

## Thesis Summary

### Too Much to Govern

*Agency, Governance, and Governmentalities in Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon*

Since the creation of Israel in 1948, a great number of Palestinian refugees have resided in Lebanon, one of the host countries that absorbed the influx of Palestinians. The living conditions of Palestinians in Lebanon have been characterized by deprivation, exclusion and marginalization as Palestinians are excluded by law from seventy-two professions, Lebanese social security, healthcare and education, and the right to own property. In the context of the Syrian war, Hezbollah involvement, and large inflow of Palestinian refugees into the camps, this situation is increasingly liable to escalate in the near future as the Palestinian community, which constitutes a staggering ten per cent of the Lebanese populace, continues to be marginalized in a hostile environment. Marginalization of refugee groups can have devastating effects on both refugees as weak states as the recent Lebanese civil war has shown; therefore a constructive approach to managing these pressing issues is required.

Traditionally, the Palestinian refugee topic is approached from a state-centric perspective, resulting in a bare and 'abnormal' presentation of the refugees' being without acknowledging agency and political potential. Motivated by the belief that sustainable reform will only succeed if considered legitimate and supported by the local population, the author has aspired to fully include the Palestinian camp dwellers and their opinions and suggestions concerning their camp organization by acknowledging their political potential and agency. A dual theoretical framework was adopted with on the one hand a Foucauldian governmentality perspective to explore political rationalities pertaining to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and, on the other hand, notions of citizenship values - *rights, obligations, participation, and identity* - to expose Palestinian political agency, patterns of community engagement and notions of Palestinian citizenship as affected by governmentalities. These concepts directly relate to components to effective governing such as social capital, community engagement, institutions and traditions as well. The research question has been as follows:

*How and to what extent does the Palestinian community of Bourj el-Barajneh engage in local camp governance and how does this engagement as well as the community's perceptions concerning engagement and camp governance relate to existing governmentalities pertaining to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon?*

This thesis is based on a three-month ethnographic fieldwork in refugee camp Bourj el-Barajneh, south of Beirut, which included participatory observation, interviews, focus groups and surveys. The author was able to live in the camp and directly witness and research the Palestinians. Based on primary and secondary research data, five governmentalities were identified, according to which the thesis was structured.

The governmentality 'State of Reason' assessed the styles of thought, policies and practices as exerted by the Lebanese state. In the name of maintaining national security, suppressing practices and policies against the Palestinians are justified. Lebanese legislature pertaining to Palestinian refugees concerning employment and social services severely affects the Palestinian community and discourages community *participation*.

'Depoliticized Humanitarianism' assessed UNRWA's and other international NGOs' approach to offering humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian camps. There seems to be a disinterest or unwillingness to deal with the local people as emancipated agents, which has a depoliticizing effect. This approach does not only obscure the political reality of the camp, but it

also hinders political change to take place as NGOs indirectly lend legitimacy to malfunctioning camp authorities that are not considered legitimate by the camp population. This developmentalist approach proves inadequate to addressing the essential underlying issues of the camp.

Despite the fact that governmentality 'Palestinian nationalism' is no longer practiced as a revolutionary means as during the PLO era in the 1960s and 1970s, it still appears to be the main impetus for Palestinians to become *active* for the community. The expression of common Palestinian norms, values and customs serves as a social binding mechanism that furthermore preserves the Palestinian *identity*. From this sense of *Palestinianism* arises a high sense of *responsibility*, which encourages camp dwellers to become active for one another.

'Political Islam' constitutes a central element of *self-identification* for the Sunni population of Bourj el-Barajneh, yet it does not affect governance and engagement practices as much as 'Palestinian Nationalism' does. 'Political Islam' does place great emphasis on the *obligation* of Muslims to *engage* in the community.

The finally suggested governmentality is the 'Diplomatic Institutional Development Approach'. A transition in styles of thought and conduct is suggested to be taking place in Bourj el-Barajneh with concepts such as *awareness*, *diplomacy*, *learning* and *cooperation* adopted. The focus lies on the establishment of institutional structures that can withstand external as well as internal pressures. The camp shows willingness to engage and improve their community, yet also awareness concerning the power structures limiting community participation.

While data suggest there are high levels of solidarity, responsibility and commitment, there is very little community engagement. The author argues that this is mainly caused by a lack of trust in politics and the effect of community engagement. Camp dwellers express that real change has to occur on different levels before community engagement can foster any change. For the Palestinians of Bourj el-Barajneh, improving their camp environment is complicated due to the many external factors affecting it. However, one of the challenges that Palestinians should focus on is the improvement of local institutions. This occurs already to some extent as village leagues have been developing the *rawabet* as a platform for negotiations and adopted 'apolitical' rules of conduct. We now know that institutional reform enjoys support from the local population and that there is a high awareness concerning institutional and political mechanisms. However, as there is no social security for Palestinians living in Lebanon, Palestinians rely on dysfunctional political actors such as political parties, keeping the clientelist network in tact and halting institutional reform. Here the importance of changing employment laws pertaining to Palestinians becomes apparent, since this would enable Palestinian camp dwellers to become independent from political parties and give them economic freedom to focus on reforming the camp.

This thesis was able to expose the motives of Palestinian community engagement patterns of local camp governance in the highly complex and multifaceted Lebanese environment. Due to highly politicized and charged nature of Palestinian refugees, progress is difficult to attain, however not impossible. It is the author's belief that progress should be achieved by focusing research on one field at the time, such as a cost-benefit analysis of Palestinian employment. Furthermore, as a theoretical implication, the refugee spaces should be approached in more balanced and respectful manner, taking into regard the social and political mechanisms of local populations to governing and protecting the camps. Without trivializing any of the issues pertaining to Palestinian refugees and the camps, it is important that opportunities are brought out for Palestinians, Lebanese and international actors to see, contemplate and develop further. Such an approach is imperative if we wish to achieve any constructive progress in these highly volatile conditions.