however, there was a growing presence of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in Lebanon thus granting the refugees increased power (Allan 2013, 11). This growing power led to tensions between those who supported the PLO's military presence (left wing parties) and those who opposed it (right wing parties and Maronite Christians). These

tensions led to the signing of the Cairo Agreement in 1969. The Cairo Agreement was signed on November 3, 1969 between the Lebanese Government and the PLO (represented by General Emile al-Bustani and PLO Chair Yaser Arafat respectively) (Siklawi 2019, 79).

The Cairo Agreement allowed a certain degree of Palestinian self-governance in refugee camps, granting the PLO authority over the camps. It also allowed Beirut to serve as the PLO's official headquarters. Additionally, as per the agreement, restrictions on political activities, professional work, and arms possession of Palestinians in Lebanon were lifted. The period of PLO involvement in refugee camps (1969 to 1982) was marked by a sharp improvement in the economic conditions of Palestinians in Lebanese refugee camps (Siklawi 2019, 80).

However, this changed when the PLO was forced out of Lebanon in the 1980s following more than a decade of violence within Lebanon. In 1975, the Lebanese Civil War broke out amidst high tension between Lebanese authorities and Palestinian refugees. To this day, Palestinians are blamed for the Lebanese Civil War by some Lebanese who, in the post-civil war period, saw Palestinians as “‘guests’ who did not respect the hospitality offered to them by the Lebanese, and who consequently brought about the destruction of Lebanon” (Serhan W. 2014, 2). Additionally, as a result of the PLO gaining more power in Lebanon throughout the 1970s, Israel invaded South Lebanon in 1978, and later invaded Beirut in 1982. The PLO was forced to leave Lebanon, creating a new base in Tunis and leaving the camps without any protection (Schulz and Hammer 2003, 56).

On September 18 1982, right wing Lebanese Christian Phalange militia supported by the Israeli military invaded the two Palestinian camps located in Beirut, Sabra and Shatila. Over 3,000 Palestinians were massacred. The massacre is seen as a collective wound on the Palestinian community in Lebanon, particularly the Palestinians living in the Shatila refugee camps. It serves as a reminder that they are a community without protection and governance (Schulz and Hammer 2003, 56).

The time following 1982 can be characterized by a "sharp rise in the threat perception of Palestinians in Lebanon as their vulnerability has increased" (Schulz and Hammer 2003, 59). Anti-Palestinian sentiment in Lebanon grew steadily. Negative stereotypes had grown and Palestinians became associated with poverty and crime. Discrimination against Palestinians became commonplace.

One story is that when Maronites wanted to distinguish Palestinians from Lebanese at checkpoints during the civil war, they would ask them to say tomato and listen for the accent, which is slightly different in Palestinian dialects of Arabic. During this time, pronouncing the word in the way of their dialect would be met with swift retaliation such as imprisonment or death. As such, many Palestinians would learn the Lebanese accent in order to blend in.



**Fig.1**

*The image above depicts the ruins left in the wake of Sabra and Shatila massacre. The already dismal conditions of the camp were left in ruins and corpses were scattered underneath rubble and all throughout the camp. The Sabra and Shatila Massacre marked a turning point for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Without the protection of the PLO, the Palestinian refugees of Sabra and Shatila were left helpless and abandoned. This event symbolized their conditions as refugees in exile suffering while waiting for return. (Source: Agence France-Presse)*

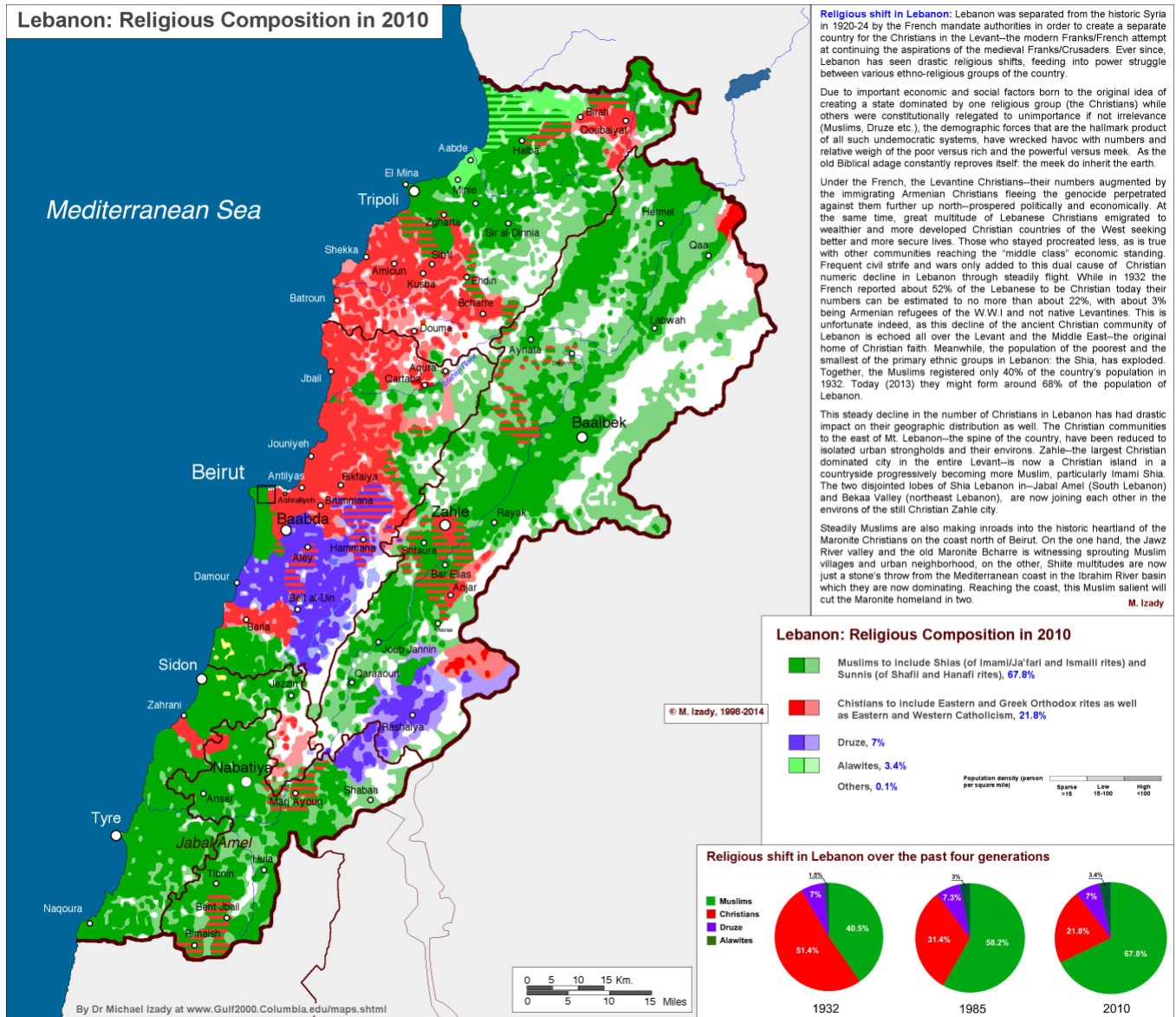
## Relationship to Host Country

### i. Discrimination and Exclusion from Lebanese Society

Following the expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon, Palestinians were left jobless and vulnerable without any government protection. In 1990, the Lebanese constitution was altered and explicitly rejected any formal settlement of Palestinians in Lebanon. “Tawteen” is an Arabic word that refers to permanent settlement. The official reason the Lebanese government holds against tawteen is that if Palestinians were to permanently settle in Lebanon, they would be rejecting their right of return. This is because the officials espoused the idea that if Palestinian refugees were given Lebanese citizenship, they would “forfeit” their right to return. In this discourse, refugees are not given autonomy as individuals, but are reduced by political players as symbols of hope and return (Schulz and Hammer 2003, 52).

However, one of the main motivations behind not allowing for naturalization of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon is the maintenance of the Lebanese sectarian system. To understand the ways in which the sectarian division of the government has affected the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, one must first understand the sectarian division in Lebanon. The system was first implemented in 1943, after Lebanon officially gained independence. There are 11 total sects in Lebanon holding seats in Parliament. Governmental power is distributed proportionally for each sect based on the 1932 Lebanese census. The original system granted disproportionate power to the Maronite sect, but was adjusted following the signing of the Taif Accords in 1989 after the Civil War (Serhan W. 2014, 1). The government currently runs under a confessional framework with the President being a Maronite Christian, the Speaker of the House being a Shia Muslim, and the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim (Schulz and Hammer 2003, 52).

The threat Palestinians represent to this sectarian framework is clear. If Palestinians were to be naturalized, they would increase the count of Sunni Muslims, thus affecting the percent of parliament that would also be Sunni Muslim (Richter-Devroe 2013, 100). The refusal of the Lebanese government to naturalize Palestinians has had a profound effect on the Palestinians living in Lebanon. Given no economic and social rights, Palestinians in Lebanon have very little opportunity for social mobility. The vast majority of Palestinians living in Lebanon still live in refugee camps. These Palestinians are third and in some cases fourth generation Palestinians in Lebanon, and their situation has remained the same as their predecessors.



**Fig. 2:**

*The above map depicts the religious composition of Lebanon. The last time a formal census was conducted in Lebanon was in 1932, when the Maronite Christians made up a substantially larger percentage of the population in Lebanon. Now, between the Sunnis and the Shias, Muslims make up nearly 68% of the population. Notwithstanding the Palestinians, tensions between religious groups in Lebanon are high as officials attempt to keep their faction’s claim to power. The presence of Palestinians represents a clear threat to this precarious system by increasing the Sunni Muslim population. (Source: Dr. Michael Izady Columbia University)*

Since Palestinians are not given citizenship, they are excluded from most employment opportunities in Lebanon. In 1982, the Ministerial Decree number 1/289 was passed and restricted Palestinian access to employment further. Palestinians were prevented from working in over seventy professions including any government jobs, office work, and any higher level positions in legal and medical work (Chatty 2010, 5). Additionally, on May 21, 1987 the Lebanese Chamber of Deputies ended the Cairo Agreement, thus re-imposing the pre-1969 restrictions placed on the Palestinians. These restrictions included the obligation to receive a work permit, national preference, and reciprocity. What is meant by reciprocity is that a foreigner is only allowed to receive a job if their home country offers that profession for Lebanese immigrants, an obligation that is impossible to fulfill in Palestine due to the Israeli occupation. These laws left only the construction and agricultural sectors as viable for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (Chatty 2010, 5).

