

**Palestinian Identity-Formation in Yarmouk: Constructing National Identity through the  
Development of Space**

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## **Abstract**

Following World War II, refugee camps were established as temporary solutions to humanitarian crises arising from the displacement of civilians during violent conflicts. The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 produced over 4.6 million Palestinian refugees of whom 1.3 million live in refugee camps throughout the Middle East. Many of these camps have developed from temporary accommodations into permanent urban structures and homes to second and third generation Palestinian refugees born and living in diaspora but who identify as 'Palestinian'. In 1948, The United Nations developed an exclusionary definition of what it means to be a 'Palestinian refugee' neglecting in the process the concerns, experiences, and desires of Palestinians, who have in turn, used the space of the refugee camp to construct a definition of Palestinian national identity for themselves. This study analyzes the physical landscape of Yarmouk Camp located in Damascus, Syria in order to understand how Palestinian residents of the camp have chosen to construct a Palestinian identity by transforming the refugee camp into a reflection of the 'homeland'. Coupled with interviews with local residents and scholarly research on Palestinian refugee camps and Palestinian identity formation in general, this project will contribute to an understanding of how a specific group of Palestinian refugees create and maintain a national identity while living in Syria through the construction of a space that reflects Palestinian national identity as defined by the residents themselves.

## **I. Introduction**

Land claims have been at the center of the Israel-Palestine conflict since the publication of Theodor Herzl's Der Judenstaat in 1896 arguing for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. In 1913 Arthur Ruppin, a Zionist socialist who established the Bit Shalom Kibbutz movement, wrote that "land is the most necessary thing for establishing roots in Palestine"

(Morris 2001: 61). In the early 1920s, as the Jewish National Fund purchased land for the creation of a Jewish society in Palestine, then a British Mandate, The World Zionist Organization “set up an agency to oversee Jewish immigration and settlement” to Palestine, resulting in the subsequent creation of the state of Israel in 1948 (Quigley 2005: 16). The native inhabitants were displaced and sought refuge in camps located in neighboring Arab countries. Although the native inhabitants identified more closely with their village of origin rather than a national identity, they came to be defined by the United Nations as ‘Palestinian Refugees’. Land has been essential for establishing a national identity that is rooted in ideas of a Palestinian ‘homeland’ for Palestinian refugees living in diaspora. Refugee camps provide Palestinian residents with a space within which they can cultivate a national identity that unites Palestinians originating from different villages and becomes a reflection of the ‘homeland’ based on how residents of the camp envisage the Palestinian nation (See Figure 1.1).

The focus of this paper is to analyze how Palestinians in the refugee camp of Yarmouk in Damascus, Syria have developed the land to construct a Palestinian national identity rooted in the experiences of 1) Palestinians who lived in Palestine before 1948, 2) Palestinians who now live as refugees in Syria, and 3) the descendants of Palestinians living as refugees in diaspora but who have never been to Palestine. This paper seeks to answer the question: what can the camp’s landscape reveal about what it means to be Palestinian in the context of living as a refugee in Syria?

In Syria, Palestinian refugees have been awarded a distinct legal status that provides them with almost all rights guaranteed to Syrian citizens in addition to official documentation identifying them as Palestinian refugees. The Syrian government refuses to confer Syrian citizenship upon Palestinian refugees in an attempt to preserve their national identity (Davis



**Figure 1.1: Pre-1948 Map of Palestinian districts. Most Palestinians identified with the name of the largest center such as Safad. In Yarmouk Camp streets have been named after these villages and districts. (map provided by PalestineRemembered.com)**

1996). Although Palestinian refugees are permitted to take up residence anywhere in Syria many continue to live in designated refugee camps, the largest of which is Yarmouk Camp located outside the capital city of Damascus.

This study will elucidate some of these processes of identity formation among Palestinian refugees at Yarmouk by analyzing the particular urban landscape of the camp (such as monuments, street names) which provides a better understanding of how residents of the camp view, understand, and negotiate with Palestinian identity.

## **II. Purpose and Methods**

Based on research I conducted in the summers of 2005 and 2008 at Yarmouk Camp, I argue that the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk is a prime example of a physical space reflecting the process of identity formation among a diasporic community. Most Palestinians who came to in the camp fled Palestine in 1948 but the camp is now filled with a large number of second and third generation Palestinian refugees who have yet to visit Palestine. Symbols of the ‘homeland,’ including streets named after Palestinian villages, cemeteries that reflect violent struggle and images of martyrs and resistance groups, fill the camp. For refugees born into the camp who have never visited the homeland, their perception of Palestine is shaped by the sights and sounds that surround them within the camp walls. To them the camp ironically serves as both ‘home’ and link to the ‘homeland’. In addition, Palestinian identity in the camp is shaped by interactions with the native Syrian population which has also grown in size in the camp in the last decade creating a physical space that is very much divided according to national affiliation.

I have chosen to define Yarmouk as a ‘city-camp’ and will thus treat it as a space where international and national policies regarding refugees come together with local perceptions of national identity to create a specific Palestinian national-identity. Although Yarmouk is an unofficial camp not recognized by UNRWA, it has come to be defined as one of the few ‘urban’ camps resembling more closely a permanent city quarter than a refugee camp. Consequently, for this paper, I intend to apply anthropological theories related to the study of urban spaces to an

analysis of the landscape of Yarmouk Camp in order to better understand the role urban space plays in identity- formation among the Palestinian refugees who reside within the camp as well as implications the urban space may have for conceptualizing the ‘homeland’ among Palestinian youth.

For this paper, I will draw on interviews with Palestinians living in the camp as well as an analysis of the physical landscape of the camp based on data collected during my August 2005 and August 2008 visit to the camp. Since my visits each lasted about three weeks, analysis will also draw from research done by social scientists as well as organizations, including relevant UN agencies dedicated to the documentation of Palestinian refugee life.

The first section of this paper provides an international and historical context for understanding Palestinian refugee camps and their development in Syria followed by a section outlining scholarly research focused on Palestinian identity formation and urban anthropological theory. I will then provide a brief history of Yarmouk Camp and followed by an extensive analysis of symbols I observed in the camp that allow us to understand how Palestinian residents of the camp have come to define and negotiate with their national identity.

### **III. International Context**

On November 27, 2007, then U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice hosted a Middle East Conference at the United States Naval Academy in Maryland that became known as the Annapolis Conference. Representatives of the United States, Israel, and the Palestinian territories attended the conference with the objective of reaching a solution on the “final status” issues of the Palestine-Israel Conflict, which include the status of Jerusalem, the settlements, security and refugees. The status of Palestinian refugees and “right of return” remain contentious issues that have impeded successful resolutions to the Israel-Palestine conflict since the Madrid Conference

of 1991. At the Annapolis Conference, Mahmoud Abbas, head of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, referred to UN General Assembly resolution 194 that grants refugees the “right to return” to their homes (many of which now lie in Israel-proper) or right to compensation (Migdalovitz: 2007). However, the Israeli government refused to recognize the “right of return” to homes now located in Israel since the return of the native Palestinian population would undermine the identity of Israel as a “Jewish State.” Unable to provide solutions to “final status” issues, the status of Palestinian refugees remains intractable. In the end, the relatively ineffectual Annapolis conference concluded with an agreement, released via a joint-statement, among all parties involved that a two-state solution to the conflict must be pursued.

