

Palestinian Refugees in Arab Countries and Their Impacts¹

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Abstract: *Apart from West Bank and Gaza Strip, it is the Arab countries that most Palestinian refugees seek shelter in. These Palestinian refugees not only live a hard life, but also are put into an awkward situation. The denial of Palestinian refugees' right of return from the Israeli government, the economic weakness of Palestine and interest consideration of Arab countries contributed to the suspense of the solution to the Palestinian refugee problem. The presence and continuation of the problem have great impacts on the nation and state-building of Palestine and those Arab countries sheltering the Palestinian refugees. The final solution depends on the support from Arab countries.*

Key Words: *Arab Countries; Nation and State-Building; Palestinian Refugees*

The Palestinian refugee problem is one of the crucial ones in the Palestine-Israeli final-status negotiation. It is mainly the result of two wars between Arab countries and Israel in the years of 1948 and 1967. The fiasco of Arab countries in those two wars led to the occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel and the flight of many Palestinians from their homes. Apart from West Bank and Gaza Strip, it is the Arab countries in which most Palestinian refugees seek shelter. Therefore, how related countries deal with the return of Palestinian refugees has become the crux of Palestinian refugee problem. This paper deals with this issue.

I. The Basic Living Conditions of Palestinian Refugees in Arab Countries

A. Refugee statistics and distribution

The number of Palestinian refugees varies depending on the source. For 1948 refugees, for example, the Israeli government suggested a number as low as 500,000 as opposed to 1-1.2 million by their Arab counterparts. A report by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the UK in February, 1949 estimated the number to be 810,000 while the UN cited 726,000 people.³ For the Palestinian refugees caused by the Six-Day War in 1967, a report released in 1968 by The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) estimated that the number will be more than 500,000,

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³ Gang Yin, *Arab-Israeli Conflict: Problems and Way Out*(Beijing: International Cultural Press, 2002), pp. 309-310.

Israel suggested a number of 313,000, while the Arab countries cited 400,000 people.⁴ Apart from West Bank and Gaza Strip, it is especially Arab countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria in which most Palestinian refugees seek shelter. According to a report by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the UK, the number of Palestinian refugees who fled to those countries during and after the 1948 war was 280,000 in total. According to the statistics of the UN, the numbers of Palestinian refugees by country were as follows: Lebanon 100,000 refugees, Syria 750,000 refugees, Transjordan 700,000 refugees, Egypt 7,000 refugees, Iraq 4,000 refugees.⁵ Until 1964, the total number of Palestinian refugees was 1,160,000 and their distributions in Arab countries were: Jordan 6,236,000 refugees, Syria 116,778 refugees, Lebanon 137,884 refugees, Iraq 10,202 refugees, Saudi Arabia 12,000 refugees.⁶

Generations after generations, the number of Palestinian refugees is increasing all the time and the number varies according to different source. According to the 1990-1991 year report by UNRWA, until 30th June, 1991, the total number of Palestinian refugees who had registered with UNRWA was almost 2520,000, among which Jordan 960,212 refugees, Lebanon 310,585 refugees, Syria 289,923 refugees.⁷ Till the end of June, 2000, this number has reached as high as more than 3,700,000 refugees, among which Jordan 1,570,000 refugees, Lebanon 376,000 refugees, Syria 380,000 refugees.⁸ The statistics from the Palestinian side shows a larger scale. According to the statistics of the Department of Refugees Affairs of PLO, until 1998, the total number of Palestinian refugees was 5,120,000, among which Jordan 1766,000 refugees (34.5%), Lebanon 382,600 refugees (7.5%), Syria 432,000 refugees (8.4%), Saudi Arabia 275,000 refugees (5.4%), other Gulf countries 140,000 refugees (2.7%), Iraq and Libya 73,000 (1.4%), other Arab countries 5,544 (0.1%).⁹ And according to a survey of Faso Institution of Applied International Studies, Norway, till the middle of 2002, there has been totally 3,335,000 Palestinian refugees in West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, among which Jordan 1,484,000 refugees, Lebanon 198,000 refugees, and Syria 296,000 refugees. There has been 1,563,000, 206,000, 309,000 Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria respectively until 2005.¹⁰

B. Living conditions

Palestinian refugees mainly live in more than 50 refugee camps (some of them live outside the camp). According to Faso survey, until 2005, there have been

⁴ Gang Yin, *Arab-Israeli Conflict: Problems and Way Out*, p. 311.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

⁶ Huai Zhi, "Palestinian Arab Refugee Problem," *World Affairs*, No.13, 1964.

⁷ Guoqing Yu, "Origin and Development of Palestinian Refugee Problem," *West Asia and Africa*, No.6, 1993.

⁸ Gang Yin, *Arab-Israeli Conflict: Problems and Way Out*, p. 312.