In 2005, the Lebanese government passed Ministerial Memorandum number 1/67 which stated that if a Palestinian was born in Lebanon, they are no longer explicitly barred from the 70 professions outlined in the 1982 decree number 1/289. However, since many places of employment still follow the three pre-1969 restrictions, they are still barred from a vast majority of professions in Lebanon aside from manual labor work (Chatty 2010, 5). Even if Palestinians do obtain work permits, they are restricted from receiving social security benefits. As such, it is increasingly impossible for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon to accrue any type of wealth and move out of camps or increase their social standing.

Today, Palestinian refugees cannot work in 36 professions, including jobs in medicine, engineering, and law (Eloubeudi 2020, 15). They can, however, work those professions within camps. Most Palestinians in Lebanon work jobs in manual labor such as construction or work as service workers or cleaners. The Lebanese government's restrictions on Palestinian employment opportunities has confined generation after generation to camps.

Palestinians living in Lebanon continue to face social and economic restrictions that make living in Lebanon difficult (Schulz and Hammer 2003, 53). In 2001, Palestinians were prohibited from owning property under law No.296 under which “[i]t is prohibited for any person who is not a national of a recognized state or any one whose ownership of property is contrary to the provisions of the Constitution relating to ‘tawteen / re-settlement’ to acquire real-estate property of any kind” (Suleiman 2008, 9). This law clearly targeted Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and prevents Palestinians from both owning and inheriting land.

Not having access to work is an endemic issue which affects many aspects of life for Palestinians living in Lebanon. It also makes integration in Lebanon difficult if not nearly impossible. Because Palestinians are excluded from a wide array of jobs, they are not fully included in Lebanese society. These laws make it so that Palestinians will never truly be a part of Lebanese society and leave Palestinian refugees in a situation of limbo. The laws make it clear to them that they will always be Palestinian refugees. Despite generations of Palestinians having been born in Lebanon, those Palestinians will never have the rights or privileges afforded to Lebanese citizens (Eloubeidi 2020).

Employment is necessary to access rights and resources in a country. Being denied access to employment also affects access to benefits such as health care. And since they are often paid wages lower than the minimum wage in Lebanon, Palestinians cannot afford to pay for health costs out of pocket (Eloubeidi 2020). Additionally, because Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are denied social security benefits, they have no means of security for when they get older and retire. They are also not entitled to paid work leave or days off. Employment also equates to social mobility. If someone saves enough money, they may move out of camps or invest in property (Serhan W. 2014).

While there are many tangible repercussions of not having access to employment, there are also many negative mental health repercussions as well. Being employed increases self-esteem, allows individuals to make connections in their host country, and learn the customs of that country. While both Palestinian men and women face difficulty in securing work in Lebanon, there is an added layer of stress for men, who, culturally, are supposed to be providers of their family. Not having access to many fields of employment can be emasculating for many Palestinian men and lead to decreased self-esteem and confidence (Eloubeidi 2020, 18).

Cutting off fair access to employment for Palestinian refugees makes poverty cyclical and contributes to feelings of hopelessness. Palestinians born in refugee camps have little to no opportunity of ever leaving camps due to the restrictions placed on them by the Lebanese government.

Tala Ismail is a Palestinian American whose family was exiled to Lebanon in 1948 after the Nakba. I met Ismail while volunteering at the Palestinian American Community Center where she was the civic engagement coordinator. Although she grew up in New Jersey, her mother grew up in Ein Al Hilweh refugee camp, the largest refugee camp in Lebanon. Ismail has worked in three refugee camps in Southern Lebanon Al Bas, Al Rashideya, and Burj al Shmal. As such, Ismail has experience in refugee camps all throughout Lebanon due to her family and her work.

Ismail shared one story of an interaction with a young Palestinian man in Ein Al Hilweh who said he never plans to get married or have children because he believes there is no reason to bring children into this world if they will be stuck in the same situation as him.

The above interaction is not uncommon. As many of the Palestinians living in refugee camps in Lebanon are third and fourth generation, they do not have much hope for their futures because all they know is the poverty they've grown up with. Aside from laws that prevent access and social mobility to Palestinians in Lebanon, Palestinians also face discrimination on a wider scale in Lebanese society. In Ismail's experiences working with refugees in camps, young Palestinians often tell her that they experience discrimination every day.

One teen refugee told her, "people look at us like we are cockroaches." Another refugee was a Palestinian whose family fled to Syria after 1948 and were made refugees once again by the war in Syria. He told her he missed being a Palestinian refugee in Syria and doesn't want to identify as Palestinian in Lebanon because of how Palestinians are treated there.

While codified discrimination makes it difficult for Palestinians to ever truly be a part of Lebanese society, social discrimination serves to solidify the exclusion of Palestinians in Lebanon. Palestinians living in Lebanon will never truly be a part of the fabric of the country. Laws such as those restricting access certain professions or to owning property make sure of that. The Palestinian living condition is a constant reminder of their identity. Even the physical spaces a majority of Palestinians live in (the refugee camps) serve as both physical and social barriers to assimilation in Lebanon. The camp serves as a constant reminder of Palestinian identity to all Palestinians who live there that they are in a condition of exile.

### Connection to Palestinian Identity

#### i. The Camp as a Marker of Palestinian Identity

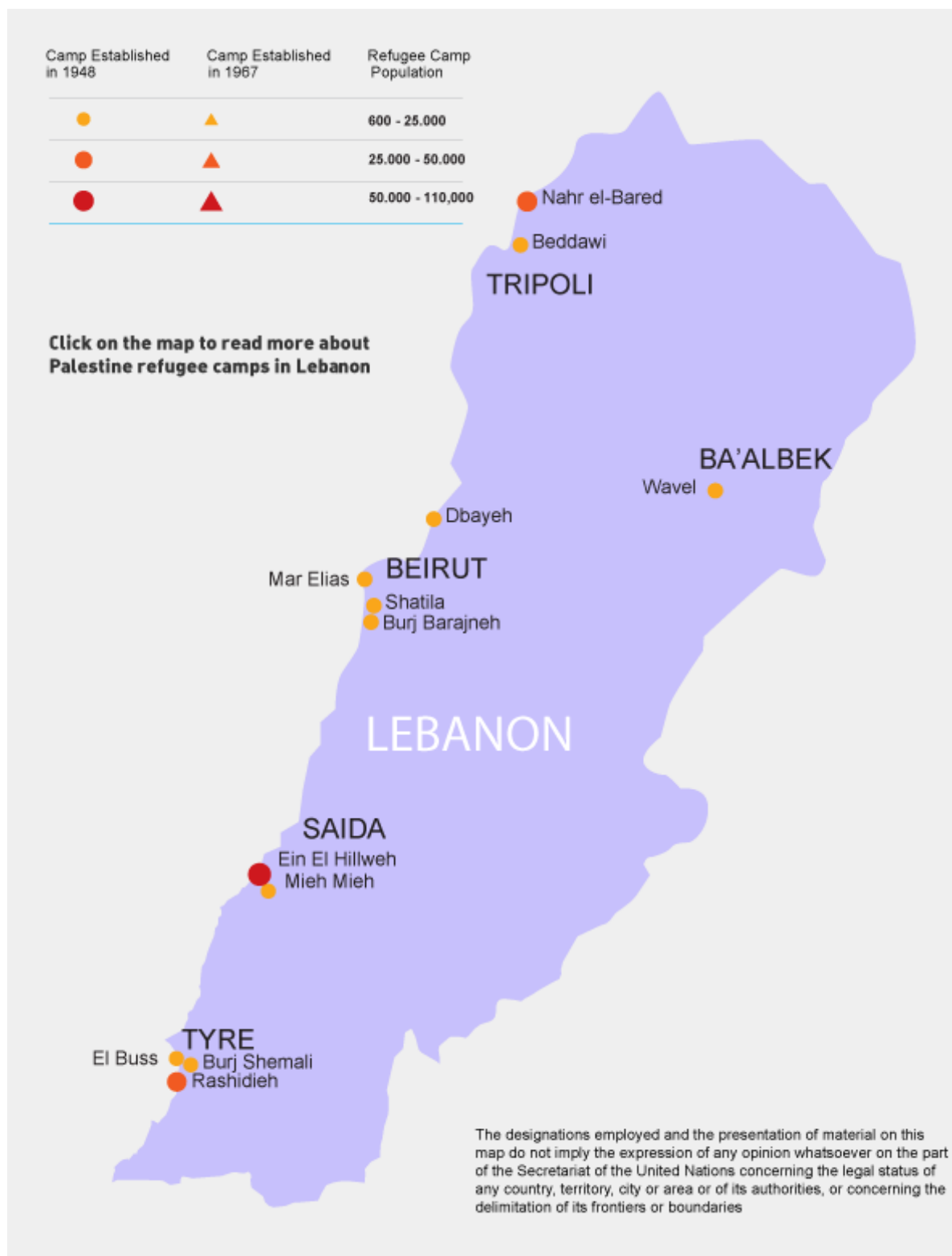
“The camp is the ultimate symbol of being different, of not belonging in the new place. Its inhabitants are alienated and marginalized, shut out, not only from the home ground and from entry to a number of places in the world, but from host societies.” (Schulz and Hammer 2003, 112).

The refugee camp is a physical marker of Palestinian identity. In camps, relationships with other Palestinians and with Palestinian identity are created and preserved. As Adam Ramadan notes in “In the Ruins of Nahr al-Barid,” “The refugee camps are *in* Lebanon but not *of* Lebanon, located in the present on Lebanese territory but drawing meaning from a separate Palestinian time-space, ‘where home is situated, where the past occurred, and where futures are to be realized’” (Ramadan 2010, 51).

In camps, connections to Palestine are shared. The camps themselves are filled with physical markers of Palestinian-ness. Palestinian graffiti lines the walls of camps. Palestinian flags are hung high and proud, as are flags of specific Palestinian political parties. Markers of Palestinian identity are worn often, such as keffiyahs, the black and white head covering worn by peasant farmers in Palestine.

Camps also serve as a physical reminder of the condition Palestinians are in and a reminder of their collective trauma. Shatila refugee camp is a stark example of this and of the condition of Palestinians in exile.

The Shatila refugee camp is one of 12 Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. It is located in West Beirut between working class residential neighborhoods and Shia suburbs. Over the years, it has become a physical space uniting the impoverished people of Lebanon. As more and more refugees came into Lebanon, particularly those from Syria, the situation for Palestinian refugees became even more dire. Not only were they experiencing decades of institutionalized discrimination, they were also now competing with two million Syrian refugees for aid and work. The camp itself is home to around 22,000 people, 10,849 of which are estimated to be Palestinian as of June 2018 (UNRWA, 2020).



