

# The Repercussions of the Demographic and Social Reality on the Political Trends of the Palestinian Refugee: A Field Study in Refugee Camps in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

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## Abstract

This is a descriptive study on the demographic reality of the Palestinian refugee. The study sheds some light on the perception of Palestinians residing in camps in the West Bank and Gaza Strip towards their country which was occupied by the Zionist gangs in 1948. In order to investigate the study's hypotheses, the researcher designed a questionnaire that was distributed to a stratified sample population in the camps of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Palestinian refugees showed awareness of their cause, which had a place in their memory, and this was evident in their political trends which revolved around the Right of Return. Palestinian refugees constantly reflected on the villages and cities from which they were forcibly displaced in 1948 due to the terrorist operations of the Zionist gangs that practiced oppression and murder against these refugees.

**Keywords:** Palestinian refugee, camp, Nakba, right of return.

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## 1. Introduction

Researchers in population studies unanimously agree on the importance of demographic factors in shaping the social system, its balance and stability. Some sociologists have used the concept of demography to denote the study of the population and its conditions from a social perspective. Durkheim designated the term of social morphology for population studies, which includes the study of the forms of societies and their material forms, the geographical distribution of the population, internal and external migration as well as housing patterns (Samha, 1997: 8).

Researchers agree that the demographic structure of any society is a reflection of the political, economic and social conditions

which prevail in that society and affect it. These conditions affect the level of fertility, mortality and migration in society, not to mention the consequent imbalance in the patterns of different population structures such as gender, age, marital status, education and other structures. Its impact extends to the geographical distribution of the population within a country or region as a result of internal or external migration processes (Ayoush, 1998: 51).

The Palestinian society is considered one of the societies in the Middle East that has been subjected to major demographic fluctuations due to the political situation that occurred in Palestine. The encouragement of Jewish immigration during the British Mandate, the occupation of Palestine in the 1948 and the

1967 war, the forcible displacement of a large number of the Palestinian people to different parts of the world, the formation of emergency gatherings inside Palestine known as “camps”, all led to an impact on the demographic, social, economic and political structure of the Palestinian society. Since the emergence of the Palestinian refugee phenomenon is an end result of the aforementioned demographic fluctuations, the researcher conducted this study reviewing a descriptive analysis of some demographic variables related to refugee migration and the formation of his family with regards to the number of children he supports. It also includes intersections between demographic, and social and political variables related to the Right of Return (Banat et al., 2018; Dayyeh et al., 2018; Dayyeh & Banat, 2019).

The study began with a description of the movement of Palestinian refugees in 1948 from the geographical point of view, according to the region of residence. There is no doubt that immigration in all its voluntary and forced forms is one of the most important demographic phenomena that characterizes the Palestinian people. During the British Mandate, Palestine was known to have Arab immigrants coming for work. Palestine also knew Zionist immigration waves for the purpose of settlement. More importantly, it knew the first mass forced displacement, which included about three quarters of a million Palestinians following the establishment of the State of Israel.

## **2. Background And Previous Studies**

The issue of refugees has abounded in wide importance in the sociological, political and

social literature, and there have been numerous studies in this field. The researchers' axes of interest varied: some of them focused on the social criterion, some dealt with the economic dimension, others dealt with the political dimension, and some of them abstracted the refugee issue from its national dimension and focused on the service dimension only. This part will present the studies related to the subject of this study. Sarhan (1970) conducted a study in Wihdat and Baqa'a camps in Jordan and in two other camps in Lebanon, and concluded that the children in the camps possess a high level of national awareness. They know that they are Palestinians and that they do not accept any settlement or compensation, but only the liberation of Palestine and that it is their true homeland, and that their loyalty is to their nation.

The study of Marx and Ben Borat (1971) in Al-Jalazun camp, aimed to identify the social and economic characteristics of Palestinian refugees. It resulted in several outcomes: the refugee's ownership of buildings, land, shops, agricultural machinery and livestock is much less than the ownership of the neighboring residents in the villages; and that the income of the refugee is less than 40% of the income of the average citizen (Dayyeh, 2019). Farah (1976) conducted a study on Palestinian refugees in Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar in 1976. The social aspect and its relationship to the formation of the refugees' political orientations dominated the study. It concluded that the connection with Palestine permeates the lives of the Palestinians, and despite the fact that the geographical area is separated from Palestine, it does not affect

this connection and that they yearn to return to it.