⁹ Rex Brynen and Roula El - Rifai, *Palestinian Refugees: Challenge of Repatriation and Development* (London: I. B. Tauris and Co. Ltd. and the International Development Research Center, 2007), p. 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

110,000 Palestinian refugees living in the 12 refugee camps of Lebanon, and 166,000 living in the 10 refugee camps of Syria.¹¹

Refugee camps are governed by UNRWA, and they also receive services from other NGOs. UNRWA was established on the Fourth United Nations General Assembly under resolution 302 (IV) of 9 December 1949. The funds of this organ mainly come from the donation of governments, related international organizations and individual benevolent contribution.¹² Arab countries are one of the donors to this organ. According to the 1975-1976 report of UNRWA: the donations of Arab countries to this organ during 1950-1974 were as follows: Egypt: 5,484,000 dollars, Saudi Arabia: 5,393,000 dollars, Jordan: 3,396,000 dollars, Kuwait: 3,383,000 dollars, Lydia: 2,614,000 dollars, Syria: 2,186,000 dollars, Lebanon: 1133,500 dollars, Iraq: 975,300 dollars.¹³ Generally speaking, the donations of Arab countries are not a large scale, although in the year 1999, Kuwait donated 2,637,205 dollars while Saudi Arabia donated 5800,000 dollars to this organ.¹⁴ In 2007, of the 40,000,000 dollars budget of UNRWA, the proportion of Arab countries' contribution was only 3%-4%,¹⁵ that's why the Commissioner-General Karen Koning AbuZayd called on Arab countries to contribute more and keep their promise to increase their proportion of contribution to 7.8%.

The lands for refugee camps are provided by the host countries, and the responsibility for the provision of infrastructure services such as sewage disposal, water and electricity technically lie with the host government too. The type of housing initially set up for refugee households in the camps to replace tents was "shelters" or small single detached dwellings. Those who moved into the camps subsequent to this have mostly built their own shelters or purchased them. UNRWA does not own the original camp housing but refugees are free to use the housing so long as UNRWA is given use of the land upon which the houses are built. UNRWA's main role in shelter maintenance is the reconstruction of shelters damaged during natural or man-made disasters, and the rehabilitation and maintenance of the shelters of families that are registered as special hardship cases. Housing in Refugee camps are generally unplanned, and have high camp density and inadequate infrastructure. Despite infrastructure problems commonly cited as complicating life in refugee camps, thanks to the effort of UNRWA and other providers, infrastructure facilities are generally better among camp refugees than in many Arab countries. Overall, infrastructure is quite good in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In Syria, the Yarmouk refugee camp has good infrastructure services

¹¹ Ibid., p. 32.

¹² Gang Yin, *Arab-Israeli Conflict: Problems and Way Out*, pp. 313-314.

¹³ Guoqing Yu, "Origin and Development of Palestinian Refugee Problem", *West Asia and Africa*, No.6, 1993.

¹⁴ Gang Yin, *Arab-Israeli Conflict: Problems and Way Out*, p. 314

¹⁵ "UN Calls on Arab Countries to Increase Their Donations to Palestinian Refugees", http://www.tynews.com.cn/index/2007-07/16/content_3305584.

while other camps fare badly. Camp infrastructure in Jordan is even worse while camps in Lebanon generally have poor infrastructure. More than 60% of the refugees in these two countries have no access to electricity and toilet facilities.¹⁶

Palestinian refugees are living in poverty. Using a simple poverty index, poverty ranges from 23% of refugees earning less than two US dollars per person per day in Syrian camps to 35% in the camps in Lebanon. Extreme poverty (those earning less than one US dollar per person and day) ranges from 5% in the Syrian case to 15% in the Lebanese.¹⁷ A lot of Palestinian refugees can only make a living with the subsidies provided by UNRWA or other humanitarian organizations.¹⁸ In Lebanon, among the Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA, almost 60% of them are living below poverty line.¹⁹

The status and living conditions of Palestinian refugees in different Arab countries vary a lot from one another. Jordan is the only Arab country that offers citizenship to Palestinian refugees (but some Palestinians don't want to become citizens of Jordan), where Palestinian refugees can enjoy the political and economic rights of citizens of Jordan. In Lebanon, Palestinians are regarded as foreigners (only a small part of Palestinians become the citizens of Lebanon, who are mainly Shiites), few of them have passports and their freedom of traveling is restricted. Lebanese government has made a lot of restrictions on the employment and welfare to Palestinians. In fact, Palestinians are forbidden to work in more than 70 qualified professions.²⁰ Laws of Lebanon prohibited Palestinian refugees from owning real estates or leaving their real estates (for the ones who have already possessed real estates) to their relatives. Fisk once described as follows: "In Lebanon, heartbroken Palestinian widows will soon be driven out of their homes. The law delineates that they have to sell their houses to the Lebanese. This is a new wave of driving Palestinians out of their homes. In fact, this is also crucial social squeeze, just to make sure every Palestinian will move directly towards Beirut airport as soon as they get the chance to live in exile in another country".²¹ In Egypt and Iraq, Palestinian refugees face little restrictions in the field like employment, they are generally regarded as the citizens of the country although these two countries don't offer citizenship to them. In Syria, the policies for Palestinian refugees are changing from the beginning: In 1949, Syria strongman Husni al-Za'im expressed a willingness to accept as many as 300,000 Palestinians

¹⁶ Rex Brynen and Roula El - Rifai, *Palestinian Refugees: Challenge of Repatriation and Development*, p. 36.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Gaim Kibreab, translated by Zhimei Zhang, "Displacement, Host Governments' Policies, and Constraints on the Construction of Sustainable Livelihoods," *International Social Science Magazine (Chinese Edition)*, No.1, 2004.