**Fig. 3:**

*There are 12 Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. The largest Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon is Ein El Hilweh, located on the outskirts of Saida. (Source: UNRWA)*

The other half of residents are made up of impoverished Lebanese, Egyptians, Syrians, and South Asian service workers. The camp does not expand horizontally, but vertically. Informal construction without government permission is carried out in the camp to make room for growing families. Buildings that were originally one story high have become several stories high, with multiple generations living above each other in very cramped conditions. The layout of the camp does not allow for much sunlight, and many people living in the camp have had health problems due to inadequate ventilation (Allan 2013, 17).

In a 2019 documentary made by Al Jazeera's English channel, titled "Palestinian, Millennial, and Jobless," a young Palestinian man compared conditions in Shatila refugee camp to a cage. "We are suffocating, we'll even go to Syria. We'll die? I want to die. That's fine. Take us to Syria, seriously. Just film the different alleyways here, and you'll see the sewage. Is this a life?" His friend behind him grips his neck and says, "See, we are suffocating, we are suffocating" (Al Jazeera, 2019).

The physical decimation and deterioration of the camps is an endless reminder of the shared history the Palestinian members of the camp share. Because most Palestinians in Lebanon do not live outside of the camps, they are endlessly reminded of their identity. Their situation serves as a reminder of what was lost and what they hope to have returned to them. For them, "the importance of living in a camp is precisely so that they remember Palestine and keep alive the demand to return" (Ramadan 2010, 55).

While the camp serves as a space of living, it is different from a "home." Sayigh makes a distinction between the English word "house" and the Arabic equivalents "beit" and "dar" to discuss the ways in which the Arabic words for home suggest permanence and security, something that is lacking in the condition of refugees. The "beit" is the permanent structure that is extended into one's village. This is important to note because even in refugee camps, Palestinians cluster near people from the same villages as them. Although the clustering is informal, it is so present that one may enter a camp and ask residents "where do the people from Safad live?" (Peteet 1992, 25). As Sayigh notes, "third and fourth generations of Palestinians in exile still feel a sense of belonging to villages (or towns) in Palestine" (Sayigh 2005, 9). The home is still Palestine, but the camps have recreated as much of this as possible.



**Fig. 4:**

*The above image of Shatila refugee camp shows that structures are built upward as families grow and need more space. Electrical wires are tangled, hang low, and pose hazards for camp residents. (Source: David Brunetti)*

Sayigh explains that the meaning of “beit” for Palestinians in exile implies a need to surround themselves with the familiar, and that includes recreating as much of the homeland as possible in camps. Although this division by villages was mostly typical in the early days of settlement in Lebanon, it can still be seen today to an extent. One big example of this is in marriages, where it is still preferred that women marry men from their villages. Sayigh notes this in an anecdote from the Shatila refugee camp where a woman from Majd al-Kroom, a prominent village in Shatila, said, “If someone from another village in the camp wanted to marry a girl from Majd al-Kroom, her father would assemble all the people of Majd al-Kroom and tell them, 'So-and-so has asked for my daughter. If there is anyone [from Majd al-Kroom] whose son wants her, let him take her!’” (Sayigh 2005, 30).

This clustering and creation of relations along village lines shows that the camp has become a way to recreate the homeland in exile. The clustering is especially evident because “in the very geography of Lebanon’s refugee camps: when the camps were first established, the refugees gathered in groups that replicated their village and family ties, with the result that the various camp quarters were named for Palestinian villages” (Khalili 11, 2004). Customs and practices

from the homeland were brought to these camps. They were able to be passed down from generation to generation due to the insulation of these communities within camps. Because Palestinian refugees were excluded from Lebanese society, the camps became enclaves where Palestinians can uphold their Palestinian customs. Even as clustering among village lines within camps has decreased over the years due to internal migration within Lebanon and some families leaving to other countries, the consistent element is that of “rural villagism” (Sayigh 1994, 30) in which the customs of the village are upheld and passed down.

Additionally, even after generations in exile, one’s village is still a primary marker of identity for refugees. Schulz notes, “Even if she or he is born in Jabaliya refugee camp in Gaza or Burj el-Barajneh in Lebanon, a Palestinian refugee is still from Acre, Haifa or Jaffa. Locality, the specific village of one’s parents, is still how one defines oneself in terms of origin” (Schulz and Hammer 2003, 97). Such patterns of identification indicate that the home is still Palestine in the eyes of these refugees. Palestinians are not “from” the camps, they only live there. This shows the difference between the permanence of “beit” in relation to the temporary “house.” The refugee camps are not “beit,” that is reserved for the homeland, and as such, refugees do not identify themselves as from the camps, even if that is all they have known and despite never having physically been to the homeland.

Living in the camps serves as a liminal reminder of one’s Palestinian-ness. It separates the Palestinians from the Lebanese people, but physically and socially. One is less likely to mingle and interact with Lebanese people (not including the Lebanese people who live inside of the camps) while living in Shatila or any other refugee camp. Additionally, since camps are associated with poverty and crime, and this association extends to Palestinians from camps, they are kept separate from regular members of Lebanese society. Even in universities, where Palestinian students learn alongside the general Lebanese population, the moment someone asks someone where they live, they will know automatically that they are Palestinian. Such clear separation prevents Palestinians from ever fully integrating.

As Ismail puts it, “You won’t meet a Lebanese girl from Tripoli if you are a Palestinian refugee living in Ein Al Helwah.” The camps serve as a bubble that insulates Palestinians from Lebanese society while also preventing them from integrating into Lebanese society. It is within the camps, these Palestinian enclaves, that the Palestinian identity is taught, inherited, and nurtured. It is also within these camps that village identity is preserved and upheld, making the camp cultures very different from that of Lebanese society. When speaking about Ein al-Helwah in particular, Ismail notes that the camp itself is like a city within a city. She describes that the culture of the camp differs greatly from the culture of Lebanon as a whole. Ismail describes the camps as very religious and conservative. When she visits, she will opt to wear more modest clothing, such as a cardigan rather than a t-shirt, something she doesn’t do when she is walking around in other places in Lebanon.

## ii. Commemoration of Tragedy

During the period where the PLO had an active and official presence in refugee camps in Lebanon, they established commemorative programs in order to bolster and promote Palestinian

identity. Among these events were functions such as festivals, gatherings, theatrical reenactments of the Nakba, and speeches, -all of which were well frequented by Palestinians living in camps and Lebanese nationals alike as they were held in main cities. The PLO also established special days in remembrance of historical events such as the signing of the Balfour Declaration in which British secretary Arthur Balfour wrote a letter in support of the establishment of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine, the Nakba, and established days such as Palestinian Land Day (Khalili 2004, 8).

When the PLO left, however, they became much smaller and only attended by people who lived in camps. Without the PLO to sponsor and hold events and gatherings, “most national days were commemorated on posters rather than through actual gatherings, and the festivals held are jointly sponsored by NGOs and the factions pooling their resources” (Khalili 2004, 9). At this time there was also a shift in the importance of oral history as elder members of the camps shared stories in more intimate settings.

The Nakba is an event that takes a center stage as a focal point of collective memory in the camps, and camp elders were “increasingly called upon to inhabit the valued roles of victim or survivor because their narratives merge individual recollection with a collective memory of persecution in a way that resonates with the moral and political goals of Palestinian nationalism” (Allan 2013, 40).

NGO’s have used commemorative activities in conversations with residents of Shatila (Bianchi 2014, 125). Residents of the camp organize events on May 15 to mark the commemoration of the Nakba, the event which brought them all to the camps in the first place. There is a distinct focus on the past, on what was taken from them. This commemoration serves two purposes. One, it instills in the residents of the camp a sense of common memory. The memory strengthens their ties to each other and to Palestine. (Richter-Devroe 2013, 113) There is a sense of collective loss, a framing of their community as victims to a common event.

The second purpose, which is tied to the first, is that it instills a sense of hope and a tie to the right of return. They remember because they want to return. Remembering instills that return is still an inevitability and that it is their right. Commemorating the Nakba reminds the residents of Shatila that they have been taken out of their homeland against their will, but that their end goal is return. Return is seen as the solution for their conditions. Conversations on improving current conditions are secondary to the main goal of return. That is because once they return, all their problems will be solved. Such commemoration ties the multiple generations together, even those who are the third or fourth generation of Palestinians exiled in Lebanon.

The commemoration of tragedy is an active form of resistance for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. It is an active effort to not forget and to push against the narrative that the longer Palestinians are away from their homeland, the less Palestinian they are. When they were first exiled, the assumption was that they would eventually take on the identities of the lands they left to. Palestinians in Syria would become Syrian, Palestinians in Jordan would become Jordanian, and so on. However, the opposite has taken place. Through commemoration of the Nakba, a collective memory has been forged (Allan 2013, 40). The Nakba is the starting point of exile, and it is viewed as something that is ongoing. For camp residents, one way to combat this

ongoing catastrophe is to remember. In Shatila, this looks like plays made to commemorate the Nakba. It is elders sharing their experiences and passing them on to their children.

Another form of commemoration in camps is focusing the commemoration on specific villages. The connections to one's village, forged and encouraged through the physical and social organization of the camps themselves, is reinforced through oral histories. In some cases, families will name their daughters after lost villages thus "Palestinian girls thus become the literal embodiment of remembered places" (Khalili 2004, 13). Elders share stories of the villages they fled to the younger generation to keep the memory alive. Physical markers of specific villages are also kept by residents of the camp such as "village books" in which photographs and written histories of specific villages are recorded. The books are written only in Arabic, produced in camps and not intended for outside distribution or for sale outside the camps. They are written by gathering testimonies from elders who fled the cities in 1948 and include detailed information such as "listings of the pre-1948 village families," "detailed ethnographies of village customs," and "historical photos from published sources, personal photos of family members" (Khalili 2004, 15). An example of this is the Kwaykat volume which is an ethnography commemorating the Palestinian village made by the refugees living in Burj al-Barajneh refugee camp.

As the generations that lived in and remember Palestine passes away, the creation of a collective memory through commemoration is imperative in preserving the Palestinian identity and the narratives are asserted and passed down in order to remind the community of their collective purpose as refugees: the right of return.



**Fig. 5:**

*Palestinian children in Shatila refugee camp launch #Action4Return at a memorial event for the Sabra and Shatila Massacre on September 17 2020. Through memorials and commemorative events, the collective memory is enforced in the next generation. (Source: Samidoun)*

### iii. The Right of Return

“The right of return and the desire to go back to Palestine, to our villages, is at the center of every refugee’s identity. The real Nakba was not just the loss of our land but the total destruction of the social fabric.” - Mazen, Shatila refugee camp, Refugees of the Revolution (Allan 2013, 38)

In Palestinian discourse, refugees are often spoken about as the backbone of the movement. They are the ones upholding the right of return. The upholding of the right of return is posited as the responsibility of the refugees, who in turn view their conditions as part of something much larger than themselves. Their condition is politicized because to live in a refugee camp is to uphold the right of return for all Palestinians.