Following the 1948 Palestinian exodus, referred to as the *Nakba* or “Catastrophe” in Arabic, thousands of Palestinian refugees fled to neighboring Arab countries. Host countries responded to the influx of Palestinian refugees by establishing camps in conjunction with the United Nations; however most Arab governments refused to assimilate the newly arrived Palestinians through means such as citizenship. Most Arab governments continue to recognize and the “right of return” for Palestinians regardless of domestic policy towards their respective refugee populations and as a result, the issue of Palestinian refugees continues to impede peace talks seeking to resolve the Palestine-Israel conflict. The Syrian government, in an attempt to preserve Palestinian national identity, does not confer Syrian citizenship to Palestinians; however Palestinian political organizations are permitted to function under strict supervision from the Syrian government. As a result, refugee camps play an important political role in cultivating and propagating a Palestinian national identity.

#### **IV. History of Palestinian Refugee Problem**

##### **A. Legal Status of Palestinian Refugees**

According to Article 1 of UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol a 'refugee' is defined as

A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. <sup>1</sup>(Convention 1967)

The 4.6 million Palestinian Refugees are an exception to this definition in that descendents of Palestinian Refugees, as defined by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency in the Near East (UNRWA) as “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict,” are also granted refugee status regardless of whether or not in refugee camps (UNRWA 2003). A problem with the definition of a Palestinian refugee as articulated by UNRWA is that “UNRWA instructions concerning refugee registration were developed for operational reasons at the time of its establishment rather than as a considered attempt to deal with the legal, political, and humanitarian complexities involved” (Bowker 2003: 65). As a result the definition of Palestinian refugees is exclusive as well as monolithic and does not accommodate Palestinians who were displaced following the 1967 War or who may have difficulty proving their residence in the 1950s was indeed in Palestine.

With this discrepancy in mind, as of June 2008, 30% of Palestinian registered refugees live in official UNRWA run camps in neighboring countries including the West Bank and Gaza

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<sup>1</sup> This definition comes from the 1967 amendment of General Assembly Resolution 429 (GA/429/1) known as the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.

(UNRWA 2003). Most Palestinian youth living in refugee camps or in established communities have never set foot on Palestinian soil yet many continue to fervently self-identify as 'Palestinian' rather than adopting the nationality of host countries or allowing their 'Palestinian' identity to wane. I suggest that for Palestinian youth living in camps, their national identity is further reinforced by and revealed to them through the environment within which such an identity is cultivated. My research will show that the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk in Damascus, Syria is a good example of a process of developing a national identity through the use of symbols and representations of the homeland within a given space.

### **B. Palestinian Exodus and the Birth of Palestinian Refugees**

Of the 726,000 Palestinians that escaped during the Nakba or first exodus in 1948, an estimated 85,000- 90,000 Palestinians fled to Syria. Mass exodus of Palestinian families and entire villages coming mostly from the northern part of Palestine, from the cities of Safad, Haifa and Jaffa traveled to Syria via trails from Lebanon and Jordan and were distributed around the country into several different makeshift refugee camps. In most cases they settled in overcrowded residential quarters, residing in abandoned schools, mosques and in some cases, hospitals. A second wave of Palestinian refugees arrived following the 1967 Arab-Israel War including over 100,000 from the Golan Heights which was occupied by Israel following the war.

As of December 2007 there were an estimated 451,467 registered Palestinian refugees living in Syria of which 121,898 reside in 9 official refugee camps (UNRWA 2003). These camps were established and run by UNRWA, which had been created by United Nations General Assembly resolution 302 on December 8, 1949. UNRWA has been charged with the responsibility of providing direct relief to Palestinian refugees in certain countries of which Syria is included. Assistance comes in the form of infrastructure development in camps, promotion of

education and work programs for children and adults, health relief and social services. The organization was originally intended to be temporary but has had its mandate repeatedly renewed as of recently until 2011. Unfortunately, UNRWA relief did not succeed in accommodating many of the Palestinians who had first fled in 1948 and many were left to fend for themselves in foreign lands.

### **C. Arrival of Palestinian Refugees in Syria**

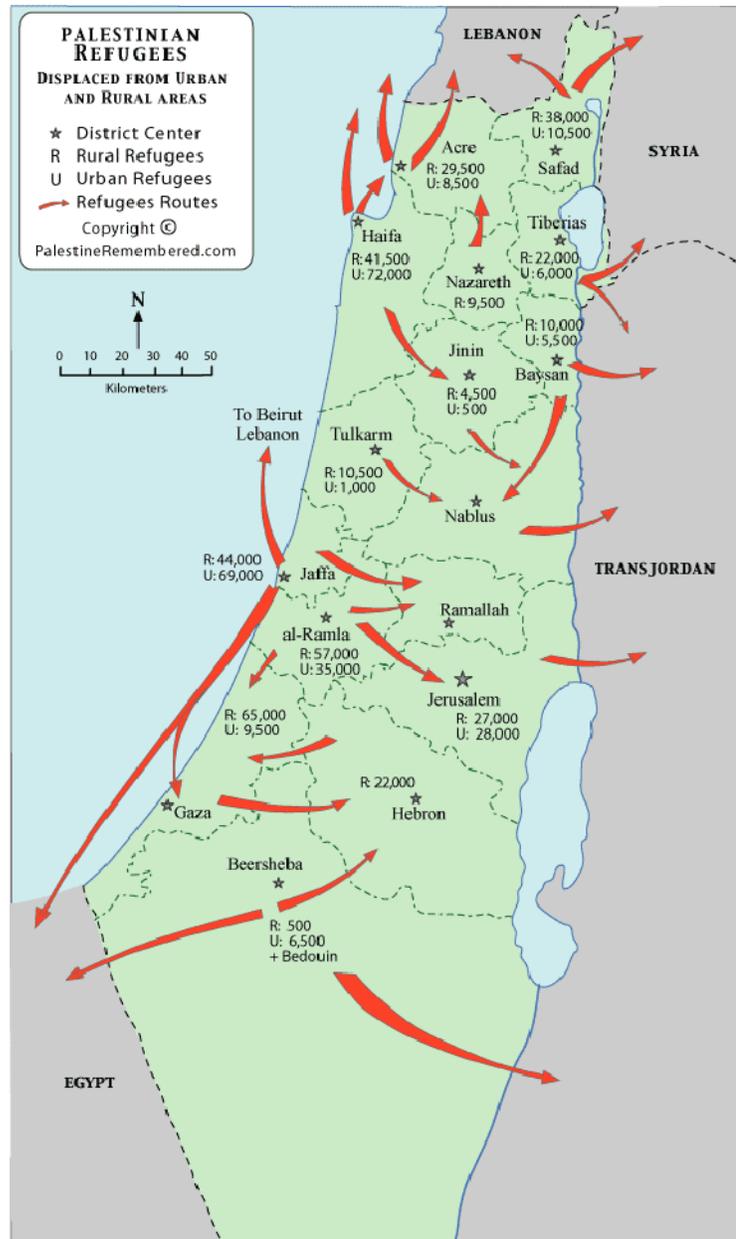
During my first visit to the camp during the summer of 2005, 17 Palestinian elders were interviewed regarding their escape from Palestine into Syria by the Jafra Youth Center in coordination with several visiting students from predominantly European countries. I worked as an English translator during the interview process, in addition to drafting articles to be included in a pamphlet based on the interviews conducted. The result of the interview process was a 77 page document entitled: "Testimonies of Palestinian Refugees". Although the document was drafted in an attempt to mimic social scientific methods, it fell short of acquiring status as a scientific report since the Palestinians conducting the research were not trained in social science methods and techniques. However, the document provides invaluable testimonies of the tedious journey from Palestine to Syria that many Palestinian refugees in the camps embarked on (See Figure 4.1). The refugees interviewed all lived in Yarmouk Camp and had escaped Palestine in 1948. Most fled to Syria via trains, buses, or walking from Lebanon or directly on board ships to Tartous and Latkia (Al-Mawed 1999: 12). Most refugees also traveled to several cities before finally settling in Damascus. One of the refugees was Fatima Mohammad Hamdi Al Chabi who escaped from the village of Ein Zaitun. Her story resembles the exile stories of several of her compatriots who continue to share their stories of escape with their children.