In another study, Sayigh (1977) focused on the Palestinian identity among the residents of the camps near Beirut. The results indicated that the crystallization of the Palestinian identity among the residents of the camps adjacent to Beirut was affected by several factors which included dispersal, poverty, persecution and control by non-Palestinian authorities. In spite of these new conditions on the lives of Palestinians in exile such as changing status, assuming responsibilities, the degree of political control and instability, these factors were not of importance to the Palestinians. They have passed these difficulties because they feel that the place in which they live is temporary, and that this country is not their homeland and they do not have a government that defends them like others. Therefore, the Palestinian identity crystallized and became clear among camp residents in an indisputable manner.

The study of Hazboun (1989) confirmed that the Palestinian refugees' adherence to their political rights strongly contradicts the Israeli assumption that the resettlement of Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip will dispel the dream of return. It is a dream summed up by the statement of Moshe Dayan, the former Israeli Minister of Defense, in June 1973, in which he says that "as long as the refugees remain in their camps, their children will say that they came from Jaffa and Haifa, but if they move from the camps, there is hope that they will feel connected to the new land".

Additionally, Jarrar (1990) focussing on the social and demographic aspects that dealt

with the living and political conditions in Palestinian camps in the West Bank, particularly in Balata and Al Fara'a camps. The results of the study concluded that the Palestinian refugee is connected to his land, which he was forced to leave, and that the living conditions of refugees in the camps are not satisfactory. That is in addition to the existence of unemployment and its high rate among refugees, which affected the per capita income and its classification below the poverty line. The study also showed that the refugee's ownership is almost non-existent, whether it be in terms of land, livestock or real estate. Regarding political orientation, the study revealed that the Palestinian refugee is patriotic and belongs to his homeland, Palestine, and that he will not give up the Right of Return (Banat, 2014; Dayyeh, 2019).

Hazboun (1992) revealed that national belonging did not influence the memory of the refugees which was directed towards their countries and villages from which they were expelled in 1948 despite the poor social and housing conditions and the low income. The study of BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights (1998) BADIL conducted a field study in 1998 that aimed to know the positions of the Palestinian refugees regarding the political developments that were related to their national cause. The study included a sample of 1200 refugee families living in 19 camps run by UNRWA, in addition to five refugee gatherings (informal camps not recognized by UNRWA). The study dealt with the demographic and residential characteristics of Palestinian refugees who live in camps in

the West Bank, as well as their attitudes regarding their political future. The results of the study found that Palestinian refugees are looking forward to returning to their cities and villages from which they were displaced in the year of the Nakba.

The study of Hamam (1999) tried to identify the social conditions of refugees in the camps of the West Bank, and concluded in its results that refugees residing in the camps cannot be viewed as just a random - chaotic group - of individuals and families; And that their presence and continuity in the camps over a period of fifty years was not a coincidence nor was it a choice. Rather, it was a compulsion imposed by the circumstances of the occupation. Moreover, the gatherings primarily inside the camps and inside the neighborhoods on a second degree was done on the basis of rural or civil origin, which made it easy to reproduce hundreds of villages that were destroyed by the occupation in 1948. The process of reproducing the Palestinian village inside the camps took place through social units and through traditional social relations in the new place called "the camp". One of the results of this study is also that the demographic distress from which the camps suffer is constantly increasing due to the unbalanced equation between the number of refugees and the area of land allocated to the camps in the West Bank. On the one hand, the number of refugees is constantly increasing as a result of the natural growth process and as a result of the return of large numbers of workers in Kuwait and the Gulf countries since the beginning of the nineties. On the other hand, the lands on which the camps are built in the West Bank have not

developed since 1948, which led to the vertical expansion of the construction process on improper foundations that do not conform to engineering standards

