Palestinian Refugees in Exile:
A Case Study of Palestinian Refugees in Ein El Hilweh Camp, Lebanon

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Abstract
The aim of the study is to examine the current Palestinian refugees’ situation in the biggest refugee camp in Lebanon. The research questions of this thesis are: How are Palestinians integrating into Lebanese society? What are the experiences of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon? How do Palestinian refugees identify themselves? Through the interviewees’ perceptions of their situations, this study provides their viewpoints regarding the position of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. This thesis utilises qualitative interviews to collect data and analyse the interviews of five participants who are third- and fourth-generation Palestinian refugees. The Palestinian refugees’ situation is studied by applying the theories of social integration, structural discrimination, and social identity. Through the analysis of the five interviews, it was revealed that three main factors dominate the Palestinian refugees’ situation in Lebanon: their integration and how difficult it might be to integrate, their experiences that are presented by the restrictions Palestinian refugees face, and their identity, how they identify themselves.

Keywords: PRL, Lebanon, integration, discrimination, identity.
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1. Introduction

Last year, I visited Jordan. During my stay, I met and conversed with many Palestinian refugees, developing a desire to know about their situation. The more I read about Palestinian refugees in general and their situation in Jordan specifically, the more difficult I found it to suppress my interest pertaining to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (PRLs). They were mentioned in every document and piece of literature I read. Therefore, I decided to examine PRLs in greater detail.

In 1948, during the Nakba—also known as the Great Catastrophe, referring to the significant ethnic cleansing of Palestinians—Palestinians were forced to flee their homes, villages and cities and settle in neighbouring countries, such as Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. When they were forcibly moved, they were not sure how long it would be before they could return to Palestine, but they thought that they would return before they felt like they were living away from home. When the Palestinians became refugees, they did not know what it would cost them or what they would gain. This is the situation of all Palestinian refugees, but the experience of PRLs, especially those living in the camps, became a special case. The camps in Lebanon are well known as exhibiting the ‘worst living conditions’ (Ibrahim, 2008) compared with other Palestinian refugee camps regionally. For many years, it has been reported that Arab governments—especially the Lebanese government—mistreat Palestinian refugees (Fayad, 2018).

The Palestinian refugees’ situation is of interest because they have been living with an unclear legal position in a foreign country for more than 70 years. It is especially significant that they live in a multi-sectarian country (in practice, there is a quota system in Lebanon attached to certain positions, connected to the multiple religious groups in Lebanon) where their rights are unclear. In this thesis, the following questions are asked: How does Lebanese society react to Palestinians? What is society’s role outside of the Lebanese government, institutions and politicians? Are Palestinian refugees living in limbo? Is it true that Palestinians live day by day? This thesis contributes to the field of IMER by investigating a subject that is not well researched. The focus is elucidating the Palestinian refugees’ thoughts concerning their situations and positions in Lebanon, especially in terms of Palestinian refugees who were born and continue to live in the camps. I have chosen to investigate two generations’ points of view in Ein-el Hilweh camp about their experiences because the only
information I was able to discover concerning the camp and its situation involved the ceasefire and conflicts in the camp that began in August 2014 (Civil Society Knowledge Centre, 2017).

1.1 Aims and Research Questions

This study investigates the situation of Palestinian refugees, a refugee group that has been in Lebanon for more than seven decades, at present. Qualitative data were gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted with five Palestinian refugees who were born and currently lived in the biggest Palestinian camp in Lebanon, Ein El Hilweh. Ein El Hilweh camp was established in 1948 by the International Committee of the Red Cross near the city of Sidon for Palestinians who had been displaced from north Palestine (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East [UNRWA], n.d.). PRLs who reside in the camp mainly work in construction sites, as cleaners or in embroidery workshops throughout Lebanese society (UNRWA, n.d.). The thesis focusses on their experiences of being PRLs and living in the camp.