²⁰ Simon Haddad, "The origins of Popular Opposition to Palestinian Resettlement in Lebanon," *International Migration Review*, Summer 2004, Vol.38, No.2, p. 479.

²¹ Gaim Kibreab, "Displacement, Host Governments' Policies, and Constraints on the Construction of Sustainable Livelihoods."

in exchange for Western financial backing for his ambitious economic development plans.²² The Palestine Arab Refugees Institution (PARI) was established On January 25, 1949 to regulate and administer the refugee presence. Headquartered in Damascus with additional branches in Homs, Hama, Aleppo, Latakia, Dar'a, and Qunaytra, PARI was responsible for establishing the refugee camps by requisitioning land and providing them with general facilities. In fact, Palestinians were treated equally with Syrians in all areas except that of citizenship and voting rights while preserving their original nationality. Perhaps more significantly, Syria is the only Arab state that has drafted noncitizen Palestinians into its army.²³ But for the Palestinian refugees who came to Syria after Israel's invasion into Lebanon, there were restrictions on their rights of employment and education.²⁴

There used to be 34,000 Palestinian refugees in Iraq in 2003.²⁵ Where previously Palestinian refugees in Iraq had little trouble obtaining and maintaining their residency status, the Ministry of Interior ordered Palestinian refugees to obtain short-term residency permits, treating them as non-resident foreigners instead of as recognized refugees. The residency requirements are onerous, requiring Palestinian refugees to bring all members of their families to Ministry of Interior offices to renew the permits, which can take days or even weeks, and the new permits are only valid for one to two months. What are even worse, Palestinian refugees in Iraq became a target for violence, harassment, and eviction from their homes soon after the Iraqi government fell to U.S.-led forces in 2003. The February 22, 2006 bombing that destroyed one of Shi'ite's holiest shrines, al-'Askariyya mosque in Samarra, led to a wave of sectarian killings that continues to date. Alleged Shi'a militants attacked Palestinian housing projects in Baghdad and killed at least ten Palestinians, among them the two brothers of the former Palestinian attach'e in Baghdad, who were kidnapped from their father's home on February 23 and found dead at a morgue two days later, their bodies mutilated.²⁶ The killings and death threats put the Palestinian community in a "state of shock," according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and led Palestinian National Authority President Mahmud Abbas and the High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres to each call upon Iraqi President Jalal Talabani to intervene to stop the killings of Palestinians.²⁷ Fear continues to grip Palestinian communities in Baghdad, and thousands more Palestinians in Iraq are eager to leave the country. Palestinian refugees seeking to flee Iraq face far

²² Laurie Brand, "Palestinians in Syria: The Politics of Integration," *Middle East Journal*, Autumn 1988, Vol.42, No.4, p. 622.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 624.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 635.

²⁵ Human Rights Watch, "Nowhere to Flee: The Perilous Situation of Palestinian in Iraq," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Summer 2007, Vol.36, No.4, p. 187.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189.

greater obstacles than do Iraqi citizens, including other minority communities under threat. Neighboring countries like Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Syria refuse to admit them. Israel in general does not allow Palestinian refugees to return to Israel or the Occupied Palestinian Territories. And resettlement options in other countries have been largely unavailable to them.²⁸

In Gulf States, Palestinian refugees are important labor resources. But after the Gulf Crisis in 1990, Kuwaiti authorities' reprisals against the Palestinian community in Kuwait resulted in the emigration of some 300,000 Palestinians who were finally taken in by Jordan.²⁹ There are also some Palestinian refugees in Libya who lead a hard life there due to the worsening relations between Libya and Palestine. In September, 1995, Libya leader Muammar Qaddafi expelled 30,000 Palestinians in Libyan territory because of his dissatisfaction with the peace agreement signed by Yasser Arafat and Israel. Egypt, Israel and Lebanon all refuse or limit the entry to Palestinians. An official from UN said indignantly: "The tragedy is nobody wants them, they cannot even return to the Palestinian self-rule area."³⁰

In a word, Palestinian refugees in Arab countries lead a hard life. The situation in the countries like Jordan and Syria is relatively good, but in Lebanon and current Iraq, the situation is rather tough.

II. Different Standpoints towards Palestinian Refugee Problem

UN resolution 194(III) in February 1948 granted Palestinian refugees the right of return. But for many reasons, Palestinian refugees had never gone back to their motherland and they became a special group who had no nationality and citizenship.