Furthermore, AbdAl-Rahman (2002) identify the attitudes of Palestinian refugees towards the Right of Return to their homeland. The researcher used the descriptive approach, and a study questionnaire was distributed to a stratified sample of the research community. The study showed that Palestinian refugees possess a collective awareness, represented in their adherence to the Right of Return, and that their presence in the camp is considered temporary. The study outcomes also concluded that the living and demographic conditions experienced by refugees in the camps increased their attachment to their lands from which they were forcibly displaced in the year of the Nakba, and that their poor conditions were a product of the Zionist gangs' occupation of their lands in 1948. However, Mohsen (2010) shed the light on the urban reality in the camps of the Gaza Strip, and to identify the suitability of these camps to the population, their conditions and habits. The researcher adopted the descriptive analytical method for a sample population from the Beach Camp. A study questionnaire was distributed to a random sample of the aforementioned camp. The study came to the conclusion that the camps in the Gaza Strip are nothing but a phenomenon of political housing as a consequence of the urgent and dire situation of housing thousands of Palestinian refugees. The research also detected a weakness in the connection of Palestinian

refugees with their current homes in the hope of returning to the homeland they left.

### 3. Comments on Previous Studies

By reviewing the contents of previous studies, the following observations can be made: (1) There are some studies that stripped the Palestinian refugee issue of its national and political content, and focused on the humanitarian and economic aspect. The study of Ben Borat and Marx is a good example of this type of studies whereby the aim was to convince the international public opinion of the necessity of solving this issue through settling refugees and improving their living conditions. (2) Through an inductive process of previous studies in the various stages of their implementation, it is noted that the temporal factor did not weaken the refugee's belonging to the land from which he was displaced. This indicates that the collective awareness and upbringing, that was formed among the refugees through the socialization process to which they were exposed, expressed the permanence of communication with the historical Palestinian memory, which confirms that the return is the obsession that lived with grandparents and moved to the parents to be fulfilled with the journey of the children, regardless of the circumstances. (3) Among the social indicators that came out of previous studies is that the refugee is connected to his land that he was forced to leave, and that the life he lives in the camp is unsatisfactory and his ownership is almost non-existent, whether it be land or otherwise. (4) Among the advantages of previous studies is that they have achieved a set of goals, such as identifying the

demographic and residential characteristics of the camp population and providing integrated data on the refugee population.

### 4. Statement of the Problem

The issue of Palestinian refugees has constituted an important dimension in the Arab-Israeli conflict since 1948, and it had different repercussions on the Palestinian social structure and on its various social, economic, political and demographic levels. One of the outcomes of the Palestinian refugee phenomenon was the formation of an emergency social system based on the original community structure called the camp. This new situation distorted the Palestinian memory as it contained variables that clearly affected the refugee's vision towards many of the issues he faced. There is no doubt that the Right of Return was an obsession that has been hovering in the memory of the Palestinian refugee. The demographic situation in which the refugee found himself due to the lack of space and the scarcity of resources established a memory of the place for him; He did not even comprehend his presence in this miserable reality for a period of time, of which he was unaware, and which spanned more than seven decades. This study was therefore conducted to describe and analyze the reality of camps with their various scenes on the one hand, and to answer the following main research question on the other hand: What are the implications of the demographic and social reality on the political trends of the refugee?

### 5. Hypotheses

Based on the previous research problem, this study seeks to test the acceptance or rejection of the following hypotheses:

- 5.1 There are statistically significant differences at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$  between the region of residence and the geographical location of the district from which Palestinians were expelled in 1948.
- 5.2 There are statistically significant differences at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$  between the region of residence and the income of the individual.
- 5.3 There are statistically significant differences at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$  between age and the refugee's visit to his country.
- 5.4 There are statistically significant differences at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$  between age and the refugee's vision towards achieving their return to their country.
- 5.5 There are statistically significant differences at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$  between the region of residence and the area of the dwelling inhabited by the refugee in the camp.

## 6. Definition of Terms

**6.1 The Palestinian refugee:** one who was forcibly displaced from his/her homeland as a result of the Zionist terrorist operations in 1948 and 1967, and this applies to his/her children and grandchildren.

**6.2 The Nakba:** a term that symbolizes the mass forced displacement of more than 800,000 Palestinians from their homes and lands in Palestine in 1948. It was represented in the Zionist gangs taking over – with the support of Britain and by force of arms – the largest part of Palestine (Banat et al., 2018; Dayyeh et al., 2018).

**6.3 The Palestinian camp:** According to the UNRWA definition, it is a piece of land leased by the host governments from the local owners, and put at the disposal of UNRWA as an aid to the Palestinian

refugees in facilitating their basic needs. The camp residents cannot own this land, but they have the right to use it for housing (Banat, 2014; Dayyeh & Banat, 2019).