Because this language is used by the Lebanese in order to justify not giving refugees citizenship, the relation to the right of return is a nuanced one for refugees. While Palestinians living in Lebanon do want to uphold their right of return, they also want rights and the ability to prosper. They do not view these two ideas as antithetical. Rather than uphold the dichotomy of “naturalization vs. return,” “Palestinian refugees, and particularly the newer generations, hope for an enhanced emplacement in the host society and simultaneously cultivates the myth of the end of its displacement from its own homeland” (Bianchi 2014, 136).

For the residents of refugee camps in Lebanon, return represents more than just the symbolic upholding of their rights. Return is a means of escape from their current condition as refugees (Schulz and Hammer 2003, 209). This is particularly important in the context of Palestinians in Lebanon because the newer generations have no memories of the homeland. As Sayigh notes, “All they had ever known were the camps” (Sayigh 2013, 166). Palestine is something that is constructed not remembered for them. As such, Palestine is romanticized as a safe haven.

“Here, refugee youth describe Palestine as ‘very, very, very beautiful’, ‘full of fresh water’. There are ‘no alleys’ and ‘no garbage’. In Palestine ‘parents find work’ and ‘every child in the family has his own bedroom’; ‘parents don’t die’ and ‘don’t divorce’; ‘all parents are wealthy’ and ‘everybody is happy’” - al-Shaml Newsletter June 1999 (Schulz and Hammer 2003, 100)

The above excerpt characterizes how Palestine is viewed by the residents of Shatila. For many of them, Palestine, and return to Palestine, has come to mean economic, social, and political freedom.

The refugees see upholding the right of return as a duty they are fulfilling by living in their current conditions. As such, they have associated this duty with suffering in the name of return and that suffering with Palestinian-ness. While working in Ein al Hilweh refugee camp, Ismail was told a few times by camp residents that she was not truly Palestinian because she did not suffer. For residents of the camp, their suffering affirms their Palestinian identity. Their exile is characterized by suffering and longing for the homeland, and this is seen as an integral part of their identity.

Refugee families carry physical markers of the right of return in the form of the symbolic “keys” which are passed down from generation to generation. The key is “kept by most refugee families as evidence of possession, passed on to heirs, displayed in Palestinian exhibitions, and increasingly used as motif in posters and children's art work” (Sayigh 2005, 22).

The key serves as a physical reminder that the refugees plan on returning to their ancestral homeland. As such, their condition is collectively seen as a temporary one that will end with the eventual return to Palestine.

## **Case Study Two: Palestinians in New Jersey**

### History of Palestinian Immigration to the United States

Arab migration to the United States began in the late nineteenth century. However, it was small in numbers and was mainly composed of Christian traders from Jerusalem and Ramallah that heard about economic opportunities from missionaries. These Christians made up the first wave of Arab immigration to the United States, many of whom came from Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon. The second wave of Arab migrants came after 1965, 70% of which were Muslim. These people often settled in places like New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Michigan, Ohio, and California, where most Arabs across the United States remain today. (Serhan 2009).

Specifically, Palestinian migration to the United States occurred as early as 1930, following the peasant revolts in Palestine consisting mostly of young men. A spike occurred in 1948 following the Nakba and this wave included women and children. These numbers were not very large because at this time, most Palestinians fled to neighboring Arab countries.

From the 1940s to the 1950s, Palestinian migration to the United States was limited due to immigration quotas. With the passing of the 1965 Immigration Act, Palestinian immigration to the United States increased. Most of the Palestinian immigrants arriving to the United States post 1967 had very limited educational attainment (Serhan 2009, 9).

As of 2020, no accurate data exists to quantify the number of Palestinians living in the United States or specifically in New Jersey. This is because Arab Americans fall under the category of “white” under the United States census. As such, there is no explicit count of Arab Americans in the United States. The Arab American Institute estimates that the Greater New York Area (including New York City, Long Island, the lower Hudson Valley in New York, and New Jersey’s most populous five cities including Paterson, Jersey City, and Newark) is home to the second largest population of Arab Americans in the United States. Researcher Randa Serhan estimates that the number of Palestinians in the New Jersey and New York area lies between 16,000-50,000.

Paterson, New Jersey, is seen as an Arab hub in New Jersey. Often called “Little Ramallah” by community members and journalists alike, the area attracted many Arab immigrants in the early 1900s. The Arab community in Paterson has existed since the late 1800s and was mostly Syrian and Lebanese immigrants. At this time, New Jersey was known as the silk capital of the United States. Paterson was a hub for silk production, luring many Syrian immigrants to the city with hopes of economic success. In the 1920s there were more than 25 silk factories in Paterson and Hoboken, New Jersey, owned by Syrian immigrants. 80 percent of Syrian immigrants in those cities worked as silk weavers (Stiffler 2010).

The majority of the Palestinian immigrants in New Jersey come from West Bank cities surrounding Ramallah and Jerusalem. These villages include, but are not limited to: Mukhmas, Turmosayya, Beit Anan, Al Jib and Deir Debwan (Serhan 2009, 15). Many of these villages have

established charity foundations for their villages that will be discussed in further detail later in this study.

Most members of these communities live in clusters in large cities. Clifton and Paterson are two towns with very sizeable Palestinian populations. Rania Mustafa, the executive director of the Palestinian American Community Center, a Palestinian cultural center in Clifton, New Jersey, estimates that there are around 20,000 Palestinians living in Clifton and Paterson. There is also a large Mukhmas and Deir Debwan population living in the North Bergen Township.

A 1984 study titled “Arab American Residential Segregation: Differences in Patterns” conducted by Vincent Parrillo on Arab American residential segregation in New Jersey found that Arab Americans settled in “loose clusters in many neighborhoods near the periphery of [Paterson]” (Parrillo 1984, 5). The study cited the cities of Prospect Park, Haledon, Clifton, and Passaic as Arab American clusters. Today, these cities still have sizeable Arab American populations, but there has been another shift with more Arab Americans, including Palestinian American families, relocating deeper into the suburbs, to cities such as Wayne, with more economic attainment.

<b><i>Palestinian migration to the United States</i></b>				
<b>Period of Migration</b>	<b>Categorization</b>	<b>Places of origin</b>	<b>Type of migration</b>	<b>Population size</b>
1899-1919	Syrians Prior to 1899- "Ottomans," "Turks," "Arabs"	Jerusalem, Ramallah (Palestine), Tripoli, Zahli (Lebanon) Damascus (Syria)	Economic, mainly Christian families Most from Lebanon and Syria Palestinian migration- single men	89,971 (entered the United States)*
1922	Palestine- Category dropped in 1957	Acre, Jerusalem, Ramallah, and villages in between	Economic, some came through Latin America Single men	Unclear. Quota was set at 56**
1936-1939	Palestine	Acre, Jerusalem, Ramallah, and villages in between	Unrest in Mandate Palestine – resistance against Zionist movement	250/year*** ~2,000/year****
1947-1949	Palestine, Israel, Jordan	Acre, Jerusalem, Ramallah, and villages in between	Women and children joining male relatives 1948 war	Unknown, noted in numerous sources****
1954-1958	Palestine, Israel, Jordan Palestinian Refugees admitted under Refugee Act of 1953	Acre, Jerusalem, Ramallah, and villages in between	Refugee	1,939**
1967-Present	Israel, Jordan, Palestinian Authority, other passports	Ramallah, Jerusalem, villages in between, refugees in other Arab countries	Legally: Economic Students, family reunification, professional	Unknown. Total estimate of Arab- Americans of Palestinian descent: 110,00-350,000*****

**Fig. 6:**

*The community at the center of this study falls into the 1967-present category. As Serhan notes in the chart, it is unknown how many Palestinians left Palestine to America in this category. This lack of statistical data makes it difficult to approximate the number of Palestinians in America. Unlike other groups, such as those who left from 1947-1958, this wave of Palestinians left seeking economic opportunity, not as refugees fleeing from harm. (Source: Serhan, *Suspended Community*)*

## Relationship to Host Country

### i. Islamophobia and Surveillance Following 9/11

Rubab Abdelhadi's personal reflection "Where is Home?" aptly illustrates the effects of the attacks of 9/11 on Palestinian Americans. She recalls the day of 9/11 vividly, -she was working in Manhattan and when the news broke out, she hurried back to her apartment. Abdelhadi felt panicked and her brain was already working through the "us" vs. "them" narrative, thinking to herself that the Muslims and/or Arabs will be blamed for the attack. She comes across a woman wearing hijab pushing a baby in a stroller and frantically tells her to go home saying, "When they realize what has happened, they will attack." Abdelhadi then reflects on her own guilt for passing and not appearing visibly Muslim because she does not wear hijab (Abdelhadi 2003, 317).

For Palestinians, this attack is multilayered. Abdelhadi, like many others, viewed America as a land of freedom and opportunity where one can be oneself. But after 9/11, Abdelhadi described being afraid of sticking out or being seen as Muslim or a "terrorist." She assured herself "passing is a survival mechanism." This sentiment is mirrored in her experiences in Palestine, where she described an instance where she hung a Palestinian flag out of her car while driving in Area B, which is under joint Israeli and Palestinian control. There, she was met with anger for her display of Palestinian identity and "cars with Israeli license plates packed with settlers honked in annoyance and made obscene gestures at [her]" (321). Even other Palestinian drivers avoided her. Again, she realized, "passing is a survival mechanism" (Abdelhadi 2003, 321).

Such musings show the precariousness of Palestinian identity. Public displays of Palestinian identity put Abdelhadi in danger in Palestine. After the attacks of 9/11, the same displays would put her in danger in the United States. In the years immediately following 9/11, the Palestinian American community focused on flying under the radar and not attracting attention to themselves. Any semblance of safety they felt in the United States was shattered by the events of 9/11. Although the community has become more comfortable today engaging in events such as protests, there is still a hesitance and an acceptance that doing so would open the community up to surveillance, "As we continue to be ethnically and racially profiled, thousands of Arabs, Arab Americans, Muslims, and Muslim Americans are made to feel foreign at home: No longer do we feel welcomed nor do we feel safe" (Abdelhadi 2003, 100). The profiling, othering, and social discrimination of Palestinian Americans have led to the community feeling like outsiders.

Following 9/11, hate crimes against Muslims, Arabs, and anyone perceived to be Middle Eastern or South Asian was on a steady rise. For this generation of Palestinians, a post 9/11 America is the only America they know. As such, their relationship with the host country, the United States, is greatly affected by this tragedy with the community members constantly feeling like outsiders (Karam 2019).