A. The standpoint of Israel

In 1950, Israel expressed its willingness to accept certain amount of Palestinian refugees (no more than 100,000 in total) according to the plan of "family reunion", but soon the promise was abandoned. Palestinian refugee problem was one of the five topics being discussed on the third stage of Middle East peace talks (the regional multilateral talks) in Madrid since 1990. Palestinian refugee problem was regarded as one of the essential problems in the Palestinian-Israel final-status negotiation after the signature of Oslo Accords in 1993. But little progress was made in the negotiation of Palestinian refugee problem. The basic standpoint of Israel is that Israel denies taking the responsibility of Palestinian refugee problem and refusing to recognize the refugees' "right of return". Israel suggests that

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 188-189.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 188-189.

³⁰ John Battersby, "Palestinian Exodus from Libya Process Threat to Peace," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 15, 1995.

Palestinian refugees should stay in the countries they are living and will only accept a small amount of Palestinian refugees based on humanity.³¹ Israel argues that: "Palestinian refugees shouldn't be allowed to come to Israel; the only solution to the problem is the resettlement of Palestinian refugees within Arab countries involved in the Middle East economic development plan."³² At the same time, Israel refuses to compensate the economic losses of Palestinian refugees; on the contrary, Arab countries are required to compensate the economic losses of Israelis which are confiscated by Arab countries.

The fundamental reason for Israel to deny the refugees' right of return lies in that Israel wants to maintain its Jewish characteristics. Israeli Politician Shimon Peres claims in his book "New Middle East": "If we accept the right of return of the refugees, Jewish people will become minority in the county which may obliterate the national characteristics of Israel. Therefore, we are not accepting it and we will not accept it in the future".³³ The leader of Likud party Ariel Sharon pointed out: "If Palestinian refugees found themselves resettled in the refugee camps in Judea, Samaria and Gaza, they will feel uneasy and indignant... Palestinian refugee problem is caused by Palestinian themselves, but one tragedy should not be replaced by the other. If we want to continue living in this country, other solutions to the refugee problem must be found out."³⁴ Israeli refusal to allow Palestinians to return to their homes rests on American support. Apart from a brief attempt by President Truman to persuade Israel to accept a symbolic 100,000 returnees, the United States has consistently favored the settlement of the refugees in the host countries.³⁵ The United States and Israel are special strategic allies; therefore, without pressure from the United States, Israel will not make substantial concessions.

B. The standpoint of Palestine

The basic standpoint from Palestinian side is: It's Israel who should take main responsibility for the Palestinian refugees' problem and all the refugees have the right to return to their homes.³⁶ On August 14, 2008, Palestinian chief negotiations representative Erakat told reporters: The Palestinian refugee problem, like the issues such as Jerusalem, boundary, Jewish settlement, water resources, is the key issue in the Palestine-Israel negotiation, and a "red line" which is not allowed to cross. But Israel mentioned this issue for several times, the purpose behind it is misleading the global media, leaving a kind of impression to the outside world that Israel is pushing forwards the peace process in the Middle East, especially with

³¹ Gang Yin, *Arab-Israeli Conflict: Problems and Way Out*, pp. 319-320,322-323.

³² Huai Zhi, "Palestinian Arab Refugee Problem."

³³ Rex Brynen and Roula El - Rifai, *Palestinian Refugees: Challenge of Repatriation and Development*, pp. 45-46.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Rosemary Sayigh, "Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: Implantation, Transfer or Return?" *Middle East Journal*, March 2001, Vol.8, No.1, p. 96.

³⁶ Gang Yin, *Arab-Israeli Conflict: Problems and Way Out*, p. 323.

Palestine. In fact, Israeli reports on Palestinian refugees are totally wrong and misleading.³⁷ For many reasons, refugee problem actually is not the top priority for the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The PLO's readiness to "de-prioritize" the refugee issue is confirmed by the Beilin-Abu Mazin accords (October 1995). In this document, the Palestinian side "recognizes that the prerequisites of the new era of peace and coexistence, as well as the realities that have been created on the ground since 1948, have rendered the implementation of (the right of return) impracticable."³⁸ Palestinian scholars and officials have begun to discuss that right of return should be understood as returning to the national territory (West Bank and Gaza Strip) rather than the 1948 territory. Ziad Abu Zayyad suggests that: "people should notice the difference between the right of return on principle and the right of return in practice".³⁹

Palestine also shows great concern to the Palestinian refugees in the host Arab countries. Refugees' problem was put into the framework of final-status negotiation according to Oslo Accords in which a standing committee was established by Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Egypt. The standing committee would discuss the entry scheme of the people who were driven out of West Bank and Gaza Strip and necessary measures to prevent disruption and disorder which caused strong opposition of the Palestinian refugees in exile.⁴⁰ Palestinian refugees in Lebanon protested to express their anger. At that time, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon protested. In 1995, Muammar Qaddafi expelled Palestinian refugees when spokesman of Yasser Arafat condemned in Gaza City that: "Muammar Qaddafi expelled Palestinians who have nowhere to go so as to support the stand that Palestinians should have their own country, but it is unjust and immoral to harm people for political reasons."⁴¹ In order to improve the tough situation of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Yasser Arafat proposed a plan that helped settle down 360,000 Palestinian refugees from Lebanon in Israel and Palestinian self-rule area in opposition to a plan proposed by Israel which only allowed 20,000 refugees to return to Palestine on the summit meeting of US, Israel and Palestine on July, 2000.⁴² The Palestinian National Authority (PA) has repeatedly stated its willingness to accept those Palestinian refugees fleeing Iraq. Muhammad Abu Bakr, director-general of the Department of Refugee Affairs of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Jordan, said in April, 2006: "Our position concerning the Palestinian refugees in Iraq and elsewhere is that either we receive them inside Palestinian National Authority territories or the Palestinians fleeing Baghdad stay