**6.4 The Right of Return:** It is the right claimed by the Palestinian refugees and their descendants to return to the places they used to inhabit, those places they, their parents and grandparents were forced to leave, and their right to restore the properties that were expropriated from them (Babadji, 1996:42; Banat, 2014; Banat et al., 2018).

**6.5 Attitude:** A coordination or organization of a person's feelings, knowledge and behavior, that is, his/her willingness to do certain actions, which is represented in degrees of acceptance and rejection of trend topics (Mahmoud, 1979:195; Ghrayeb et al., 2021).

## 7. Methods And Design

### 7.1 Approach

The social survey focuses on the present situation. It is also concerned with a detailed description of the studied units as well as an accurate representation, whether by using a comprehensive inventory of these units to study, or by generalizing samples representing the characteristics of the phenomena and human beings on whom the survey focuses (AbdAl-Muti, 1997:314). Accordingly, this study proceeds in its methodology through the descriptive approach that fits with the subject of the study.

### 7.2 Population And Sample

More than half a million Palestinian refugees live in the West Bank of the Jordan River, the remaining part of historic Palestine in 1948, constituting 20% of the total Palestinian refugees and are distributed

among 19 Palestinian camps (Banat, 2014). As for the Gaza Strip, it is considered the southern part of the Palestinian territories. It is a border strip where sand covers one-third of its area of 360 square kilometers, and extends along the beach and ranges in width from 5-12 kilometers (Al-Soubani, 1991:142).

The study population included the camps of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian camps outside occupied Palestine were excluded due to the difficulty of movement and the unstable political conditions. The sample of the study amounted to 2,940 male and female refugees, of which were 1,446 males and 1,494 females, which were chosen by the stratified random method, and thus the sample size constitutes 5% of the refugee population.

### **7.3 Instrumentation**

The researcher designed a questionnaire that includes a number of questions that cover some of the demographic indicators and their correlation to the political trends of the Palestinian refugee. In order to identify the validity and reliability of the tool, the researcher subjected it to the arbitration of specialists. The researcher also distributed the study tool to an exploratory group of the study population and extracted the correlation coefficient, which amounted to 75%, which indicates the stability of the research tool.

What distinguishes sociological research from other research is that it is not concerned with individual behavior or individual phenomena, but rather studies phenomena, relationships, trends and social actions with considerable significance and

spread. Since sociological research is a purposeful effort to learn more about the research population than what we learn in our normal social life, this research could have been done in more than one method. The researcher was directed to choose the appropriate curriculum or curricula based on two things: the first of which is the goals he seeks to achieve, and the second is the type of materials or information that he can obtain. The sociological report, which represents the conclusion of the research, has two distinct characteristics:

The first is accuracy. The social researcher must be disciplined and precise in his descriptions as much as possible. If he is able to do that, he will find a way to calculate and measure, and in order for the research and analysis to be accurate, they must have two basic characteristics: objectivity in observation and criticism of what others wrote. The second characteristic of the sociological report is that it is guided by sociological ideas. Accuracy alone does not make the description of a sociological nature. The sociological analyst should have a wealth of ideas that help him to form questions related to the subject of his study, and these ideas or concepts include a large part of what he learned as a student of sociology. It guides him in analysis and in research. The researcher would like to confirm that these facts were not lost on his mind during the preparation of this study, even if he seemed enthusiastic about certain positions or ideas with political dimensions, due to the horror of what he faced and what the Palestinian refugees are facing in Palestine and in the land of the diaspora (Banat, 2014; Banat et al., 2018).

In line with the knowledge base of sociologists in their identification of two types of levels of sociological analysis, namely macro-sociology and micro-sociology. The level of analysis adopted by the researcher here is macro-sociology with its demographic, social and political variables in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the correlation of these variables to shaping the political trends of the Palestinian refugee.

## 8. Findings

### 8.1 The demographic reality of the Palestinian refugee and its impact on shaping his political vision

#### 8.1.1 The relationship between the region of residence and the geographical location of the judiciary to which the occupied refugee village belongs.