Fatima moved to the Palestinian village of Saf Saf with her mother and her brothers, but just before reaching the village, the Zionist started bombing and killed many people.

They reached Saf Saf and waited there for her father, who arrived with all their animals.

After 5 days they moved to Lebanon and from there they decided to go to Syria, to Hama.

(Testimonials)



**Figure 4.1: Map of Palestinian Districts and routes used by fleeing Palestinians (divided into rural and urban Palestinians). Palestinian identity remains heavily rooted in an agrarian lifestyle since most Palestinians**

**tended to work as farmers and fled from rural villages rather than urban centers.(map provided by Palestinremembered.com)**

At the age of 15, Fatima was married and moved to Yarmouk Camp. After settling in Yarmouk Fatima has never returned to Palestine but continues to grow four trees on her balcony to remind her of the farm she grew up on in Palestine. Many Palestinians who fled Palestine came from rural agrarian villages. To this day, olive trees remain an important symbol of Palestinian identity. The transportation of a distinctly rural feature- the tree- to the balcony situated within an urban space is an example of a Palestinian woman using the space to reaffirm aspects of her national identity. Fatima tells her children stories of life on the farm to remind them of their history as a means of keeping the struggle to return to Palestine alive among later generations.

The narration of escape for most Palestinian refugees to Syria is marked by the same levels of displacement and uncertainty. During my research at Yarmouk Camp three years later, I interviewed a man by the name of Abu Ibrahim who recounted a similar tale in which he counted off a total of 15 different places he and his family moved to until finally settling in the refugee camp at Yarmouk. During the journey, families were separated and attempts to reunite in host countries are well-documented. In a report prepared for the Expert and Advisory Services Fund International Development Research Centre entitled “The Palestinian Refugees in Syria: Their Past, Present, and Future”, Dr. Hamad Said Al-Mawed conducts research with a sample of 150 Palestinian refugees who escaped their homeland in 1948 and derives information on their escape and subsequent settlement in Syria through a survey and interview. He identifies the six routes Palestinians used to reach Syria. Recounting the tale of escape and exile is an important part of Palestinian camp-culture and play an important role in identity-formation for Palestinian refugees due to the fact that many Palestinian refugees are now born outside of Palestine in camps and have no recollection of their homeland. The youth I had a chance to interview in the

Camp had never set foot in Palestine yet continued to identity themselves as Palestinian even though they spoke in some cases with perfect Syrian accents and participated in Syrian school systems (meaning they took classes on Syrian nationalism). Nonetheless, for many of these youth, I found that the camp comes to symbolize the homeland Palestine.

## **V. Literature Review**

In 1997, Rashid Khalidi, a historian and Edward Said Professor of Modern Arab Studies at Columbia University, published *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, in which he argues that Palestinian Arab national identity was constructed mostly as a response to the challenges posed by Zionism and that prior to the establishment of the state of Israel, most Palestinians identified first and foremost with their village of birth (Rashidi 1998). Following the dispersal of Palestinians into neighboring Arab lands, refugee camps formed spaces where a Palestinian national identity could be constructed, forcing many Palestinians to move away from identifying with particular villages to identifying with a nation recognized as Palestine, thus unifying the Palestinian refugees living in diaspora and linking them to Palestinians who continue to live in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza.

### **A. What is a City-Camp?**

My decision to classify Yarmouk as a city-camp developed from the work of sociologist Michel Agier (2002) and allows me to study the camp's landscape as an urban space. Based on physical appearances, the camp resembles a Syrian quarter more so than a typical refugee camps, which one expects to find in arid land filled with makeshift tents and several UN shelters. One of the first social scientists to explore the concept of 'city-camps:' Michel Agier's article entitled "Between War and City," is one of the most cited in both sociological and anthropological work concerning refugee camps and identity. The text, initially written in French, contributes to a book

of the same name that argues for an interpretation of refugee camps as urban spaces. Agier opens with the claim that “social and cultural complexities emerge with the formation of the novel sociospatial form of ‘city-camps’ in which new identities crystallize and subjectivation takes root” (Agier 2002 318). The issue of refugees and displaced persons emerged following World War II. The establishment of temporary refugees gave birth to the concept of the refugee camp in which refugees and displaced persons live in temporary housing usually under the jurisdiction of a relevant UN body. Temporary housing reflects camps rooted in temporality, however in the case of Yarmouk, the homes have been transformed from temporary makeshift houses to permanent cement structures that have created a more urban atmosphere and a sense of permanence.

In most cases, new identities are formed within the camps as heterogeneous populations mix for the first time and the camp dwellers adjust to their new lifestyles and living spaces. For example, Palestinian refugees from certain villages who migrated and settled in camps in neighboring states were forced to interact with Palestinians from different villages. Agier argues that “refugee camps very often find it hard to maintain their integrity, in other words, to ensure the protection and neutrality of the spaces they demarcate (Agier 2002: 319). Refugee camps are not monolithic spaces since their borders and physical landscape are constantly contested and are engaged in a process of evolving. The flow of people and goods into and out of the camp impacts the population living there.

Agier’s theory provides the basic framework the study of the Yarmouk Camp since an urban approach will be implemented to analyze the landscape of the camp and the formation of identity within it. In response to Agier’s article “Between War and City”, Liisa Malkki argues that

the very notion of displacement implies emplacement, a ‘proper place’ of belonging, and this place has long been assumed to be a home in a territorial, sovereign nation-state. The specific device of the refugee camp also operates in intimate relation to the logic of the national order of things. The camp presents itself, socially and juridically, as a ‘space of exception’, and as an emergency measure, and is yet startlingly routine and familiar.