³⁷ "Palestine stress that refugee problem is a red line which is not allowed to cross," http://news.ifeng.com/world/other/200808/0815_1396_724849.shtml.

³⁸ Rosemary Sayigh, "Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: Implantation, Transfer or Return?" p. 96.

³⁹ Rex Brynen and Roula El - Rifai, *Palestinian Refugees: Challenge of Repatriation and Development*, pp. 45-46.

⁴⁰ Gang Yin, *Arab-Israeli Conflict: Problems and Way Out*, p. 321.

⁴¹ John Battersby, "Palestinian Exodus from Libya Process Threat to Peace."

⁴² Gang Yin, *Arab-Israeli Conflict: Problems and Way Out*, p. 333.

near the border and return to Baghdad.”⁴³ But Israel refused to allow them come into Palestinian National Authority territories. During his first official visit to Syria, the newly-appointed Palestinian Authority foreign minister, Mahmoud Zahar, announced that he had received a commitment from the Syrian authorities to accept the Palestinians stranded at the Iraqi-Jordanian border.⁴⁴

C. The standpoint of Arab countries

Generally speaking, Arab countries support Palestinian people’s fight for the restoration of their legitimate national rights. In the international community, Arab countries are not only opposed to taking Palestinian problem as refugee problem but also opposed to any attempt to deny refugee problem.⁴⁵ Although Arab countries refuse to grant citizenship to Palestinian refugees (except Jordan), out of brotherhood and humanitarianism, refugees are usually temporarily settled. The PLO and the Arab League have rejected on principle and actively discouraged in practice local integration or third-country resettlement of Palestinian refugees. Their view is that local integration or resettlement would negate the right to return of the resettled refugees.⁴⁶ But policies towards Palestinian refugees vary in different Arab countries.

Jordan granted citizenship to the Palestinian refugees who came to Jordan after the 1948 and 1967 wars. As citizens of Jordan, Palestinians joined in the parliament, government and army of Jordan. A large number of Palestinian elites became a part of the ruling group of Jordan. A very important reason for Jordan to adopt this policy was that Jordan regarded Palestinians as “one family”. In fact, the royal family of Jordan had intended to establish a Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan with Palestine included (especially West Bank). But Jordan didn’t welcome entry to Palestinian refugees in other Arab countries after Jordan broke off legal and administrative relations with West Bank. For instance, Jordan refused entry to a group of 200 Iraqi Palestinians who arrived at the Iraqi-Jordanian border on March-May, 2006. In an interview with Human Rights Watch, the secretary-general of Jordan’s Ministry of Interior, Mukhaimar F. Abu Jamous, said that Jordan would not alter its policy of refusing entry to Iraqi Palestinians. He said that Jordan already had a massive Palestinian refugee burden and could not take on additional Palestinians. The official said that because Iraqi Palestinians had no passport, only a Palestinian travel document, there was concern that once Jordan accepted Iraqi Palestinians, they would be unable to leave Jordan again, unlike ordinary Iraqis. Abu Jamous of the Jordanian Ministry of Interior stressed that the Iraqi Palestinian issue should be resolved through regional burden sharing, but that even with

⁴³ Human Rights Watch, “Nowhere to Flee: The Perilous Situation of Palestinian in Iraq,” p. 191.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁴⁵ Gang Yin, *Arab-Israeli Conflict: Problems and Way Out*, p. 318

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch, “Nowhere to Flee: The Perilous Situation of Palestinian in Iraq,” p. 191.

international financial assistance Jordan would not allow the Iraqi Palestinians to enter its territory.⁴⁷