**Fig. 7:**

*The explosion of the twin towers marked a turning point for Muslim Americans, particularly those who lived in the Greater New York area. Despite being a part of the community, and having experienced the tragedy of 9/11 alongside their fellow Americans, Muslim Americans were now seen as outsiders and enemies. This was particularly true for Palestinian Americans, who left Palestine seeking safety and stability and found themselves being targets once again. Any sense of security felt by Palestinians in America had now been abruptly ended by the events of 9/11. (Source: Spencer Platt)*

Hanan, 18, is a Palestinian American who grew up in Clifton with a sizeable Muslim population. Her mother, born to Palestinian parents, was raised in Jordan and her father grew up in the West Bank. She does not cover her hair, but when asked if her classmates knew she was Muslim, she responds with “of course.” She grew up in a very diverse community with a large Arab Muslim population. She recalls the discomfort she’d feel every year during 9/11. She says that her classmates look at her whenever the topic is brought up.

Teachers look at you different, some of your friends look at you different, or the questions you get are kind of ridiculous. So you just have to live with that every day. You know it’s like, every time 9/11 is brought up, they will look at me, they will say oh those are the Arabs, those are the terrorists, those are the Muslims. - Hanan, 18

For members of this generation who are visibly Muslim, such as the women who wear hijab, their experience of feeling othered is much more constant. Mona, 21, is a Palestinian woman who has been wearing hijab since she was 14. Although she does not feel cognizant of the fact that she is wearing hijab when she is in a diverse area, such as her college campus, she is hyper aware of it when she drives deeper into Central or South Jersey, such as when she visits farms with her family.

If I’m in a random city in New Jersey and I want to pick apples, I’m terrified for my life. I just feel out of place. I am aware of my surroundings and I’m aware someone is staring at me makes me feel horrible and it makes me feel sad. I’ve been here my whole life, -just let me live. - Mona, 21

The above situation shows the extent of exclusion that Muslim Americans feel, particularly those who are visibly Muslim. For the members of the second generation, being born in the United States is particularly jarring because these individuals have much more in common with the “Americans” than they do with their counterparts who grew up in Palestine. Despite sharing a nationality and many cultural practices with “Americans,” facing Islamophobia in the United States makes Mona feel as if she will never be accepted into American society.

Another interviewee, Alaa, spoke about the feeling of constantly needing to be on one’s best behavior because she feels that any poor behavior on her part would reflect poorly on her entire community. Alaa, 20, has been wearing a hijab since she was 11. Alaa discussed that when she is in public, she makes sure to always smile at strangers and spark up conversations with cashiers. She stated that facing “overt” Islamophobia is rare for her, and has only happened a handful of times, but when she is in public she can tell when someone is prejudiced based on the way they treat her versus others. She defines “overt” Islamophobia as incidents where someone explicitly tells her to “go back to her country” or that “she doesn’t belong here.” For her, small experiences of discrimination are much more common.

I will be at the grocery store and the person will be so friendly to the white lady in front of me but won’t even look up or greet me when it’s my turn. -Alaa, 20

When faced with behavior such as the above, Alaa tries to be “extra-friendly” but acknowledges that at the end of the day it is not her duty to change everyone’s perceptions of Muslims.

Experiences with Islamophobia that Palestinian American Muslims face, or those who are perceived to be Muslim, contribute to the ostracization that the community faces. It directly impacts the feeling of belonging because despite being born and afforded the rights of living in the United States, these individuals are made to feel less American.

Following 9/11, the United States government began surveillance measures against Muslim Americans, infiltrating their mosques and student groups. These measures have an added layer for Muslim Palestinian Americans, who were subject to surveillance on both fronts, for their ethnic identity and for their religion.

Upon reaching college, Palestinians are subject to surveillance and restrictions upon joining Palestinian student groups such as Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). SJP is pro-Palestine student advocacy group that has over 200 chapters in American and Canadian universities. All throughout the United States, SJP groups have faced undue restrictions from universities and obstacles in implementing their club programming. According to a 2018 investigation conducted by The Intercept, “The work of [pro-Palestine] advocates has drawn increasingly hostile tactics from far-right groups who wish to silence them, and the FBI interviews underscore the power of those groups — whose false claims are now apparently informing government action” (Kane 2018).

Even at the university this study is being conducted from, Fordham University, university administration has attempted time and time again to prevent the student group, Students for Justice in Palestine from forming (Kottke and Carmente 2020).

At the time of writing this thesis, I am a board member of Fordham’s Muslim Student Association, and each year, we hold an annual charity gala inviting other students from colleges and universities in New York City. We invite university administrators to the events and at one gala, an administrator came and sat at a table with a few students from a university in Manhattan. The administrator was making conversation with the students and asking them a few questions about their studies and more. During the conversation, one of the students texted me and asked me to meet her outside the venue as she had something pressing to share with me. She told of her concerns that there was an informant at the event. This student was an active member of a Palestinian organization in the city and was thus afraid that the woman was an informant sent to spy on her. Once she pointed out the person, I told her it was a university official I had personally invited to the event. She was relieved but still on edge.

I share this story because to any outsider, this student may seem a bit paranoid. One may ask what she is so afraid of. However, these feelings of anxiousness are not unique, and many students who are either active in Palestinian causes or Palestinian themselves can relate to them. These fears are also not unfounded.

Above the university level, non-violent movements in support of Palestine have been subject to scrutiny and restriction by the United States government. In 2015, the Center For Constitutional

Rights in conjunction with Palestine Legal released a report titled “The Palestine Exception to Free Speech.” In the report, the researchers outline various incidents of censorship of speech related to Palestine. One of these tactics are “false and inflammatory accusations of antisemitism and support for terrorism.” The list the anonymously run website, “Canary Mission” as an example of this tactic. Canary Mission is a website which claims to “document people and groups that promote hatred of the USA, Israel and Jews on North American college campuses.” This site lists the Muslim Student Association as a “terror factory” and lists countless students and professionals in an attempt to “expose” them to future employers (Center for Constitutional Rights 2015).

Many students who advocate for Palestine on campuses publicly view ending up on the pages of this site an inevitability. Many other students are deterred from publicly advocating for Palestine for fear of ending up on “Canary Mission” and being “blacklisted.”

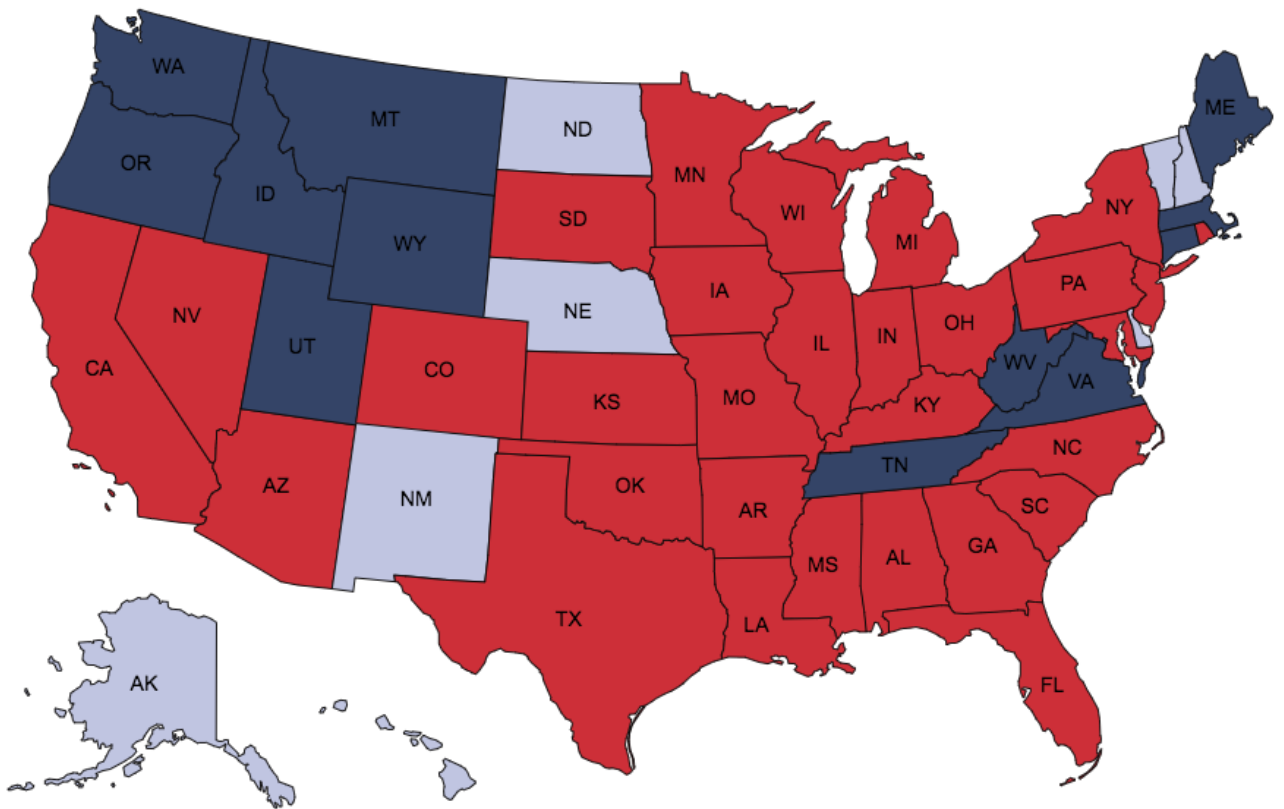
In informal interviews with students at Fordham University who were involved in attempting to get the club instated on their campus but eventually backed out after the lawsuit occurred, a number of students cited fear that future employment opportunities would be affected. One student, who was in the process of applying for law school, said she backed out because she did not want to ostracize herself from future employment opportunities.

Nationally, laws have passed in order to discourage individuals from participating in the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement, a non-violent movement started by Palestinian activists in order to “to end international support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians and pressure Israel to comply with international law” (Palestinian BDS National Committee 2020).

30 states have passed laws that target the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement (Campion 2020). These laws do not directly criminalize BDS, but they discourage corporations from actively engaging in the movement by withholding state pension funds.

This legislation, as well as the targeting of Palestinian speech in universities instills a sense of “otherness” in second-generation Palestinian Americans. Mona attends a large college in New Jersey. She feels that simply being Palestinian is a cause for a multitude of discrimination, “Okay, you’re Palestinian, get out. If you’re Palestinian, they’re not even looking at your application. It’s real, it’s not even a fear. I want to go back [to Palestine] next year. If I say something that someone doesn’t like that causes them to destroy my family’s home, then I’m screwed.”

Mona is referring to the possibility of being “black-listed.” Being able to visit Palestine is incredibly important for many members of the second generation. As such, some of them stay away from activism entirely in order to avoid the chance of not being allowed to enter Palestine.