(2002: 353)

Although the Yarmouk Camp I visited was established as a temporary home for Palestinian refugees in Damascus in 1958, it has evolved into a permanent structure on the Syrian landscape. Since many first and second generation Palestinian-Syrians are born into the Camp, the space becomes a familiar symbol of their homeland and identity. According to Mallkki, “on the one hand, trying to understand the circumstances of particular groups of refugees illuminates the complexity of the ways in which people construct, remember, and lay claim to particular places as “homelands” or nations”” (2002: 352). The Palestinian refugees who were responsible for the constructing the camp left tangible marks on the landscape that reveal how they perceived Palestinian identity to be constructed. Following the 1967 Arab-Israel War, the Golan Heights, which belong to Syria, came under Israeli occupation leading to the displacement of Syrians and many more Palestinian refugees who settled in Yarmouk Camp. Furthermore, mass migration to urban centers such as Damascus led to an influx of Syrians who sought cheap housing in the camp in order to work in the capital. As a result, the population demographics of the camp shifted with Palestinians making up only 20% of the camp’s population. Although the population of the camp is predominantly Syrian, the Palestinian quarter is filled with images of the ‘homeland’ such as Palestinian flags, posters of martyrs from Palestine, and streets named after villages in Palestine.

## **B. Landscapes and Collective Memory in the Camp**

Landscape, in the form of monuments, buildings, and streets, recount the story of the city. It constructs and reveals important socio-cultural aspects of the identity of its inhabitants, while, at the same time, impacting the lives of the inhabitants. According to sociologist, Louis Wirth, ‘urbanism’ is defined by how a city’s landscape influences human behavior, not only the type of life individuals lead in a city. He argues that ‘urbanism’ as a way of life is not constituted by simply living in a city but by being conditioned by an urban space. An urban refugee camp is no exception to this theory (Wirth, 1938). The residents of the camp build a space that reflects their conceptions of a Palestinian national identity while in return, the landscape of the camp imposes ideas of the nation upon the residents.

In his article “Landscapes, Memory, Monuments, and Commemoration: Putting Identity in Its Place”, Brian Osbourne describes the construction of Canadian national identity in conjunction with the development of a landscape composed of distinct monuments. He argues the construction of national identity requires one to be “self-consciously aware of place” (2001: 2). He further argues that “national identities are historical constructions that are constantly being reconstituted according to a presentist agenda” (2001: 3). Palestinian identity in the Yarmouk Refugee Camp is cultivated by using symbols that constitute a collective memory that is reflected in the landscape of the camp. For example, the use of Palestine village and town names such as Jenin and Safad, as names for streets in the camp represents a “temporal reference point” for refugees in the camp. Even the camp is named after the Yarmouk Battle in which the Arab Muslims conquered the Levant thus bringing Islam to Greater Syria. Other spaces such as cemeteries become sites where commemoration is “performed, collective memory is reinforced, and national identity is constructed, both formally and informally” (2001: 3).

### **C. Palestinian Identity Rooted in Land**

Professor of Anthropology at the University of Arkansas, Ted Swedenburg, has written extensively on the link between Palestinian national identity and the land. In his work *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-39 Rebellion and The Palestinian National Past*, Swedenburg demonstrates how Palestinians have come to identify with farmers or *fellaheen*, as they are known in Arabic. Palestinians in general, he argues, identify with the *fellaheen* because of their connection to the land. Having been displaced, Palestinians use their connection to the land as a means of rooting Palestinian national identity in a clearly demarcated space. Through the years, important farm produce such as oranges and olives have come to symbolize Palestinian connection to the land even more strongly than the *fellaheen*. For example, Nasser Abufarha another Professor of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin, argues that “Palestinians draw connections between their ancient presence in Palestine and that of the ancient olive tree rooted in the land of Palestine (2008: 353). Furthermore, “Palestinians rely on the reconstruction of Palestine in the Palestinian cultural imaginary through cultural representations and performances to maintain the relationship to the land” (2008: 344). These cultural representations and performances can be observed in the landscape of the refugee camp.

### **VI. History and Development of Yarmouk Camp**

A specific look at the development of Yarmouk Camp will help explain how it came to be a *city-camp* and how the physical landscape reflects the formation of Palestinian identity. The influx of Palestinian Refugees following the 1948 Nakba and the 1967 Arab-Israeli War resulted in the establishment of several refugee camps throughout Syria. Although most camps are run by the United Nations Relief and Work Agency, Yarmouk Camp located outside of the capital of Damascus, was established by a Palestinian agency which purchased the land and distributed it

to Palestinian refugee families according to size. According to UNRWA, Yarmouk Camp is an unofficial camp and “home to the largest Palestine refugee community in Syria...[the camp] resembles an urban quarter, and it looks very different from the other Palestine refugee concentrations in Syria” (UNRWA 2003). In the summer of 2005, I was taken by a family friend to the Jafra Youth Organization located a few feet past Yarmouk Camp’s main entrance. Signs leading to the camp included the English and Arabic names of the camp: *Mukhayam Yarmouk*, Yarmouk Camp. When I arrived at the camp; however, I was surprised to see before me a space that resembled a quarter of the city of Damascus rather than how I imagined a refugee camp to appear. Before arriving at the camp, I was warned by the director of UNRWA Recruitment in Syria that Yarmouk Camp was not representative of official refugee camps in Syria because its population was more affluent and had an overall higher quality of living. In order to understand how Yarmouk transformed into a bustling urban space, one has to look back at the development of the camp and the socio-economic factors that influenced its development.

To describe the development and expansion of Yarmouk into a *city-camp*, I will use field notes collected during my visit to the camp in August 2008, where Dr. Talousi, a Palestinian refugee born in the camp and doctor at the camp’s local hospital, gave me a tour and detailed history of the camp, supplemented with data from sociological research conducted Dr. Hamad Said Al-Mawed on the condition of Palestinian Refugees in Syria.

Yarmouk Camp was established in the late 1950s to accommodate Palestinians who had overcrowded certain districts of Damascus. Many Palestinians who fled in 1948 had been living in hotels, mosques, and schools in *Hay Al-Amin* a quarter of old Damascus. The first extension of the camp began in 1956

when The General Authority For the Palestinian Arab Refugees (GAPAR), distributed small pieces of land between 40 and 80 square meters to families. Seventeen parallel straight alleys running from the east to the west separated the rows of houses... Another six streets running from the south to the north ran through the houses. Each of these streets was given a name of a village or city in Palestine.” (Al-Mawed 1999: 28)

While at the camp, Dr. Talousi explained to me that *Wikalat Al-Gawth* was responsible for distributing the land. In his article, Dr. Al-Mawed accredits GAPAR with purchasing and distributing the land. Although not yet clear, it appears that *Wikalat Al-Ghawth* is simply the Arabic name of GAPAR. Many UNRWA projects are carried out in conjunction with GAPAR. The purchase of land and distribution by an organization besides UNRWA meant that the camp and its residents would not be directly under the control of UN regulations. Instead, “ever since 1968, a municipal council and a local committee has been appointed to be in charge of municipal services” (Al- Mawed 1999: 28). This arrangement allows the camp to run independent of UNRWA control even though UNRWA continues to provide many basic services (such as schools and health clinics) to the camp since the camp does maintains the largest concentration of Palestinian refugees in Syria. Up until 1982 each Palestinian was provided with basic necessities such as rice, tea, and flour that they could pick up from an UNRWA building in the camp. Following the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon the aid was only distributed to families who needed it. In addition to a municipal government, the residents built a central mosque, a *mashfa* (hospital) and used nearby land to farm.