In Syria, Palestinian refugees are actually regarded as its own citizens although they are granted citizenship and suffrage. Asked in an interview on October 2000, Bashar al-Asad said, "Syria will never be a sword to stab the Palestinians in the back."⁴⁸ Some people say that Syria's policy towards the refugees in Lebanon will remain what it has always been: 1) that the refugee problem should be solved as a whole, not broken into bilateral fragments; 2) it must be based on the right of return; 3) Arafat alone cannot decide the fate of the refugees; the host countries, indeed all the Arab countries, must be involved in the final-status negotiation.⁴⁹ There are two reasons for Syria's concern on Palestinian refugee problem: one is the brotherhood between Syria and Palestine, the other is the consideration of exerting influence on Palestine and Palestinian-Israeli negotiation. In fact, Syria is very friendly towards Palestinian refugees, and shows great sympathy to the Palestinian refugees fleeing Iraq. Syria had previously allowed a group of nineteen Palestinians, stranded at the Iraqi-Syrian border from October 4 to November 21, 2005, to go to its al-Hol refugee camp (a UNHCR-run camp mostly holding Iraqis), after extensive negotiations between UNHCR and the Syrian authorities.⁵⁰ On May 9, 2006, the International Organization for Migration moved more than 250 Iraqi Palestinians stuck at the Iraqi-Jordanian border to Syria, and Syrian authorities transferred them to al-Hol refugee camp. They should then receive assistance from UNRWA, probably after being moved to an UNRWA-managed camp where movement is less restricted than at al-Hol camp. The Syrian authorities then allowed an additional group of thirty-seven Iraqi Palestinians who had fled directly from Baghdad to the Syrian border to cross the next day.⁵¹

Lebanon's attitude towards Palestinian refugees is: Lebanon is opposed to the permanent settlement and integration of Palestinians in the country and the right of return is the primary concern to negotiate with Israel. Lebanese former President Emile Lahoud's address to Beirut community leaders (November, 1999) emphasizes this point, "We cannot accept a settlement without ... the scared right of return of Palestinian refugees to their land."⁵² Later, Sunni Prime Minister Rafic al-Hariri explicitly stated, "Lebanon will never, ever integrate Palestinians. They will not receive civic or economic rights or even work permits."⁵³ Other examples of this common political position are a statement by Hizballah secretary-general

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Nowhere to Flee: The Perilous Situation of Palestinian in Iraq," p.192.

⁴⁸ Rosemary Sayigh: "Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: Implantation, Transfer or Return?" pp. 98-99.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Nowhere to Flee: The Perilous Situation of Palestinian in Iraq," p. 192.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.193.

⁵² Simon Haddad, "The origins of Popular Opposition to Palestinian Resettlement in Lebanon," *International Migration Review*, Summer 2004, Vol.38, No.2, p.471.

⁵³ Simon Haddad, "The origins of Popular Opposition to Palestinian Resettlement in Lebanon," p. 486.

Hassan Nasrallah: "First, regarding resettlement plans, we are with the rest of the Lebanese and with the rest of the Palestinians in rejecting the resettlement plans although the Palestinians are our dear brothers. The natural thing is for the Palestinians to return to their land in Palestine."⁵⁴

Lebanese's opposition to resettlement rests on three major alleged contentions. The first is the negation of the right to return. The second objection to resettlement is economic. Lebanon is a country that has high population density, few resources and little wealth. The third objection is historical and political. The national power of Lebanon rests on the power of different religious group. And the resettlement and integration of refugees will break the internal balance of power distribution which may cause instability and conflict.

III. The Impacts of Palestinian Refugees in Arab Countries

A. Impacts on the nation- and state- building

Nation-building: nation as a building process of cultural-political community and establishment of national identity. This process mainly involved in three sets of relationships: society and individuals, ethnic groups and nations, ethnic groups and ethnic groups. The characteristics of nation-state mainly include: territorial integrity, centralism, popular sovereignty, homogeneous national culture, united national market, etc. which mean the end of nation-state building. In the third world, nation-building goes hand in hand with state-building which constitutes the nation-state building process.⁵⁵ Palestinian nationalism came to being after three stages of Ottomanism, Arab nationalism, Palestinian nationalism,⁵⁶ followed by Palestinian nation-building process. While the establishment and operation of PLO and Palestinian National Authority, Palestine has begun the state-building process. But till now, the process hasn't finished yet. As a Chinese scholar Hui Yang points out, "Palestinian nation-building is a long and special process. Different from the building process of other countries, nation-building does not go hand in hand with state-building in Palestine, the formation of nation precede the formation of state".⁵⁷

The process of nation and state-building of Palestine faces challenges from different levels, which may be greatly impacted by a large number of Palestinian refugees in Arab countries.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 471.

⁵⁵ Minxing Huang, "On Nation-building of Middle East Countries in 20th century," *West Asia and Africa*, No.9, 2006.

⁵⁶ Hui Yang and Xueqing Ma, "Origin and Early Stage Practice of Palestinian Nationalism," *West Asia and Africa*, No.2, 2002.

⁵⁷ Hui Yang, "On Palestinian Nation-Building," *West Asia and Africa*, No.19, 2006.