**Fig. 8:**

*States that have enacted anti-BDS legislation are shown in red. The fact that a majority of states (30 states) have anti-BDS legislation serves to further ostracize the Palestinian community. Such laws are seen as an infringement on first amendment rights. (Source: Palestine Legal)*

For the members of the community who grew up in the United States learning about inalienable rights such as the right to free speech in schools, these anti BDS laws and censorship seem incongruent with the values they were taught. As a result, Palestinian Americans feel targeted by the United States government on two fronts. First, the community is acutely aware of the ally ship between the United States and Israel. Since 1947, the United States has sent over 130,440 million USD in military aid to Israel (Murad 2018, 39). These funds support the occupation against their homeland. Through Islamophobia and discrimination, the Palestinian Americans in the United States also feel discriminated against. Therefore, the United States policies, both abroad and domestically, target Palestinians.

However, as will be discussed further in the next session, instead of retreating from activism altogether, second generation Palestinians find support on creating their own spaces for dialogue. This directly contrasts from the generation before them, their parents, many of whom retreated from public protests in the years immediately following 9/11 because “they did not want to become targets of the 9/11-backlash against Arabs and Muslims in the United States” (Serhan 2009, 33). Instead, activism and involvement in “diaspora spaces” are one of the ways in which they connect to their identity.

### Connection to Palestinian Identity

#### i. Diaspora Spaces

“It is within diasporic political spaces where collective feelings of belonging, representation and politicisation are defined and debated and where perceptions of empowerment, hope and agency may potentially arise as the focus is on constructions and use of such space in relation to identity.” (Mavroudi 2008, 5)

The New Jersey Palestinian community has made use of a variety of “diaspora spaces.” As defined by Mavroudi, these spaces construct and promote the diaspora identity. There are a variety of spaces like there in the New Jersey community. The oldest are the village associations, which are usually run by and whose active members are Palestinian men who left Palestine. These men meet formally to discuss various initiatives for their homes in Palestine.

The Palestinian American Community Center was founded in 2014. It’s original purpose was to provide a space for the community to “educate about Palestine and fulfill the different needs of the community.” The Center’s current mission is to “strengthen ties to Palestinian heritage while ensuring the wellbeing of the community.” The Center’s Executive Director, Rania Mustafa, estimates that the community is around 20,000 Arabs living in Paterson, most of whom are Palestinian. It is mostly made up of *fellahi* Palestinians who came from West Bank villages such as Deir Debwan, Turmosayya, Mukhmas, Beit Anan, Al Jib, Deir Jerir, and Beit Hanina. There is also a sizeable population of Palestinians from Gaza, but many of them fled to Gaza as refugees in 1948 therefore have ties to other villages in Palestine. A majority of this community can be described as “culturally conservative,” and women are encouraged to dress modestly and interactions with the opposite gender maintain a sense of formality.

Mustafa observes that the community comes from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Those who immigrated to New Jersey in the 1980s-90s or before are upper middle class, while more recent immigrants who came within the last ten years are lower income families. Mustafa believes that the majority of the community can be considered as middle class. A good number of Palestinians are small business owners, they mostly own furniture and grocery stores in the area. This is due to the fact that the majority of these Palestinians immigrated from Palestine without an education or degree, or have decided not to use their degree to get a job in the United States. Their children, on the other hand, go to college and enter career paths based on their degrees. Their parents encourage them to go into fields such as engineering, law, or medicine.

The center caters to a wide range of community members. Community members of all socioeconomic backgrounds come to the center regularly and bring their children. The staff is mostly young women, while the center's board is made up of 12 men and 3 women. There is a divide, however, between the people who do come to and interact with the center, and those who do not. Mustafa divides those up into two categories, those who are the "ultra-religious" (she uses this term non-literally) and those who are acultural.

"There are two kinds of people who don't come to PACC. There is one that is the ultra-religious who refuse to come to PACC, who say PACC is the 'Sulta' or 'Fatteh.' Even though we all know that PACC has nothing to do with any of that. So they don't come. The other kind are the ones who are anti-culture. They are the ones who are more American than anything else and believe they need to assimilate."- Rania Mustafa

The first category, the "ultra-religious," are those who view PACC as associated with Fatah, the Palestinian Nationalist Social Democratic political party, who is now the governing body of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. Also, within that category are people who prioritize their religious identity over their cultural one, and see PACC as incongruent with maintaining their religious identity. Those individuals gravitate more towards the mosque than to PACC.

The second category, the "acultural Palestinians" are those who do not feel a particular tie to their Palestinian identity. These individuals prioritize assimilation and do not believe there is a need to connect to their roots. Mustafa also sees a trend in being acultural among Christian Palestinians in the United States. This sub-group has been in the United States longer than the Muslim Palestinians. For Mustafa they also tend to have white passing names, and since are not Muslim, they do not feel as othered in the United States. As a result, some of them have been able to assimilate to the United States more easily. Mustafa emphasizes that this is not the case for all Christian Palestinians, but it is a trend she has observed in many cases. Many Christian Palestinian Americans are members of the American Federation of Ramallah, a Palestinian non-profit organization founded in 1952 with 19 national chapters, including one in Plainsfield, New Jersey.

The PACC's seasonal programs cater to all community members. For the adults, English conversation classes are offered for immigrant members of the community who are learning English and Tatreez classes are offered to teach individuals how to stitch traditional Palestinian embroidery. There is a book club made up of women aged 20-40 where members read books such as Khaled Houssani's *The Kite Runner*, Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*, and more.

Conversations are held on the book's themes and at times get personal as the members get to know each other and bond. Other seasonal programs, such as Dabka, Tatreez, Karate, and Arabic lessons are aimed at children aged 5 to 18.

Programming such as Dabka, Tatreez lessons, and Arabic classes serve to preserve Palestinian heritage. Parents send their children to these courses in order to instill in them a sense of Palestinian-ness from a young age. These programs are the center's most popular and run year-round. There are around 15 children per class, and about six classes each session, three for boys and three for girls.

In the summers, PACC has two main programs for children "PACC Summer Fun" and "Holding Onto Palestinian Existence" or "HOPE." The first program, "PACC Summer Fun" is a daily summer program that involves fun activities for attendees. During the program, children can often be seen running around the center. Children feel very comfortable at the center, and it is there where they establish relationships with other Palestinian children, which is a factor that motivates parents to send their children to PACC.

The latter program, HOPE, is aimed at children aged 12-18 and involves a series of courses on Palestinian identity and history. The program's stated mission is to "To educate the youth with comprehensive knowledge of Palestine in an effort to develop socially conscious and critically thinking individuals who actively advocate for the Palestinian cause" (PACCUSA, 2018). The program's course curriculum includes lessons on Palestinian history, such as the events of the Nakba, the origins of Zionism, and the intifadas. For most of these students, these classes are the first time they ever receive any formal education on their history and heritage. The program also includes lessons on other social justice issues in relation to Palestine, such as finding parallels between the Black Lives Matter Movement and the Palestinian cause or the ongoing settlement on Indigenous land. These parallels serve to connect the Palestinian struggle with other struggles and encourage students to advocate for justice everywhere, -not just in Palestine.

Throughout the year, the center holds events for community members by bringing in various speakers. Examples of speakers who have come to PACC throughout the years are former CNN journalist, Marc Lamont Hill, Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib, as well as members of Palestinian organizations Palestine Legal and Al-Awda.

The speaker topics range from "know your rights workshops" where legal professionals to speeches about the importance of standing up for Palestine. While these events serve and are open to all members of the community, they are often where the majority of young adults come to the center. Most speaker events held at PACC will have a turnout of around 60-80 individuals, more than half of which are made up of an equal divide of men and women aged 18-35. These youth often interact with the speakers by asking questions. One question that is asked at almost every event by a member of this generation is "What can we do as Palestinian Americans to help the cause?"



**Fig. 9:**

*Pictured above are the advanced girls Dabka troupe at the Palestinian American Community Center performing at PACC Day, an annual community event that usually has a turnout of 500-600 people. Having Dabka classes brings the children closer to their Palestinian identity by sharing and learning a fun part of Palestinian culture. The performance, with the girls wearing the keffiyah as a physical marker of Palestinian identity and performing Dabka in front of an audience, is a celebration of Palestinian-ness that the entire community comes together for. (Source: Palestinian American Community Center)*

Congregating at the center, holding community conversations, and socializing with other Palestinians in the diaspora are the community's ways of staying connected to the homeland through each other. By forming bonds with individuals that are also Palestinian, Palestinian Americans strengthen the ties to the homeland. In essence, they have created a community where they feel seen, represented, and empowered. Together, these second-generation Palestinians are able to navigate their experiences of their hyphenated identities.

Since the center's formation, Mustafa has observed changes in the community. First, Mustafa observed that PACC has "increased Palestinian morale." On a national level, there are discussions and plans to build more Palestinian community centers in states such as California. Locally, she has observed a multitude of changes, both within and outside of the community. For example, more community members have been running for local politics, which is something Mustafa attributes to there being more community representation. There are currently three second generation Arab American politicians who frequent the center and hold local office in the cities of Paterson and Prospect Park, respectively. Having local government representation increases the visibility of the community.

According to *Homelands and Diasporas: Holy Lands and Other Places*, "A careful examination of the Palestinian communities in their diaspora would show many forms of networks with varying degrees of institutionalization: familial networks that sometimes include a family council, village clubs which continue to be important (especially in the United States), national and nationalistic-religious networks usually based on the different popular organizations associated with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) or pro-Hamas" (Weingrod 2005, 104).

The family unit is the closest degree of institutionalization of Palestinian communities, followed by village councils, and then by groups such as PACC, the American Federation of Ramallah, or American Muslims for Palestine, who caters mostly to the members of the community living in the North Bergen region. The second category, village organizations, broadly serves all members of that village both in the diaspora and in Palestine. They are a bridge between the two communities and unite them in the same causes. Although these organizations are spread over the United States, meaning that members across the country can join, many of their meetings occur in places where those villages have clustered. In New Jersey, the Deir Debwan Charity Organization, the Mukhmas Community Center, and Turmosayya Organization are among many organizations with ties to Palestinian villages.

The members are usually first generation male members of the community who grew up in those respective villages. Projects these organizations take on include the construction of new infrastructure in the village, welfare support for indigent community members, scholarships for students in the village, and annual conventions where community members can meet for elections and to discuss the yearly agenda of the committee. These spaces are markedly more conservative than a space such as the PACC with no specific village association. Some villages do not encourage women to attend annual conferences, while others, such as Deir Debwan, have

both men and women in attendance despite it still being a matter of controversy to some community members.

“The spaces those in diaspora create are a reflection of this ‘in-between-ness’ of past and present and of ‘here’ and ‘there’” (Mavroudi 2008, 5).