Now there are over a million people living in the Camp of which only 200,000 are Palestinian. The rest are Syrians who moved to the camp following the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights. Many Syrians from *Idlib* and *Deir el-Zor*, poorer districts that neighbor

Damascus, moved to Yarmouk to be closer to work in the city as part of the global trend towards urban migration and many took residence in the city due to the cheap cost of housing.

Accordingly, the city has developed into two clearly delineated sections. The original borders of the camps now lie to the west of the camp if entering from the entrance while the newer quarter encompasses the eastern portion of the camp. The ‘old quarter’ as the eastern section is called, is composed of over 97% Palestinians while the ‘new quarter’ is almost entirely Syrian. As Dr. Talousi pointed out, Syrians who moved to the camp settled on the right side of the main street while the Palestinians continued living on the left side. Remnants of the temporary houses of the camp can be still be found in the winding streets of the old quarter while the newer quarter is dominated by higher, modern buildings that are organized as squares with straight, wide corridors between them.

There are a total of 6 primary schools in the camp, all run by UNRWA. The secondary schools are state schools as well that have morning and afternoon sessions to accommodate the number of students in the camp. All streets, schools and parks are named after Palestinian villages or martyrs and heroes. Moreover, girl schools are named after Palestinian female heroes and, in addition to the boy’s schools, line the street known as *Shar’i Al-Madares* or ‘School Street.’” Near the schools and deeper into the Palestinian half are tighter lanes and stores that are owned by Syrian citizens. These stores are separated from the main market that lines the central street of the camp and where many Syrians from Damascus come seeking better bargains. This allows the camp to function as a space of economic transactions that provides residents of the camp with a source of economic independence.

Original homes, of which some remain, were initially made of mud and *zinco* a material similar to aluminum, for the first 10 years. Some older houses still stand although many have

been renovated and turned into multi-story buildings to accommodate growing families. Poorer families live on the tops of buildings in makeshift homes. Initially, most houses have 1 or 2 rooms but housed families with 10- 13 children, like Dr. Talousi's family. Now the number has decreased to around 6 or 7 children per family. As a result of population expansion and freedom from UNRWA regulations, Yarmouk camp was transformed into a bustling urban district of greater Damascus.

The newest area of the camp is known as *Hay al-Taqadoom* or the "Modern neighborhood" because it is the most recently constructed part of the camp it supposedly represents a "brighter" future. The houses will be larger and the corridor streets wider once this section of the camp is completed. The development of the camp reflects the growing population of Palestinian refugees living in the camp and an attempt to deal with many of the problems faced by dwellers of urban spaces in cities including over-crowdedness. Moreover, the further development of the camp contributes to the sense of 'permanence' that the refugee camp has come to reflect. Palestinian refugees in the camp recognize that they will not be returning to their homeland anytime soon and as a result the camp is transformed from a temporary response to a humanitarian crisis to a permanent reminder of displacement and loss of homeland.

## **VII. Compare and Contrast with other Refugee Camps**

To further understand the differences between Yarmouk Camp and other Palestinian refugee camps in Syria and Greater Syria and to analyze what makes Yarmouk camp a more popular destination for Palestinian refugees over official UNRWA-run camps, one can refer to Al-Qutub's article "Refugee Camp Cities in the Middle East: a Challenge for Urban Development Policies." In this study, Al-Qutub analyzes refugee camps, from a sociological perspective, as temporary cities which have distinct economic, social, and political

characteristics. Specifically, he looks at how the demographics of Palestinian camps and policies made by host communities concerning them affect their formation and development. Al-Qutub's article is very general and spans several camps in multiple host countries (Al-Qutub 1989).

He begins with a brief historical overview of the development of camps in Palestine and in neighboring states and looks at distinct social structures common to all Palestinian and non-Palestinian camps alike. Similar to other refugee settlements Palestinian refugee camps were built as temporary shelters. At the time, no one knew how long the refugees would be there which complicated policy formation for many host countries. In countries such as Israel and Lebanon, the camps become targets for conflicting political forces which manifests with the explosion of violence in such camps as Nahr Al-Bared in Lebanon earlier in the year of 2008. Al-Qutub looks at certain psychological factors that may have contributed to the "creation of state of loss, emptiness, social fragmentation, frustration and alienation" for Palestinians (Al-Qutub 1989: 98). The author argues that in city-camps, there is a destruction of the social structure in general that leads to increased poverty for the "weaker segments of the Palestinian people in particular" most notably landless farmers who escaped during the Naqba (Al-Qutub 1989: 97). This analysis applies to the Yarmouk camp where many Palestinians, who were socially divided according to the village of their birth while in Palestine, suddenly found themselves interacting with members of other villages while in the camp. The loss of a homeland and the dispersion of villages and families led to a widening of the social gap between different Palestinian classes. The richer and middle class Palestinians spread into the cities of their host countries while the poorer, agricultural Palestinians were living in densely populated camps. The distinction between urban-dwellers and rural-dwellers is heavily embedded in Palestinian culture. Fatima Al-Chabi, the woman I interviewed in the summer of 2005, had planted four

small trees in planters and placed them on her balcony to remind her of her farm in Palestine. Many Palestinians like Fatima's were used to life in a small village and on the farm, a stark contrast with life in an urban space especially if these camps eventually become shanty towns and then transform into slums.

On the surface, Yarmouk Camp appears to be more like a bustling quarter of Damascus; however, the houses expose a different story with their cramped living quarters and minimal furniture and accessories. Yarmouk Camp is a relatively high-end camp in the sense that camp residents have a higher quality of living than Palestinian refugees who reside in UNRWA run camps.

With regards to a camp-site economy, there are rarely any distinct or independent economic institutions in the city since the labor force is used for Arab or foreign economic development. Social and economic institutions in the form of non-profit, voluntary, and UNRWA supported agencies have been supporting services such as hospitals, orphanages, and schools; however it seems that these institutions are insufficient in meeting community demands.