The research questions of this study are as follows:

• How are Palestinians integrated into Lebanese society?\(^1\)

• What are the experiences of PRLs?

• How do Palestinian refugees identify themselves?

1.2 Thesis Outline

The thesis structure is as follows: The introductory chapter presents the problem, aims and research questions. Chapter 2 relates the background and briefly presents the history of PRLs, as well as the series of events that affected them. Chapter 3 examines the previous literature regarding Palestinian refugees’ impasse in Lebanon, while Chapter 4 presents and discusses the theoretical framework of social integration, structural discrimination and social identity. Chapter 5 supplies a description of the research method utilised, collected data and the role of the researcher; Chapter 6 presents and analyses the results. Finally, Chapter 7 delivers the conclusion, summarises the thesis and findings and provides suggestions for future research.

\(^1\) The question aims to find out the interviewees perceptions of integration, not PRLs integration in general.
2. Background

PRLs are divided into three groups: First, there are an estimated 450,000 registered Palestinian refugees according to UNRWA (2014). In 1949, the United Nations (UN) created UNRWA for Palestinian refugees (Bocco, 2009). Since its establishment, UNRWA has become the leading agency for providing necessary services in the host countries in which Palestinian refugees reside until a solution to their problem is found (Bocco, 2009); these services are education, health, emergency aid, relief and social services (Ibrahim, 2008; UNRWA, 2014). The second group of PRLs comprises non-registered Palestinians. Approximately 35,000 Palestinian refugees are not registered with UNRWA, but instead, they are registered with the Directorate of Political Affairs and Refugees (DPAR) in Lebanon. These Palestinians arrived in Lebanon after 1948. As of 2004, nonregistered refugees began receiving a small amount of assistance from UNRWA (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2016, p. 10). Finally, an estimated 5000 refugees do not possess identification (non-ID Palestinians; UNHCR, 2016, p. 10); they have no legal rights or status, and they are not recognised or registered by UNRWA or the DPAR. This study focusses on the first group of Palestinians, who are registered with UNRWA and live in the camp.

The Palestinian refugees in general are excluded from UNHCR conventions and protocols of international legal and physical protection for refugees. (The Convention entered into force in 1954 and the Protocol entered into force in 1967). That is because of the reason that any refugee who is registered and receive support from other UN agency, do not receive protection from UNHCR (Akram, 2015). In a result it means that the PRLs are not under the UNHCR refugee protection as they are registered with UNRWA, who provides the PRLs with their services. Therefore, Palestinian refugees can only receive protection from their host countries, which in this case, means that Lebanon should provide protection policies. However, since Lebanon is a non-signatory state to the UNHCR convention and protocol, no legislation or policy practices address the refugees’ needs (UNHCR, 2015). Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are legally categorised as ‘foreigners who do not carry documentation from their countries of origin’ (UNHCR, 2016, p. 4) by the Lebanese government.

Starting in 1948, PRLs were dispersed across 12 camps where UNRWA operated. This situation began to change in the 1970s, with the rise of the Palestine Liberation Organization
The PLO was founded in 1964 due to the growing salience of the Palestine question in inter-Arab politics, as well as the increasing friction between the Arab states and Israel over several projects and other issues (Rubenberg, 1983). After transferring the PLO leadership from Jordan to Lebanon, Palestinians enjoyed rights and access to facilities in Lebanon. The feeling of Palestinian pride was stronger than ever before because the PLO’s presence in Lebanon meant that new health clinics, nurseries, vocational training centre and other amenities were being established (Hanafi and Long, 2010; Rubenberg, 1983). The PLO also focussed on employing Palestinian refugees: Two-thirds of PRLs were employed in Lebanese society (Hanafi and Long, 2010, p. 138). Furthermore, the PLO worked to promote the national and political identity among displaced Palestinians, who had seen themselves only as refugees until that time. While the Lebanese government had access to the camps, the new agreement between the PLO and Lebanese government meant that the government no longer had access within the camps (Hanafi and Long, 2010).