The results showed that there are statistically significant differences at the 0.05 significance level between the region of residence and the geographical location of the district from which Palestinians were expelled in 1948 (Chi-square= 77.9, P-value= 0.001).

The results show that 22.5% of Palestinians living in the West Bank were displaced from northern Palestine, while 40.3% of them were displaced from central Palestine, and 37.1% were displaced from southern Palestine. In contrast, 10.2% of refugees staying in the Gaza Strip were displaced from northern Palestine, and 41.1% of those had left central Palestine. The vast majority of the population of the Gaza Strip (48.8%) trace their origins to southern Palestine.

This indicates that the movement of the forced displacement of Palestinian refugees in 1948 headed mostly towards the areas

close to the districts from which these refugees fled; And that the ecological rapprochement between the camp site and the original home of the Palestinian refugee increased his adherence to returning to his country, from which he was displaced, and his rejection of any forms or solutions that go beyond this right.

#### 8.1.2 Births are one of the most important forms of population movement in their impact on the growth of societies and the increase in the size of the population or its stability or determining its type.

Births are affected by many factors and variables, foremost among which are the transformations taking place in the economic and social structures (Samha, 2020: 25). There is no doubt that the Palestinian refugee family is one of the most transformative social organizations within the Palestinian social structure in terms of the number of births. This is indicated by the results whereby 34.2% of refugee families residing inside the camp have one to four children compared to 22.7% who support five to eight children.

Perhaps the classification of the extended family applies to the Palestinian family in general, because the size, value and criteria of the Palestinian family used to depend on the land they owned or worked on, and still does. The family's demand for more males being a labor force is related to the land and work in order to provide for the family's needs of food and security and to assure its social status (Ayoush, 1998: 97).

The researcher believes that the Palestinian refugee prefers to have many children in order to support him in meeting the daily needs of the family, and to overcome the bad

social and economic conditions that accompany the refugee's life in the camp. This is especially that the family has a low monthly income, which in turn made it live in a deteriorating economic situation resulting from the high unemployment rate as a consequence of the tight Israeli siege on the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

### **8.1.3 The relationship between the region of residence and the income of the individual.**

The study results showed that there are statistically significant differences at the 0.05 significance level between the region of residence and the per capita income of the individual (Chi-square= 22.4, P-value= 0.001). Findings indicate that the level of per capita income was generally low in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip for most of the Palestinian refugee sectors. The percentage of refugees whose income was less than 1,000 shekels (less than 200 US dollars) per month was 34.3% in the West Bank compared to 38.9% in the Gaza Strip. The results also showed that the percentage of refugees who have an income ranging between 1,001 and 2,000 shekels less than (250 US dollars) per month was 40.6% and 38.8% in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, respectively. In other words, the general percentage of low family income in the West Bank reached 74% in comparison to a slightly higher one (76%) in the Gaza Strip. This is a clear indication of the level of poverty the Palestinians suffer from under the yoke of the Zionist occupation, the military siege and the continuous closure imposed on the Palestinians.

Study outcomes also show that the percentage of high income in the West Bank

was considerably higher than in the Gaza Strip such that the percentage of household income ranged between 4,001 and 5000 shekels (900-1200 US dollars) reached 2.1% in the West Bank compared to a lower percentage in the Gaza Strip of 0.6%. This is due to the tight closure, the policy of demolition, and the sabotage of the Palestinian economic structure practiced by the Zionist occupation authorities in addition to the natural increase in the birth rate in a large way that cannot be contained in a narrow geographical area which is further offset by the scarcity of economic and natural resources. This proposition is consistent with the Malthusian Theory (1798) in the imbalance between the arithmetic progression of natural resources, and the exponential growth of the population.

### **8.1.4 The relationship between age and the refugee's visit to his country of origin.**

Despite the deteriorating economic conditions of the Palestinian refugee in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, his contact with his country from which he was expelled has not been interrupted, and the harshness of life did not let him forget about his homeland; he remains in contact with his hometown through the visits he makes to it. Study results showed that there were statistically significant differences at the 0.05 significance level between age and the refugee's visit to his country of origin (Chi-square= 33.8, P-value= 0.001).