Spaces such as PACC, the American Federation of Ramallah, and various village organizations serve to link the diaspora communities to each other and in turn to the homeland. While PACC serves to tie the community together in support of the Palestinian cause and in promotion of the Palestinian identity, village organizations connect to Palestine on a much more direct level by making all members of the diaspora direct stakeholders in the events of their village.

One interview subject, Amin, 18, stated that growing up in New Jersey gave him no shortage of ties to his Palestinian identity. He credits the community with instilling in him a strong sense of Palestinian-ness. While these physical diaspora spaces serve to unite and connect the community, another relation to Palestinian identity that Palestinian Americans contest with is their privilege, which serves to motivate them to advocate for Palestine.

## ii. Mitigating Privilege

A common thread in interviews and research on Palestinian communities is the discussion of privilege. Privileges are “an ‘invisible package of unearned assets,’ and ‘unearned powers conferred systemically’” (McIntosh 2019, 36). For Palestinian Americans, American citizenship is a privilege that is levied by members of the community to visit Palestine, and, in adulthood, advocate or “speak up for Palestine.”

“Rather than being a primary source of belonging, ... citizenship was a valued asset through which people leverage rights to economic, social, political, and cultural resources across transnational fields” (Abu El-Haj 2015, 4).

Abu El-Haj claims that United States citizenship is seen as an asset to be used by Palestinian Americans. The results of my research affirm this claim. Unlike some other Palestinian communities, most Palestinian Americans, particularly those in the New Jersey area who mostly emigrated from West Bank villages, have the ability to travel back to Palestine using their American passport. Many New Jersey families visit their homelands each or every other summer, or whenever it is financially viable, in order to generate physical ties to Palestine. In the New Jersey Palestinian American community, most second generation Palestinian Americans have stories from their youth in Palestine that center around playing around the village with their relatives.

These trips to Palestine have instilled a sense of love for Palestine. The homeland is not an abstraction, but a physical place with memories and people who this generation has attachments to. They are greatly aware of the “injustices” that occur in Palestine because they see them first hand and are able to compare those experiences to their life in the United States. Their freedom in the United States compared to the lack of that freedom in Palestine further exacerbates the sense of injustice that they see.

Unlike their families, who emigrated to the United States and acquired citizenship, second-generation Palestinians were born with these rights. But instead of taking them for granted, they see the way their counterparts who are not afforded these rights struggle. As such, a feeling that most interviewees identify with in relation to their identity and the privilege that comes with being Palestinian American is guilt. They feel guilty that they live a life of privilege in comparison to their counterparts living in Palestine or even in other countries in the Middle East.

The PACC cultivates physical ties to Palestine through the “Homeland Project,” where ten Palestinian youth ages 18-35 are taken to on a ten day trip to Palestine which includes visits of historical sites and refugee camps. Mona comes from a small village in Palestine and went on a Homeland Project trip in 2017. During her trip, Mona was overwhelmed with feelings of guilt in relation to her privileges.

“When we went to the refugee camp, I had a mental breakdown and the first that I noticed was that I was wearing 50 dollar pants. When everything came crumbling down that was the first thing I thought. How am I wearing these pants and looking these people in the eyes who live in refugee camps and only have three feet of living space? How am I supposed to say I'm Palestinian to when I'm wearing these stupid pants? Am I allowed to enjoy these things? Am I allowed to be happy? How am I supposed to enjoy everything when there are Palestinians suffering so much?” - Mona, 21

Mona's experience shows the sense of guilt Palestinian Americans feel in relation to their identity. Mona went on to discuss the various privileges she is afforded simply by being a United States citizen, such as “simple freedoms” like the freedom of movement. Since second generation Palestinian Americans have spent the majority of their lives living in the U.S., they are able to clearly identify that the living conditions in Palestine are both abnormal and unjust.

For many people in this generation, this privilege makes them feel responsible to their homeland and the Palestinian cause. Many of them pick up professions with the intent to “give back” or use their privilege to help Palestine. Mona, for example, aims to use her career in the creative field to bring awareness to the injustices in Palestine. Another interviewee credited their Palestinian identity for their decision to go to law school stating that they are certain they would not have identified a passion for human rights law had they not been Palestinian.

One way Palestinian Americans use their privilege is by speaking about Palestine informally. Amin, 18, is a Palestinian American college student from New Jersey who has visited Palestine throughout his childhood. He uses his privilege as a Palestinian American to raise awareness about Palestine. For him, a benefit of living in the United States is the ability, “to start conversations about Palestine.” Classrooms are a space where second generation Palestinian Americans start conversations about Palestine by creating presentations on Palestine and sharing their experiences in the homeland when prompted.

Additionally, posting about Palestine on social media is another way Palestinian Americans advocate for the cause. The goal here is to engage with “Americans” who do not know about Palestine in order to garner support and inspire change. Amin believes that “if people start to see

the atrocities that are being committed against Palestinians and see the oppression that Palestinians live under, they're going to open their eyes and see this is wrong.”

Involvement in groups such as SJP, engaging in activism, and going to protests are ways for Palestinian Americans to “mitigate” their privilege by using it in order to advocate for Palestine. Protests are a space where Palestinians and supporters of Palestine unite for a singular cause. The protests are usually organized in response to events such as the siege on Gaza or Donald Trump’s decision to name Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Many of these events occur in New York City, usually in Times Square. Although there are no official counts of the number of protesters that usually attend these large protests, interviewees estimate that number to be between 300-500 people.

Protests have mixed reactions in community members. Some community members, such as Mustafa, see the appeal of protests but prefer other types of “productive” action such as writing to elected officials. Mona believes that protests are effective because they raise awareness, stating that as a result of protests “one person is bound to go home and look Palestine up. And I think that that counts for something.”

On July 3rd, American Muslims for Palestine, another Palestine advocacy group located in New Jersey, held a rally to oppose the annexation of the West Bank on a busy street in North Bergen. The rally, which was held amidst the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, had a turnout of about 80-100 protesters made up mostly of the younger generation (18-25), with young women and men showing up in equal numbers.

Chants included “There is only one solution: Intifada Revolution,” “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free,” “No justice, no peace,” and “Not another nickel, not another dime, no more money for Israel’s crimes.” The chants were recited in unison by the crowd. Visible markers of Palestinian identity can be seen, such as Palestinian flags, keffiyahs worn by all community members, and external garments such as jackets and vests lined with “tatreez,” traditional Palestinian embroidery. These external markers of Palestinian identity are worn by protestors in a display of their culture and pride for that identity.

The fact that this protest was heavily attended by members of the younger generation, especially during a pandemic, shows the willingness of this generation to advocate for Palestine. Second generation Palestinian Americans also showed up in solidarity with Black Americans over the course of the summer of 2020, alongside the rise of protests in support of the Black Lives Matter movement following the brutal murder of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis Police Department.

This involvement is due to the fact that the generation draws parallels between the oppression of Palestinians in Palestine and the oppression of Black people in the United States. The following political cartoon depicts an IDF soldier kneeling over the neck of a Palestinian side by side with an image of a police officer kneeling over the neck of a Black man. Images like that were spread throughout the community as rallying cries. The message was clear: if you oppose injustice in Palestine, you must oppose injustice here. These parallels were taken to yet another level when Palestinian activists pointed out that police forces across the United States, such as the NYPD,

received training by the Israeli Defense Forces (Khalel 2020). Additionally, real life images depicting the IDF kneeling on Palestinians in the same way the police officer knelt on the neck of George Floyd surfaced to show that the same tactics were used even thousands of miles away. Such connections reinforce the importance of global justice for the Palestinian American population, whose sense of justice extends farther than just their community but to all oppressed peoples.



**Fig. 10:**

*The above political cartoon represents the parallels between the Black Lives Matter movement and Palestinian movements for freedom. Such cartoons show how solidarity is constructed through the illumination of such parallels. The image depicting an IDF soldier kneeling on the neck of a Palestinian in the same way the officer knelt on the neck of George Floyd shows the similarities between the oppression Black people face in the United States and Palestinians face in Palestine. (Source: Al Awda)*

At Black Lives Matter protests, Palestinian activists hold up signs with slogans such as “Palestinians for Black Lives.” Such clear displays of solidarity have two effects. First, they illuminate their parallels between the two struggles by linking them. And secondly, they promote the Palestinian struggle by defining the parallel clearly. The idea is, if you support Black lives you should also support Palestinians. While the intention is not transactional, in that Palestinian activists do not support the Black Lives Matter movement so that the movement will support

Palestinians, the underlying hope with solidarity efforts is that if Palestinians show up for these causes, these causes will show up for Palestinians. Palestinian Americans showcase these parallels in order to further their cause and rally for justice. One common rallying cry by Palestinian American youth groups is: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

These solidarity efforts are not limited to the Black Lives Matter movement. For example, the Palestinian Youth Movement is a national grassroots movement of Palestinian Americans that “brings together Palestinian youth from all over the U.S. with diverse views and various political, cultural and social backgrounds in a collective process of decision making, leadership building, and action” (Palestinian Youth Movement 2020). One of their projects “From Palestine to South Africa” sent 20 Palestinian youth organizers to South Africa in April 2019 to “deepen relations of joint-struggle between Palestinians and South Africans” and learn from their history with apartheid. Such initiatives illustrate the global nature of the Palestinian struggle and work to emphasize that the oppression Palestinians face in Palestine is not limited to Palestine, but a symptom of larger global issues. This global awareness is instilled in Palestinian Americans as a result of their experiences visiting Palestine and witnessing injustice firsthand.

“These young people’s awareness of unjust conditions such a statelessness; the aggregation of basic civil, human, and political rights many Palestinians face; and the heightened surveillance and security faced by many Muslim communities (and those mistakenly thought to be Muslim) in the United States led many to be deeply committed to the ideas of equality and justice that they believe should be guaranteed to all people.” (Abu El-Haj 2015, 7).

Many members of this community have a vested interest in improving conditions here in the United States. This sense of responsibility to promote justice is motivated by their Palestinian identity. Experiencing and witnessing injustice first hand inspires second generation Palestinian Americans to fight against injustice in the United States.



**Fig. 11: Palestinian American Community Center (New Jersey)**



**Fig. 12: Flying Seagulls UK (Shatila Refugee Camp)**

*The above images show Palestinian children in America and in Lebanon. At community spaces like the PACC, Palestinian American children can come together and partake in fun activities like arts and crafts. In Lebanon, the camp is the uniting space for Palestinian children. As such, coming together means simply going outside. The second image depicts a musical troupe coming to visit the Palestinian children in the camps. (Fig. 11 source: Palestinian American Community Center' Fig.12 source: Flying Seagulls UK)*

## Discussion and Analysis

In many ways, the Palestinian community in New Jersey and those living in refugee camps in Lebanon are two very different communities. Despite sharing an overarching identity, that of Palestinian diaspora, the ways in which those communities connect to their identities varies greatly.