The Lebanese government later became dissatisfied with the PLO’s presence because the PLO was heavily armed. This led to high tensions in Lebanese society, especially between Lebanese Sunni Muslims and Christians. At that time, the Lebanese Sunni Muslims supported the PRLs because most PRLs are Sunni Muslims. The Lebanese Christians were afraid that if the PRLs had more power and influence, then the result would be an increase in the Sunni Muslims’ societal power in Lebanon. The PLO vacated Lebanon in 1982 for many reasons, but primarily because of the Lebanese civil war, which spanned from 1975 until 1990. The PRLs were blamed for the war, although many PRLs were killed during the conflict (Hanafi and Long, 2010).

In 1988, Palestine declared its independence, and the 1993 Oslo Accords provided for a Palestinian authority but not a Palestinian state. Despite these factors, PRLs’ hardships continued to increase (Fanack, 2017). Although the Palestinian refugees’ issues were included in the Oslo Accords, until now, nothing discussed in the Accords has been executed. Moreover, when the PLO declared independence, the Palestinian refugees’ right of return to Palestine was not included in the declaration (Fanack, 2017).

PRLs’ rights are restricted in different ways. While Palestinian refugees in Syria enjoy the freedom of access to, for example, the same educational and employment opportunities as those offered to Syrian citizens (Shiblak, 1996, p. 43), Lebanon offers poor access to fundamental civil rights. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are known to be ‘marginalised and mistreated’ compared with Palestinian refugees in other host countries (Baroud, 2019). There are many restrictions that PRLs face, but the following are relevant to this study: limitations on employment, access to government services, property ownership and full residency rights (Shiblak, 1996, pp. 42–45).
3. Literature Review

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue in this study, an overview of previous research concerning PRLs is essential. For decades, Palestinian refugees’ issues, especially those of PRLs, have been well studied and researched. Studies have examined the camps in Lebanon, PRLs’ rights and local practices that facilitate or prevent the provision of aid and fundamental rights to PRLs.

The importance of employment difficulties for PRLs is increasing, especially in relation to the regulations that forbid PRLs from engaging in certain professions (Haddad, 2004; Meier, 2010; Sayigh, 1995). Access to education is another issue. Although PRLs have UNRWA schools they can attend, only a minority of PRLs can pursue higher education or even complete high school, especially after the withdrawal of the PLO and termination of the UNRWA scholarship in 1982 (Ramadan and Fregonese, 2017; Sayigh, 1995; Sayigh, 2015). Another restriction that scholars highlight is the Lebanese law prohibiting PRLs from owning property outside the camps (Haddad, 2004; Meier, 2010; Sayigh, 2015).

Scholars have discussed the effects of the PLO’s entrance into and withdrawal from Lebanon, the Lebanese civil war, the Oslo Accords, and the Taif Agreement on Palestinian refugees. They have stated that these factors remind them that they are displaced people and there is no ultimate solution to their settlement in Lebanon (Haddad, 2004; Meier, 2010; Sayigh, 1995; Sayigh, 2015). The Taif Agreement ended the civil war in Lebanon and was approved by the Lebanese parliament in 1989 (Taif Agreement, n.d.). In the next paragraphs, I provide a more detailed discussion regarding the accounts by Simon Haddad (2003) and Diana Allan (2013), which are in line with the interests of this thesis.