Results indicated that 65.5% of the elderly refugees, aged 50-59 years, had visited their country of origin, and 60% of elderly refugees aged more than 60 years old had visited their hometown. It is also worthy to

note that the percentage of those aged between 30-39 years, and those aged between 40-49 years, who had visited their home country was 60.5% and 62.5%, respectively. This confirms the depth of the connection of the Palestinian individual and his longing to the land from which he was displaced, and that the place has a special status in the conscience and heart of the Palestinian refugee. Moreover, the repetition of visits to and from their country of origin increases the self-motivation represented in insisting on the Right of Return, and this was confirmed by the study of Farah (1976).

#### **8.1.5 The relationship between the age of the refugee and the achievement of his/her right of return.**

The results indicated that there were statistically significant differences at the 0.05 significance level between age and the refugee's vision towards achieving return (Chi-square= 38, P-value= 0.001). The elderly and those over 50 years of age were more optimistic about achieving return. 78.9% of refugees aged 50-59 years believed that return would be achieved, and the percentage rose to 85% among those who were over sixty years old. Perhaps this result stems from the fact that individuals in this age group were born in the villages from which they were expelled in 1948, and so their certainty of return has not wavered since they left their Palestinian villages and cities.

In the same context, it is noted that the Palestinian refugees who were born outside their villages of origin had no doubts about their return to their country from which they were displaced due to the Israeli occupation in 1948. The response rate among young

people aged 20-29 years who believed in their return was at 76.8%. This explains the nature of national connection between the Palestinian generations, which links the Palestinian to his land, and that the conflict will not end unless the return is achieved, and this was confirmed by the studies of Hazboun (1992) and BADIL (1998).

The results indicated the falseness of the claim made by the early porters of the Zionist movement, who claimed that grandparents and fathers die and that children forget. These statements also refuted the convictions that have dominated American political thinking since the early fifties, on top of which are the theses of Hubert Humphrey, the American senator who claimed in his report to the Committee on Foreign Relations that "The new generation, which makes up half of the Palestinian refugees, lacks any roots in Palestine" (Shadid, 1981: 67).

Through this, we conclude that the temporal continuity in the process of political upbringing has remained over the past six decades, and the changing circumstances have not been able to eradicate it. On the contrary, what we see of the extent of participation in the Palestinian struggle in the Al-Aqsa Intifada and other previous Palestinian uprisings is focused in this generation. Perhaps the best evidence to support this opinion is what we see of the large number of martyrs, wounded and detainees of this generation in the events of the Palestinian uprisings.

### **8.1.6 The relationship between the refugee's age and his vision regarding the impact of the Israeli terrorist operations on the displacement of the refugees in 1948.**

The refugees showed awareness of the exodus of their parents and grandparents from their country in 1948, as all categories of refugees in the study emphasized the responsibility of the Zionist gangs for the forced displacement that they carried out against the Palestinians. The results indicated that there were statistically significant differences at the 0.05 significance level between age and the refugee's vision of leaving their Palestinian villages due to the Israeli terrorist operations in 1948 (Chi-square= 11.5, P-value= 0.021). The results show that 82.9% of the elderly, aged more than 60 years old, have confirmed that their exodus from their villages was due to the Zionist terrorist operations in 1948, and they are thus considered eyewitnesses to what they saw while they were in their cities and villages in 1948. This refutes the Zionist allegations that the Palestinian refugees have left their Palestinian villages and cities of their own free will. What confirms the validity of the statement that the refugees were expelled as a result of terrorist operations is the statements of the researcher Abu Sitta, who monitored in his study the villages and cities that were directly and indirectly attacked by the Zionist gangs in 1948 (Abu Sitta, 1998, 1-55); And that these operations came as a culmination and implementation of what the first theorist of Zionist thought, Theodore Herzl, called for in his book "The Jewish State" (Herzl, n.d.: 12).

It is remarkable that young Palestinian refugees showed a great deal of awareness towards the terrorist practices that formed the phenomenon of Palestinian asylum such that 77.7% of young individuals between the ages of 20 and 29 years old asserted that immigration was due to the Zionist terrorist operations.

### **8.1.7 The refugee's vision of voluntary exit in 1948.**

Based on the previous results, the researcher affirms the falseness of the Zionist allegations which claimed that the refugees voluntarily left their homes in 1948, and this is confirmed by the results of the study. It is noted that there is almost unanimity among the Palestinian refugees regarding the matter of voluntary exit from their country of origin, whereby the vast majority of refugees (92.1%) categorically deny this exit and reject this argument.