It is important to note that in Syria, Palestinians seemed to have experienced a different reception by the host country unlike the treatment of Palestinian refugees in countries such as Lebanon. Based on Sharifa Shafie's research for Forced Migration Online, Palestinian Refugees in Syria are provided many rights not allotted to them in other countries that improves the quality of life in camps such as Yarmouk where local NGOs as well as International NGOs come together to provide services for the local population and where residents are not restricted to carrying out transactions within the bounds of the camp since it is more like an urban district rather than an official camp. As for legal rights and their status before the law, status is "regulated by the Syrian Arab Republic Law no. 260 of 1957 [which] stipulates that Palestinians

living in Syria have the same duties and responsibilities as Syrian citizens other than nationality and political rights”(Shafie 2003). In 1963 Law no. 1311, specifically article 20 allows Palestinians to carry ‘laissez-passer’ or travel documents issued by the Syrian government that allows them to travel to and from Syria without a visa. With regards to working permits, Palestinians are free to acquire work in the government, to own businesses (as evidenced by several shops in the Yarmouk Camp) and in general many do not have a difficult time acquiring employment. Interestingly however, like all Syrian males, Palestinian males must serve in the army but they serve for the Palestine Liberation Army rather than the Syrian army. Since 1968, they are allowed to own homes and other forms of property. Furthermore, Syria is the only Arab country, besides Jordan, that allows Palestinians to have access to all government services including health care and education. Palestinians are allocated a number of scholarships to study abroad and are permitted to enter Syrian universities and are treated like Syrian citizens. In the camp, through Dr. Talousi, I was introduced to many doctors and nurses who were born into the camp but studied at the local University of Damascus. Dr. Talousi argued that seeking an education is very important for Palestinians living in the camp because it can lead to economic opportunities and social mobility. In camps outside of Syria, Palestinians are not provided many of the rights that Palestinians living in Syria have come to enjoy. Yarmouk camp has the added advantage of being located near Damascus and as a result experiences several socio-economic advantages that other camps in Syria are not open to such as distance from public educational institutions

## **VIII. Developing Nationalism through Symbols of Palestine**

### **A. A Dangerous Place: Syrian Perceptions of Palestinian Refugees**

On the morning of August 6, 2008, my cousin Saheb drove me to the nearest Palestinian refugee camp in Damascus, Syria known as *Mukhayam Yarmouk* or Yarmouk Camp. It takes about 15 minutes to reach the camp by car and without traffic, a rare occurrence in Damascus especially the summer. My mother would not allow me to go alone so I had to bring one of my male cousins to accompany me. This made getting to the camp harder because I had to make sure someone was with me at all times. Even when I attempted to book a private taxi to take me to the camp, none of the taxi drivers (who were all Syrian) agreed to drive me there. I later found out that many of them had never been to the camp and believed it was full of crime and violence and thus a place too dangerous to visit.

We park the car at the beginning of the camp's entrance which is marked by a large sign that reads "Welcome to Yarmouk Camp". On the way to the camp, signs describe the area as a refugee camp even though it is not officially recognized by UNRWA as one. Expecting a shanty town, I was surprised to enter what appeared to be another district of Damascus. The main street looks the same as any ordinary street with shops lining each side, filled with mostly male vendors and female shoppers. As we walk, I thank Saheb for coming with me and laugh at the fact that my mother is worried about sending me here. "She's right" he says. "They are all *zi'ran* here" he continued, referring to the Palestinians. This reminded me of a similar conversation I had 3 years ago with another cousin, Amina, who told me the Palestinians were all *nawar*. The words *zi'ran* and *nawar* are difficult to translate. The former can be loosely translated as thugs or low-life people, while the latter means "gypsy-like". Usually we refer to young men who hang out on the streets and hit on girls as *nawar*. Amina told me that during the year the Palestinian boys would wait outside of her all-girls high school and would harass them. It didn't really matter much that poorer Syrian boys did the same thing. For most Syrians, Yarmouk is

considered a dangerous place and only the poor will venture to shop in the Yarmouk market. Perceptions of the camp also stem from stereotypes of Palestinians maintained by Syrians who consider the Palestinians to be 'low class.'

### **B. A Difficult Journey**

As Saheb and I walk, we stay on the main road. There are shops on both sides and posters of Palestinian martyrs on the walls. So far, the posters are the only objects in the camp that reminds me that the people here are Palestinian. I try to locate the Jafra Youth Center I had visited three years earlier. I finally find it and we enter to talk to someone who can help me with my research. The office is located on the bottom floor of a three story building. It has a desk, a book case and a computer. There is a door that leads to the main seating area which has a podium and seats and tables organized for meetings and guest speakers. The wall is lined with photos and maps of Palestine (the largest is a pre-1948 map of Palestinian villages), Che Guevara, and Fairuz. Fairuz is a famous Christian Lebanese singer who sings classical songs about Arab nationalism and the *Quds* or Jerusalem. Guevara is a popular figure and symbol of resistance to many Palestinians. In fact, after visiting the camp three years ago, my uncle warned me that some Palestinians tended to be communist, implying they rejected Islam as well.

Inside a young girl is sitting at the desk. I explain my research goals to her and ask if she can help. Her name is Dana and she is a Palestinian living in Denmark who has come to the center as part of a volunteer program. Jafra works in conjunction with many European Union member countries as well as other NGOs and she has come with other Danish volunteers, to assist the organization with its annual Palestinian awareness camp for foreigners. The two week camp had just come to an end and they were recovering from a night of celebrating so no one

who could help me was awake she explained to me. She takes down my information though and says someone from the center will call.

When no one from the center calls, I decide to venture to the camp on my own. As the Berkeley graduate student I encountered during my summer 2005 visit had told me, making connections with anyone in the UN or at the local level through NGOs is very difficult in Syria since there is little organization and many of the individuals working at UN agencies and NGOs are un-qualified. Like me, she had a hard time reaching the center and received little help from the local UN agencies since many were only trying to recruit her to volunteer as an English teacher for their local staff rather than assist her with her research. With some luck however, my uncle, a famous physician in Syria, calls up a Palestinian friend who works at one of Yarmouk Camp's hospitals and asks him to take me around the camp and answer any questions I may have thus giving me the opportunity to interview local residents in the camp. Thus getting to the camp proved the hardest part of the whole research process since my mother would not allow me to go alone and to my surprise, taxis refused to drive to the Camp as well.

Following my first trip to the Camp in 2008 with my cousin, I have dinner at my grandmother's house one afternoon and realize that there are no men who can accompany me to the camp. As previously mentioned, I was forbidden to visit the camp on my own even during the day so my grandmother calls up a private taxi service to ask for a driver. Private taxi services are relatively new in Syria and cost much more than a normal taxi would but they are considered much safer to use. Since I am going alone to a place I don't know and by myself my mother prefers I use a private taxi. I agree to this arrangement and drag along Zainab my 14 year old sister along with me. When my grandmother calls the center she normally works with, it takes three calls to finally find a driver who is willing to take me. The taxi driver who accompanies me

later tells me that no one wanted to drive to the camp so they kept passing the job to each other until he finally agreed to take me. I ask him why and he replies that the camp is not safe and that the people there will mess up the car. He recounts a time, the only time he has gone to the camp before, when he was dropping off some materials at a friend's house and he witnessed a man beating another one with a belt of spikes.