Firstly, impact on national identification. According to "The Palestine National Charter" revised and passed in 1968: "The Palestinians are those Arab nationals who, until 1947, normally resided in Palestine regardless of whether they were evicted from it or stayed there. Anyone born, after that date, of a Palestinian father-whether in Palestine or outside it- is also a Palestinian."⁵⁸ Therefore, exiled Palestinians are one part of Palestinian nation. Palestine and Arab countries have been refusing to abandon the refugees' right of return, which is a conformation to their national identity. At the same time, Palestinian refugees in Arab countries don't want to become citizens of other countries for they don't want to abandon their national identity. In a poll in October 1999, 67% of those polled said they prefer to hold both Lebanese and Palestinian nationalities, 96% said they refuse to leave Lebanon for any country other than Palestine.⁵⁹ In Syria, according to a poll, 85% of Palestinian refugees there expect to go back to their motherland.⁶⁰ As we can see, Palestinian refugees in Arab countries share the same identity towards Palestinian nation. However, on one hand, because Palestinian refugees are unable to go back to their motherland and they are isolated from each other geographically and in life, the social status and living conditions of Palestinian refugees in different Arab countries vary a lot; on the other hand, several generations of Palestinian refugees have passed and With the passage of time, the descendents of Palestinian refugees may have a declining emotion towards their motherland, all these will produce unfavorable effects on the national identity of Palestinians.

Secondly, impacts on economic identification. Palestinian refugees in different countries mainly rely on international relief; they live a poor life in general. In Palestinian self-rule area, as a result of the PLO's incapability to develop national economy and the restriction from Israel, the economic activities of Palestine are much closely bound to Israel rather than Palestinian refugees in Arab countries. Therefore, Palestinians are far from building a united national economic market and an independent national economic system which are the economic foundation of nation and state-building of Palestine.

Thirdly, impacts on political identification. It's hard for Palestinian refugees to have political identification in host countries because of the political exclusion in Arab countries. As the sole legitimate representative of Palestinians, PLO is not recognized by all the Palestinians, for there is severe internal dissension in the organization. Therefore, Palestinians are lack of a highly and generally recognized political target. What's more, Palestinian refugees in Arab countries become the target of penetration and contention by different forces. For the interests of their

⁵⁸ Chongjing Yin, *The Middle East for 100 years*(Beijing: Xinhua Press, 1999), p. 56.

⁵⁹ Simon Haddad, "The origins of Popular Opposition to Palestinian Resettlement in Lebanon," p. 471.

⁶⁰ Gang Yin, *Arab-Israeli Conflict: Problems and Way Out*, p. 324.

own, Arab countries have established proxy organizations within Palestinian refugees. As a result, Palestinian refugees in Arab countries vary a lot in political identification which is a negative factor for the nation and state-building of Palestine.

What's more, Although Palestine claims that Palestinian refugees are a part of Palestinian nation, due to its limited strength and the restrictions from Israel, Palestinian refugees are excluded to the state-building process on Palestinian territory. Palestinian refugees didn't take part in the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks which determined the fate of Palestinian nation and the Palestinian election which constructed the framework of political power in Palestine. In the long run, all these will have negative effects on the political identification and state-building of Palestine.

B. Impacts on Arab countries

Palestinian refugees also have great impacts on the host Arab countries, especially on Jordan and Lebanon.

Jordan occupied the West Bank in the 1948 war and granted citizenship to Palestinian refugees afterwards. But with the development of Palestinian nationalism, the increasing numbers of Palestinian refugees threatened the rule of the Royal Family of Jordan which finally led to the conflict between Palestinians and Jordanians. Although Jordan broke off its administrative and legal relations with the West Bank in 1988, there were still some negative effects caused by Palestinian refugees: Firstly, Palestinian refugees have threatened the stability of Jordan. Palestinian refugees account for more than 50% of the Jordanian population and play an important role in Jordanian economy, especially in the private economic sector. The majority of the 500 largest companies that were listed in The 500 Top Jordanian Companies for 1995 were privately owned; classification of the private companies by their owners' ethnic origin shows that 60% of them were owned by Palestinians and that they accounted for 54% of the sales turnover and 63% of the value of the assets of all the companies surveyed. The Palestinian companies were especially dominant in banking, commerce and industry.⁶¹ The fact that the Palestinians constitute a demographic threat and also wield economic strength is a source of heightened inter-communal tensions.⁶² Secondly, Jordan faces heavy economic burden. Jordan is a poor and small country. A large number of expenditure on Palestinian refugees each year has become a heavy economic burden for Jordan. Thirdly, Jordan faces the pressure that Israel doesn't want to solve the problem of Palestinian refugees. Israel has been suggesting that Palestinian refugees'

⁶¹ Yithak Reiter, "The Palestinian-Transjordanian Rift: Economic Might and Political Power in Jordan," *The Middle East Journal*, Winter 2004, Vol. 58, No.1, p.76, p. 91.

⁶² Ibid.

problem should be solved in the host Arab countries and Jordan's way of treating Palestinian refugees provide an excuse for Israel to claim that Jordan is the motherland of Palestinians. If Jordan doesn't grant the right of return to the Palestinian refugees, Jordan's fear of the statement "Jordan is Palestine" continue to exist.⁶³ Therefore, Jordan calls for the parties concerned strictly implement the UN resolution concerned with the refugees' right of return and claims that any solution with Jordan excluded will bring negative effects and even threaten the security and stability of the region.⁶⁴ Leaders of Jordan said frequently that they would not prevent Palestinian refugees from leaving although the citizenship of Jordan is granted to them. Out of the consideration of Palestinian refugees, Jordan will not accept the Palestinian refugees from other countries either.