### **8.1.8 The refugee's vision towards the impact of the Zionist terrorist operations on the forced displacement in 1948.**

The study data notes that 76.7% of the respondents admit that their immigration was forced, and that it was due to the Israeli terrorist operations carried out by Jewish gangs in 1948. This is confirmed by the study of Abu Sitta (1998) which showed that the number of Palestinian villages that were subjected to a direct military attack reached 269, and the number of villages the Zionist gangs directly supervised the expulsion of their residents reached 116 villages. The residents of 44 villages left as a result of the fall of neighboring villages into the hands of the Zionist gangs whereas those who left out of fear of an expected attack reached 33 villages (Abu Sitta, 1998:1-55).

## **8.2 The social reality of the Palestinian refugee and its implications for the Right of Return.**

Although there is a consensus among researchers in the social sciences that the camp is an emergency building unit for the Palestinian society, it expresses at the same time the tragedy that befell this community at the hands of the Zionist gangs in 1948. There is no doubt that the Palestinian camp as an emergency social system suffers from distorted social conditions due to the area on which this camp is located and due to the steady population growth. This is also accompanied by bad conditions at the health, educational and economic levels. While the social reality of the refugee has different connotations and indicators in formulating his attitudes towards the topic of the research, it is necessary to examine the levels of this reality, probe it, and link it with different variables through which one can come up with an analytical framework that explains the nature of the trend adopted by the refugee towards the Right of Return. This is what the following paragraphs will review.

After the Palestinian refugees acquired the vast lands whereby these lands were their only source of livelihood, and despite the aforementioned displacement process, this does not, however, negate that the Palestinian refugee has a legitimate right to claim the lands he owned prior to emigration.

### **8.2.1 The area of lands from which the refugees were displaced in 1948.**

It is clear from the results of the study that 57.4% of Palestinian refugees owned between 40 and more than 100 acres of land

in their villages and cities from which they were forcibly displaced in 1948. This is conclusive evidence that the Palestinian land before 1948 was inhabited with people and civilization, represented by the existence of agriculture as a main element and a source of livelihood for the Palestinian farmer, and this refutes the Zionist propaganda that this land was uninhabited. As a result of the terrorist operations carried out by the Zionist gangs in 1948, and the accompanying process of uprooting Palestinians from their land, the Palestinian refugee lost the lands he owned and began to live in a narrow geographical area on lands owned mostly by the UNRWA.

### **8.2.2 The area of the land on which the refugee's house is based in the camp.**

The study results indicate that about half (50.5%) of the total Palestinian refugees own land less than 120 square meters, and this is due to overcrowding in the camp in addition to the small size of the land area on which the camp is located.

### **8.2.3 The relationship between the region of residence and the area of land owned by the refugee in the camp.**

The results showed that there are statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level between the region of residence and the area of land owned by the refugee in the camp ( $r^2 = 52.8$ , statistical significance = 0.001). According to the findings, the Palestinian refugee owns a small area of land compared to what he owned before 1948. Prior to the forced displacement in 1948, the percentage of land owned by Palestinian refugees, whose share for each family ranged from 40 acres to more than 100 acres was 60.8% in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The total

percentages of land areas owned by the Palestinian refugee after the Nakba in the camp in which he resides in the West Bank - which are less than 120 square meters - amounted to 55.6%. While the total of these percentages in the Gaza Strip amounted to 47.8%. This displays the historical and human injustice suffered by Palestinian refugees as a result of the forced displacement practiced by the Zionist movement against them in 1948.

#### **8.2.4 The area of the building in which the refugee resides in the camp.**

The results showed that the majority of Palestinian refugees (60%) live in houses with an area of less than 120 square meters. This is due to the low economic level experienced by the Palestinian refugee in addition to his lack of ownership of a large area of land on which he could build a suitable building. This situation was prevalent in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with some differences between the two.