We arrive 20 minutes early to the camp. The driver tells us he will wait by the car. My sister and I go walking but this time into the narrower streets. There are many construction workers who walk beside us and Zainab begins to feel uncomfortable. She tells me she's a little scared. So we go back onto the main street and continue walking until we reach the center. I ask her why she is scared and she tells me the men are creepy and dirty. The men had seemed fine to me but in the smaller streets referred to as *harat* there was noticeably more poverty, however the camp is a far cry from many of the shantytowns that surround the capital city of Damascus. There were no shops, just houses and also no women walking there, unlike on the main street.

### **C. Jafra Youth Center: Palestinian Youth organized at the intersection of local, national and international interactions**

In the camp, the landscape “provides the action- space/stage/theater where group-identity is acted out within the group, with other groups, and with government and other institutions” (Osbourne 2001: 5). Yarmouk Camp becomes an intersection for several actors involved in the Palestinian crisis. NGOs as well as government bodies such as the Syrian government and PLO play a role in camp politics. The Syrian government decides which organizations it will recognize in the camp; therefore, Jafra Youth Center is recognized by the Syrian government as a legitimate Palestinian NGO. In addition, Jafra is recognized by the European Union as a representative of Palestinian Youth at the camp and as such they engage in exchange activities

with European organizations. For example, they host graduate students from countries like Denmark and Belgium in a weeklong conference on Palestinian issues.

At the Jafra Youth Center I meet with Dana again and Wissam and Nael. I interview them and ask Wissam, the head of the Center, some questions about the establishment and mission of the Jafra Youth Center. He explains to me that the Jafra Youth Center is an NGO by the European Commission and European Union Standards. That is why they work together with the EC to coordinate exchange programs such as the weeklong event they orchestrated last week in which Danish volunteers came to assist in a camp designed to teach foreign students about life in a Palestinian camp. They also try to conduct research by allowing the students to conduct interviews with Palestinians in the camp and publish the findings in a pamphlet.

Wissam then goes on to explain that in Syria they present themselves as a Palestinian organization and work with other organizations including the umbrella organization known as the Organization for Palestinian Refugees in Syria. They also work with the local representatives of Palestinian political parties such as Hamas and Gaza. Political parties are one way Palestinian Refugees maintain ties with the Palestinian nation. The Jafra Youth Center organizes programs for locals as well. Their main goal is “to get children off the streets.” They opened a computer lab for Palestinian youth and conduct lectures for women on men on their rights as refugees. Palestinian organizations in Syria are backed by different ideologies. Some are communist leaning while others adhere to strict interpretations of Islam. There are also organizations that deal solely with the issue of Palestinian rights in Syria, others, like the Jafra Center are focused on the Palestinian “Right of Return.”

Wissam and the other volunteers are all under 30 years old and run the center in conjunction with its sister center in Lebanon. They chose Yarmouk camp as the location for the

camp because they are a non-profit organization and wanted to be able to reach as many Palestinians as possible. In addition, they all live and have grown up in the camp. In the next week they planned on having a camp for Palestinian children from camps all over Syria. The purpose of summer camp is to remind Palestinian youth of their roots and to teach them about their rights as refugees. Activities, such as participating in traditional Palestinian dances known as the *debka* and other cultural endeavors during the camp serve as reminders to the youth of who Palestinians are as a nation. Last year they had around 150 children attend this year around the same number will gather for the week-long camp filled with programs revolving around art, politics, and sports. The meeting concludes and Zainab and I return to the car and go home. The process of reaching the camp and my experiences interacting with Syrians as well as Palestinians in trying to facilitate a means of journeying to the camp and collecting data reveal important information about the dynamic of Palestinian-Syrian relationships.

#### **D. Portrait of a Palestinian Youth: The Camp as Both Home and Link to the ‘Homeland’**

My final visit was arranged through Dr. Talousi, my uncle’s friend from the camp. Dr Talousi introduced me a young Palestinian nurse whose brother was a martyr and who had grown up in the camp. She took me to her home in order to interview her brother, Muhammad, and his family. The interview helps explain many of the observations I made about Syrian-Palestinian relationships when trying to reach the camp. Muhammad is 25 years old and works as a mechanic mainly in the Yarmouk camp where he was born and raised. Muhammad says he always felt like he was in Palestine while living in the Camp even though he has never been to the place he describes his ‘hometown’. He states that the street and school names remind him of the villages of Palestine and important figures in Palestinian history. According to Maoz

Azaryahu and Rebecca Kook, “ideologically charged and evidently present, commemorative street names are instrumental in the symbolic construction of national identity, mainly in terms of historical heritage” (2002: 195). Collective history is constructed through shared symbols and the use of Palestinian village names for street names in the camp provokes remembrance of a collective history, and subsequently national identity, that residents share. Images of martyrs on posters also help relate him to the political climate of Palestine, reminding him that even though he is not living under occupation or war that his homeland is still under siege. Outside of the camp there is no connection with these names, in Damascus he sees the names of battles and individuals that are not related to him or his history.

Furthermore, as Dr. Talousi explained, houses in the camp are small and so children spend more of the days outdoors in the street. In her piece *The Uses of Sidewalks*, Jane Jacobs adopts a nostalgic tone when describing the sidewalk and its role as a public space for interaction. Interactions on the sidewalk create a sense of community and a feeling of security. She argues that the city is safer when more people use the streets and sidewalks because it creates public respect and trust. This brings the community together even with communities that may have diverse populations (Jacobs 1993). Because Palestinian families will have many children, homes become overcrowded forcing many of the children to the ‘streets’ The fact that Muhammad spent most of his childhood playing in the streets and among the older generation of Palestinians makes him feel closer to his Palestinian brethren, even if they may be from a different village. At around 7pm, most of the Palestinian residents will set up tables and seating areas in the corridor streets and main road in the camp in order to engage with other residents and to escape the suffocating homes. In addition, at the camp Palestinians speak a different dialect of Arabic which he does not hear when he leaves the camp. For example, the day prior to

the interview, Muhammad had been working in the district of Mezzeh, an upscale part of Damascus and described the sense of alienation he experiences from being in a different environment. He was surprised by the lack of children in the street as well as adults even though there was more open space in which they could walk, play, or meet as many do in the camp.

Palestinian kids are also embedded in a social environment that differs greatly from the one Syrian children face. “As a child in the camp,” explains Muhammad, “everything you learn comes down to Palestinians and Jews”. In the camps the children think that this binary world is the only one that exists. During the 1990s, the first Intifada began, and more Palestinian youth were reminded of the cause of their parents. “Even when problems occur in Gaza, people in the camp flood the streets to protest” explains Muhammad. The Intifada brought a revival of solidarity among Palestinian Youth living in the Camp and those living back in the homeland.