Both communities experience a sense of tension with the host countries they live in. Palestinian Americans in New Jersey feel othered in their daily life. Much of these feelings stem from post 9/11 discourse around Muslim Americans. A majority of the members of this community are Muslim, and those who are not are assumed to be Muslim because they are Arab. Some members of the community have faced Islamophobia directly and are hyper aware of their Muslim identity, particularly those who are visibly Muslim. Muslim women who wear hijab described a sense of heightened responsibility that they feel to represent their entire community. These individuals fear that if they are caught on an “off day” or behave in a way that will be perceived negatively, they will reinforce negative stereotypes about other Muslims or Arabs.

However, this goes a step further for Palestinian Americans, who not only face general Islamophobia, but also endure heightened surveillance from the United States government. Laws targeting the BDS movement, extra scrutiny and censorship of Palestinian activism on campuses, and the creation of sites such as Canary Mission which target Palestinians who are vocal about the cause all contribute to the feelings of exclusion. And although such targeting has made some Palestinian Americans wearier of sharing their identity or being vocal, it has done the opposite for many others.

In my interview with members of the community, many of them have expressed that the injustice of being targeted by both law enforcement and officials on college campuses has only made them firmer in their “commitment to justice.” Because they have American citizenship, Palestinians are aware of the rights they are guaranteed in comparison to their counterparts living in Palestine and as such, affirm their rights by “challenging the United States to live up to its stated ideals of equality and justice for all” (Abu El-Haj 2015, 35). When they feel they are being targeted or silenced due to their identity, they respond by expressing it more. Engaging in activism or wearing external markers of their identity such as keffiyahs, bumper stickers that say “I love Palestine,” or wearing bracelets with the Palestinian flag on it are some of the many ways they do so.

It is a completely different situation in Lebanon. Although Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are proud of their identity, they are not as eager to display it publicly due to the discrimination they face. In Lebanon, Palestinians are associated with poverty and crime. Some older generations of people in Lebanon harbor resentment towards Palestinians because they blame them for the civil war. One refugee described the way Lebanese people view Palestinians living in Lebanon by saying, “they see us like cockroaches.”

And unlike Palestinian Americans, who are guaranteed rights legally due to their citizenship, and thus are entitled to those rights, Palestinians in Lebanon are not citizens. They do not have protection under Lebanese law, and are not entitled to that protection. In Lebanon, being

Palestinian is met with a great amount of difficulty and strife. Palestinians rarely are able to move out of camps, and multiple generations have lived and died in refugee camps. There is a sense of hopelessness for many of them because there are no prospects for upward mobility due to restrictions on employment. One refugee living in a camp expressed that he would not like to have children because he does not want them to experience the life he has lived.

Viewing these two experiences simultaneously, the differences are incredibly clear. Palestinians in the United States are prospering and in Lebanon, there is no opportunity to prosper. Palestinian Americans can afford to advocate for the Palestinian cause, but Palestinians in Lebanon are concerned with survival first and foremost.

As a result, their views on the right of return are very different. While both groups do believe in and advocate for their right of return, they have different relationships with it.

In Lebanon, since the right of return is used by the Lebanese government as a reason to reject “tawteen” (permanent resettlement) and giving Palestinians citizenship, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have a sense of resentment towards that notion. That is not to say that Palestinian refugees in Lebanon do not want their right of return upheld, but that they do not want the right of return to be the reason they are not allowed to prosper and gain social, political, and economic rights. As Bianchi affirms, these refugees do not view the right of return and citizenship as antithetical, but instead view that having an “enhanced emplacement” in the host society is a part of the right of return in that it protects the dignity of those in the diaspora as they strive to be reunited with their homeland (Bianchi 2014,136). It becomes even more frustrating for the younger generations who have no real memories of Palestine. To them, Palestine is an abstraction, -they’ve never seen or visited it, nor have their parents. They are tied to it by their status as refugees and by blood, but not by memory.

Conversely, for Palestinian Americans the right of return is seen as an end goal of their activism. It is not something that they advocate for out of their own dire circumstances, but on behalf of the rest of the diaspora. Something many Palestinian Americans express is that although they love Palestine, they would not live there permanently. When asked why, they say it is because they are too used to life in America and have become accustomed to the freedoms that being American has given them. Many members of the second generation levy these rights to advocate for Palestine through their career paths, such as becoming a lawyer to protect Palestinians from human rights violations.

Viewing these two cases side by side is essential as it reveals that the diaspora, often conceptualized as a singular unified entity, is a diverse group of people with different experiences that inform their identities. While they all share a condition of “exile,” that condition differs greatly. For Palestinian Americans, their exile is not a state of “suffering” or an in-between limbo where they are forced to wait for return, like those in Lebanon. For Palestinians in Lebanon, their suffering is part of what affirms their Palestinian identity by affirming the right of return. As a result, some Palestinian refugees in Lebanon view suffering as a part of their Palestinian identity, and view those who do not suffer as “less Palestinian.”

This contrasts with Palestinian Americans, who while associating their identity with struggle, hold a stronger relation to resistance. They face suppression due to their identity, but it does not render them incapable of any upward mobility. As such, the idea that suffering and Palestinian-ness are correlated is not one at the forefront of their minds. As Ismail shared, when hearing a refugee tell her she was less Palestinian because she did not suffer, she was surprised because she holds the belief that the Palestinian people cannot be reduced to their suffering.

Palestinians in Lebanon connect to their identities through collective trauma. They remember the Nakba and commemorate tragedies such as the Sabra and Shatila massacre as a way to affirm their Palestinian identity. Living in camps means that Palestinians in Lebanon are constantly reminded of their Palestinian identity, and recreating Palestine in camps serves to tie the community to the homeland more firmly. It also insulates the Palestinians in Lebanon from Lebanese society, allowing them to create and affirm Palestinian identity even as generations become further removed from memories of Palestine. Palestinian Americans connect to their identity by coming together, whether it be by congregating in diaspora spaces or attending community gatherings such as events or weddings, passing on traditions like dabka, speaking Arabic, and most importantly, by visiting Palestine. These visits allow second generation Palestinian Americans to create physical ties to Palestine.

Despite sharing an identity, the way Palestinians in the diaspora connect with their homeland, with their identity, and with each other is directly affected by the host country in which they have settled. Prosperity in America allows for Palestinian Americans to connect with their identity positively and through a lens of advocacy and activism, but codified discrimination for Palestinians in Lebanon causes the identity to be viewed as one of suffering, and for Palestine to be a romanticized escape from their current situation. Conditions in the United States allow for Palestinian Americans to choose how to interact with their identity, whereas in Lebanon there is no choice and Palestinians are confined to a life defined by their status as Palestinian refugees.

Although the two groups have very different lived experiences, one similarity between them is a shared creation of a community consciousness and memory where the Nakba serves as the turning point in Palestinian history. Even for the New Jersey Palestinian population, a majority of whom were not exiled in 1948, the Nakba is seen as the beginning of Palestinian exile because it offset a multitude of other tragedies. Additionally, the right of return and the continued persistence in affirming that right is another uniting factor of the diaspora. Even while Palestinian Americans consider the option of staying in the United States “after return” (an option not given to Palestinians in Lebanon) they still insist that such rights must be maintained. In short, the Palestinian diasporas share a tie to their ancestral homeland, Palestine, a shared collective trauma through events like the Nakba, Naksa, and the ongoing occupation of their land, and a desire for return and reunification with their homes. But their unique circumstances inform their desires and the way they view themselves and their struggles, therefore cultivating very different experiences.

As such, it is important to distinguish between Palestinian “diasporas” in order to best understand the community. Rather than viewing Palestinians in a dichotomic structure, the ones “there” (in Palestine) and “away” (in the diaspora), the group must be viewed through the lens of *diasporas* in order to study and fully understand it. When conducting this research, it becomes

clear that the Palestinians living in refugee camps in Lebanon and the Palestinians living in the United States share very little in terms of lived experience. Therefore, grouping them together in the same category without taking into account their many differences would be problematic because it would overlook the complexities of the diaspora.

## **Conclusion**

The host country greatly affects the way that members of the Palestinian diaspora connect to their homeland. In Lebanon, not having citizenship makes the othering of Palestinians in Lebanon all encompassing. Not having social mobility and being physically segregated from Lebanese society through camps means that Palestinians in Lebanon will never fully integrate. As such, camps have become spaces where Palestinian identity is affirmed and created. Commemorative events serve to create a collective memory of which the starting point is the Nakba, the root of their exile.

The situation of the Palestinian Americans is very different. While this group has integrated legally through citizenship, post 9/11 othering of Muslims and surveillance of Palestinians has caused members of the community to “feel out of place.” As such, they retreat to community spaces such as mosques or diaspora spaces such as the Palestinian American Community Center in Clifton. In these spaces, identity is affirmed, created and passed on to the younger generation. Having citizenship means this community is able to visit the homeland, which allows the younger generation to connect to their identity through their memories.

This study illuminated the role of citizenship in connection to Palestinian identity. Although both groups affirmed their right of return, Palestinian Americans expressed hesitation about whether or not they would return because they have the option to stay and reap the benefits of the lives they have built. For Palestinians in Lebanon, Palestine is romanticized as the ultimate escape.

Often conceptualized as a single diaspora, the differences between the two communities suggested that within a diaspora there are other diasporas. Do general labels such as “Palestinians diaspora” serve or harm the communities they describe? Similarly, does the umbrella term “Palestinian diaspora” suffice in encompassing the two different communities?

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Fig. 1: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1660936>

Fig. 2: <https://gulf2000.columbia.edu/maps.shtml>

Fig. 3: <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon>

Fig. 4: <https://medium.com/insecurities/permanent-temporality-shatila-refugee-camp-beirut-lebanon-2014-489a846c73eb>

Fig. 5: <https://samidoun.net/2020/09/palestinian-youth-in-shatila-camp-launch-action4return-week-at-sabra-and-shatila-memorial/>

Fig. 6: <https://pqdtopen.proquest.com/doc/304864920.html?FMT=ABS>

Fig. 7: <https://uproxx.com/life/spencer-platt-september-11/>

Fig. 8: <https://palestinelegal.org/news/2016/6/3/what-to-know-about-anti-bds-legislation>

Fig. 9:

<https://www.facebook.com/Palestinianamericancommunitycenter/photos/a.2497996117106776/2498000877106300/?type=3&theater>

Fig. 10: <https://al-awda.org/al-awda-statement-of-solidarity-for-black-lives-and-black-struggle/>

Fig. 11:

<https://www.facebook.com/Palestinianamericancommunitycenter/photos/a.2426802214226167/2426802927559429/?type=3&theater>

Fig. 12: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A\\_EIvKArVWg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_EIvKArVWg)