#### **8.2.5 The relationship between the region of residence and the area of residence in which the refugee resides in the camp.**

The study results indicated that there are statistically significant differences at the 0.05 significance level between the region of residence and the housing area in which the refugee lives in the camp (Chi-square=52.8, P-value=0.000). Most of the Palestinian refugees (66.8%) live in houses with an area of less than 120 square meters in the West Bank compared to 55.4% in the Gaza Strip. It is noteworthy that this space often accommodates more than one family where each family takes one room, thereby leading to vertical expansion inside the camp in order to accommodate the largest possible

number of family members and to get rid of overcrowding, even if it is relative.

Despite the narrowness of housing and the small size of the land on which this building is based, most of these houses are owned by UNRWA, and this is what puts the Palestinian refugee in an unstable situation and subjects him to anxiety and suspicion.

#### **8.2.6 Type of housing ownership in the camp.**

The results showed that 48.5% of Palestinian refugees are staying in homes owned by UNRWA. Some of the refugees have demolished the old houses that were built by the UNRWA during the establishment of the camps, and modern and fairly spacious houses were built in their place. This is to keep pace with the natural increase in the number of births within the Palestinian family in the camp. Given the steady increase in the number of Palestinian refugees in the camp, UNRWA, in cooperation with NGOs and institutions in Europe and America, has provided some services to improve the infrastructure inside the camp. These projects had a positive impact in reducing health issues that accumulated in the alleys of the camp.

#### **8.2.7 Availability of an association in the name of the refugee's country of origin.**

The study results indicate that 39.2% of refugees have an association bearing the name of their country or villages from which they were displaced in 1948. This indicates that Palestinian refugees are trying to communicate on a daily and continuous basis with their destroyed villages and cities, and they like to revive their national memory in these villages. Despite the refugees' displacement, forced dispersal and

exposure to all stressful and harsh conditions, there is another important indication of their connection to the land of their forefathers, and that is their retention of documents proving their ownership of the land after more than half a century of occupation by the Zionist movement.

### **8.2.8 The extent to which the refugee has documents proving ownership in his country of origin.**

It is inferred from the results of the study that the majority of Palestinian refugees still retain their identification papers that demonstrate their right to the lands from which they were displaced in 1948. The percentage of refugees who have documents proving their ownership in their destroyed villages in 1948 reached 58.5%. This indicates that the hope for return is still circulating in the minds of Palestinian refugees, especially that the degree of awareness of the need to possess documents in the forties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was not high. Many were content with a paper written by the village mayor or a simple-minded writer in cases of selling or buying land, and this was confirmed by previous studies. As for the hope of return, the study findings indicated that Palestinian refugees were not optimistic of a return soon because that return requires great time and effort.

### **8.2.9 The time frame that the refugee sees in achieving return.**

Results showed that most Palestinian refugees (67.2%) believe that their return will not be achieved in the short term. Perhaps the refugees' familiarity with the surrounding political conditions, whether at the local, regional or international levels, has

reflected itself on the refugees' answers in this dimension of the study.

## **9. Conclusion And Recommendations**

By examining the entirety of the study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Palestinian refugees believe that the return will not be achieved in the short term. The Palestinian refugees who were surveyed expressed their belief that the return will not be achieved within three years, five years or even fifteen years, and half of them stated that they have no hope of returning during their lifetime.

2. Palestinian refugees are in constant contact with their lost spatial location. They visit their villages and renew their loyalty to the villages and cities from which they were expelled. Perhaps their adherence to their stolen land made them keep documents proving their ownership. This is parallel with the results of the Farah study in 1976 conducted in Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar whereby it was concluded that the connection with Palestine permeates the lives of the Palestinians, and despite the fact that the geographical area is separated from Palestine, it does not affect this connection (Farah, 1976:101-102).

3. The study results showed that there is a great awareness reflected by Palestinian refugees about how their grandparents and their fathers left their villages in 1948. They are well-aware that their asylum was forced because of the terrorist operations carried out by the Zionist gangs in 1948 against their families and villages. These gangs tried to obliterate the features of Palestinian villages and cities by destroying them completely and establishing Zionist settlements on them and giving them

Hebrew names. In light of the findings of this study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Preserving Palestinian camps and preventing their transformation into neighborhoods overlapping with cities.
2. The Right of Return must be transformed from a level of a slogan to an action plan.
3. Reviving the Palestinian memory with the historical right of the Palestinian refugee.
4. Considering the Palestinian refugee issue as a political issue in the first place. This does not, however, mean ignoring the life requirements of refugees in the camps.

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