The biggest problem faced by youth the camp is drugs and lack of jobs. Contrary to the situation of Palestinians in neighboring host-countries, Palestinians are given equal opportunities at employment in Syria. Muhammad claims he does not get rejected for being Palestinian when it comes to jobs but that, on the contrary, Mohammad was told by his employer who is Syrian that he will get the job “*because you are Palestinian.*” This appears to be the case only in Syria, unlike in Jordan where there is a general antagonism to promoting ones Palestinian identity. One of Muhammad’s friends was going through the border between Syria and Jordan when a Jordanian police officer stopped him and found a map of Palestine in the car. He pulled it out, ripped it, and told him “You still are thinking about that [Palestine]?” In Syria, however, Palestinians are free to maintain political and social ties with Palestine. In fact, unlike in Jordan, Palestinians can not request Syrian citizenship and as such they will continue to be identified as refugees even if they do not live in a camp and are provided with the same rights as the local

population. However, the local population also looks down on Palestinians. Based on my experiences getting to the camp, many Syrians described the Palestinians as low class thugs and believed that the camp was filled with social problems. Muhammad explains that “in the camps if anything illegal or dangerous happens people are constantly watching you and every problem is exaggerated and blamed on us.” Although only 20% of the population is Palestinian in the camp the rest is Syrian. With the poverty rate around about 80 to 90% of the population in the camp however it is not surprising that many of the problems that develop in poorer neighborhoods in the rest of the city also develop in the camp such as drug trafficking however most Syrians choose to ignore this fact and lump the Palestinians into one large group of outcasts.

Al –Ghawth, the agency responsible for Palestinians in Syria, also encourages education. Mohammad and his siblings were encouraged to study a lot since their father only had 2<sup>nd</sup> grade education. In the camp education levels are very high for both genders. There are also many highly qualified professionals that emerge from the camps such as doctors and Muhammad’s sister Hanan a nurse.

As for religious make-up of the come there are some Christian Palestinians live in the camp but it is predominately Muslim. In the 60s there was a rise of communist movements had some influence on the youth but are not as influential anymore. Mohammad also jokes about how the head of the main communist Palestinian organization attends Friday prayer each week. There has been an increase in religiosity, something I noticed in the street myself with more of the women covered up in the camp than in Damascus and more dress in full black coverings. According to Dr. Talousi, if one were to go into a mosque now they would find that three fourths of the congregants are youth. This increase in religiosity among the youth is a by-product of a

movement towards increased religiosity in Gaza and the West Bank which is a byproduct of the first and second Intifada.

### **E. Cemeteries as Spaces that Symbolize National Resistance**

A few weeks before I visited Yarmouk Camp, the bodies of several Palestinian ‘martyrs’ were returned following the exchange between Hizbullah and Israel. Processions were held in the main street leading to the ‘martyr’s cemetery’ where the bodies were laid to rest. For many Palestinians in the camp who participated in the event, the commemoration of the nation’s martyrs was a means of reaffirming their alliance to the nation-state of Palestine. As a result, the camps become

loaded with landmarks and lieux de memoire that are mnemonic devices for national narratives, shared values, and putative hopes for the future. The imaginative use of symbols and myths and of monuments, commemorations, and performances, have become the stuff of history, tradition, and heritage, all directed towards nurturing some form of identity. (Osbourne 2001: 3)

The landscape can be interpreted as an imprint of the collective memory and social cohesion that is cultivated within its borders. The martyrs play an important role in keeping the struggle for Palestine alive among the elderly and especially among youth. In addition, one finds the name of Syrian martyrs dispersed upon the Damascene landscape, however in the camp, with the exemption of images of the Syrian President Bashar Al-Asad, only Palestinian political figures mark the landscape of the camp.

In Diane Bennett’s article “Bury me in Second Class: Contested Symbols in a Greek Cemetery,” the author argues that the “natural and supernatural aspects of death make it a powerful symbol of social relations among the living and this symbolism can be forcefully

represented in the arrangement of cemeteries;” further claiming that “where and how one is buried is an important sign of one’s place in society, although how this symbol is put to use varies greatly” (1994: 123). During my summer 2008 visit to the camp, Dr. Talousi took me to the cemetery to pay my respects to a number of Palestinian bodies that were returned in July during the hostage exchange between Hizbullah and Israel. The men who are with me are appalled by the way the bodies are buried. They have not been back since the ceremonial procession in which the bodies were brought to the cemetery but no one watched the bodies being actually buried. The ceremony was so poorly organized that one of the electricity poles next to the burial site fell over and injured some women and children. The bodies are laid next to each other and are covered by cement. No plaques are in place to designate who is buried where and if one did not know it was the site of buried martyrs, they would walk all over it thinking it was a normal ground to walk on. The disrespect for the martyrs, exemplified by the agency that was responsible for the burial of the martyrs angered many of the citizens of the camp who would have wanted to bodies to be buried in honor. Spaces such as the cemetery serve as mechanisms of cohesion for camp residents and remind them of the shared history and experience that defines them as *Palestinian*. The distinction between martyr and citizen is also important because it reveals an important aspect of Palestinian culture: the struggle for the state and the honor associated with dying for the nation. Like the pictures of martyrs that line the streets names after Palestinian villages, the cemetery is a physical reminder of the Palestinian’s homeland and of his status as a sojourner in Syria waiting for the chance to return to a nation liberated by the struggle and sacrifice of honorable individuals.

## **IX. Conclusion**

As illuminated by the Annapolis Conference of 2007, solving the Israel-Palestine conflict is predicated on finding a solution to the Palestinian refugee problem. During May of 2007, violence broke out in the Nahr El-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon as the Lebanese army fought with Islamic militants in the Camp. The restrictive, and often abusive, policies of the Lebanese government towards their Palestinian refugee population have created an extremely volatile situation in the refugee camps that could lead to increased violence, destabilization, and conflict. On the other hand, Syrian policies towards Palestinian refugees have led to a relatively stable coexistence between the Syrian citizens and Palestinian refugees. At the same time, Syrian policies encourage Palestinians to preserve their national identity.

By maintaining a Palestinian national identity, Palestinian refugees keep the struggle for Palestine alive as they refuse, or are prohibited, from completely assimilating into host countries. Thus, the Palestinian diaspora provides a unique space within which to study the effects of identity-formation and refugee status. This paper revealed the process of national identity formation in the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk. Although the paper does not purport to provide a cohesive and all encompassing definition of Palestinian national identity in the camp, it attempted to provide basic examples of how residents of the camp have come to define Palestinian national identity (through the use of certain names, a shared experiences, culture) and have incorporated their reflections into the landscape of the camp.

Arab states who do not wish to assimilate the Palestinian refugee populations have a vested interest in keeping the notion of a Palestinian state alive among their refugee populations and as a result, states such as Syria, allow them many rights and privileges to build and construct a national identity within Syrian borders. The analysis of the landscape of the camp provided

information on what images and objects Palestinian refugees in the camp associate with Palestine such as street names that reflect villages in Palestine and an emphasis on martyrdom and struggle for the Palestinian cause. The construction of an identity through landscape also allows Palestinians in the camp to define 'Palestinian-ness' for themselves rather than falling back on internationally constructed definition.

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