In Lebanon, the coming of Palestinian refugees has changed the demographic and religious structure of its original inhabitants. The Palestinians that resided in Lebanon at the time were composed of primarily Sunni Muslim (85%) and secondarily non-Maronite Christians (15%).⁶⁵ As a matter of fact, the presence of Palestinian refugees shifted the Muslim-Christian demographic balance in favor of the Muslims, which threatened the Maronite population, they said: "We have no desire to throw these people into the sea, or to annihilate them, all we ask of them is to start to look for another land to settle on, outside the Lebanese territory".⁶⁶ Araz also points out "Lebanese officials said more than one time, as long as they have the opportunity, they will expel all the Palestinian refugees who are mainly Sunni Muslims. At present, the number of Shiite Muslim is a little more than the number of Mennonite in Lebanon. Therefore, Lebanese government believes that the balance between different religious sects in the country will be destroyed once the refugees are integrated.⁶⁷ Shiite Muslims worry about the same thing. A Shiite villager stated, "We gave Palestinians everything and they gave us back insults, corpses, and lessons in corruption".⁶⁸

Lebanese authorities cannot dismiss the potential of friction with Palestinian groups who might attempt to use Lebanese territory to instigate attacks on Israel in view of the deteriorating Israeli-Palestinian relations. This would be reminiscent of events leading to the 1978 and 1982 Israeli incursions into Lebanon. Meanwhile, Palestinian refugees' involvements in the internal conflict of Lebanon make themselves very suspicious by all walks of life in Lebanon which contributes to Lebanon's opposition to the settlement of Palestinian refugees.

⁶³ Hillel Frisch, "Jordan and the Palestinian Authority : Did Better Fences Make Better Neighbors?" *The Middle East Journal*, Winter 2004, Vol. 58, No.1, p. 60.

⁶⁴ Gang Yin, *Arab-Israeli Conflict: Problems and Way Out*, p. 50.

⁶⁵ Simon Haddad, "The origins of Popular Opposition to Palestinian Resettlement in Lebanon," p. 475.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Gaim Kibreab, translated by zhimei Zhang, "Displacement, host governments' policies, and constraints on the construction of sustainable livelihoods," *International Social Science Magazine (Chinese Edition)*, No.1, 2004.

⁶⁸ Simon Haddad, "The origins of Popular Opposition to Palestinian Resettlement in Lebanon," p. 485.

After the signature of "Cairo Compromise", more and more Palestinian refugees came to Lebanon. They were permitted to possess weapons in the refugee camps. Lebanese President Lahoud regarded the camps as a "ticking time bomb"⁶⁹ and called for international peacekeeping troops to help disarm Palestinian camps.⁷⁰ Lebanese media regarded Palestinian refugee camps as "safety islands" for outlaws. After four Lebanese judges were assassinated in Sidon in June 1999, Lebanese famous reporter Jibrán Tuwayni pointed out in an article on newspaper: "we don't mean to accuse Palestinians' assassination in Sidon before the end of the survey, but the impression Palestinian refugee camps leave to the outside world is its possession of heavy weapons which naturally lead to its internal disorder and chaos". He called on Lebanese government to go into the refugee camps and invalidate the "safety islands" in order to abolish the 1969 Cairo Compromise which was an unjust landmark compromise.⁷¹ In other Arab countries, the number of Palestinian refugees is relatively small and they don't have big political impacts in these countries. But they often become victims of political struggle, for example, during the Gulf crisis, Kuwait expelled all the Palestinian refugees working in the country; in 1995, Muammar Qaddafi expelled all the Palestinian refugees in Libya; and after the Iraqi war, Palestinian refugees in Iraq fled away from Iraq.

Hence Palestinian refugee problem has become a tough one for Palestine, Israel and Arab countries. There are three ways to solve the problem in general: going back to its territory, settlement in the host countries, and resettlement in the third country. But Israel's denial of the right of return, Palestinian refugees' unwillingness to settle in the host countries and the refusal of the third country and other Arab countries to shelter them all contribute to the difficulty in solving the issue. What's more, in order to bargain with Israel in negotiations and seek the interests of their own countries, Arab countries have reserves in dealing with Palestinian refugee problem which increase the difficulty in solving the problem. The solution to the Palestinian refugee problem mainly depends on the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, but we cannot neglect the role of Arab countries. Arab countries should play an important role in the Palestinian refugee issue. Without the support and cooperation of Arab countries, it's impossible to solve it.

⁶⁹ Rosemary Sayigh, "Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: Implantation, Transfer or Return?" p.96.

⁷⁰ Simon Haddad, "The origins of Popular Opposition to Palestinian Resettlement in Lebanon," p. 479.

⁷¹ Jaber Suleiman, "The Current Political, Organizational, and Security Situation in the Palestinian Refugee Camps of Lebanon," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Autumn 1999, Vol.29, No.1, p. 72.