Haddad’s (2003) study, ‘The Palestinian Impasse in Lebanon—The Politics of Refugee Integration’, discussed the issue of Palestinian refugees’ integration and discrimination against them in Lebanon. The author offered original data concerning Palestinian and Lebanese perceptions of one another related to their situation and status. Haddad’s (2003) analysis was based on questionnaires that he distributed to PRLs and Lebanese citizens. Among the data Haddad gathered, the responses were divided between the idea of permanent settlement of PRLs and the obstacles that PRLs have had to face. Haddad uncovered the most widespread opinions of Lebanese people regarding the government and its actions concerning the presence of PRLs, which previous studies had not investigated.
From the results of the completed questionnaires, Haddad examined the main reasons behind the discrimination PRLs face and the hindrances to integration. He concluded that Palestinian refugees in the host countries were ‘accommodated . . . rather than integrated’ (Haddad, 2003, p. 40), although some host countries, such as Jordan, provided many Palestinian refugees with citizenship when they first arrived, while others, such as Syria, provided citizenship only to certain refugees. Most Palestinian refugees enjoy full legal status as citizens in their host countries; however, they do suffer discrimination (Haddad, 2003, pp. 40–44). Haddad mentioned and compared the Palestinian refugees in other countries to highlight the PRLs situation. Specifically, PRLs face discrimination in terms of employment and ownership, in addition to tight restrictions and ill treatment; they are constrained from working in a wide variety of fields, forced to live in run-down camps and banned from owning property (Haddad, 2003, pp. 40–44).

In the study ‘Refugees of the Revolution: Experiences of Palestinian Exile’, Allan (2013) investigated Palestinian refugees’ experiences in Lebanon since their arrival, as well as the events and obstacles they have had to endure. Allan (2013) examined how the PRL identify themselves and the number of events they have witnessed. She highlights one of the prominent Palestinian camps—Shatila refugee camp—where the Sabra and Shatila massacre occurred on 16–18 September 1982 (Allan, 2013). The massacre was perpetrated by the Phalange party and the predominantly Christian Lebanese right wing, which were ordered by their allies, the Israeli Defence Forces, to clear all the PLO fighters from the camp. Most of the victims were Palestinians, while some were Shiite Lebanese (Al Shaikh, 1984).

Through interviews with PRLs in the Shatila refugee camp, Allan (2013) emphasised the political and cultural dimensions of PRLs’ struggles, as well as the roles of the Lebanese government, PLO and nongovernmental organisations. She presented how the shaping of the identity of PRLs changed with the development of events, situations and difficulties in Lebanon. The identity was limited with Shatila’s institutions, political economy; ‘with neighbourly networks and rituals; and with the micropolitics of camp life’ (Allan, 2013, p. 215). The identity of PRLs was affected when they were initially displaced to Lebanon; the PLO’s arrival in Lebanon was another major shift for the identity of PRLs in terms of the political and cultural dimensions; the PRLs moved from being forgotten second-class residents to first-class residents (Allan, 2013).
Allan (2013, p. 13) and Haddad (2003, p. 41) agreed that the refusal to naturalise PRLs was not only due to the fear of their becoming permanent residents in Lebanon but also sectarianism. As previously mentioned, Lebanon is multi-sectarian, and the main concern for the Lebanese government is that most PRLs are Sunni Muslims. During the 1990s, the Lebanese government also granted residency to Palestinian refugees who were Shiite, Sunni and Christians (Haddad, 2003, p. 41).

Haddad (2003, pp. 29–37) and Allan (2013, pp. 102–128) discussed the series of challenges and events that Palestinian refugees encountered from the Nakba until the time their studies were published. The creation of the PLO and their arrival in Lebanon offered hope and power to PRLs in the camps. However, the Lebanese civil war, withdrawal of the PLO from the camps in Lebanon and Israeli invasion of Beirut (the Lebanese capital) led the PRLs into greater dilemmas (Allan, 2013, pp. 102–128; Haddad, 2003, pp. 29–37). The PRLs felt betrayed after the Oslo Accords agreement of 1993, as their right to return to Palestine was not discussed; this led to harsher treatment of Palestinian refugees, who were left out of the equation of the PLO (Allan, 2013, pp. 12, 39, 49).

As mentioned previously, many studies have concerned Palestinian refugees, but it is difficult to find a recent study focussing on the Palestinian refugees’ viewpoint concerning integration, their identity and their experiences in Ein El Hilweh in Lebanon. The situation of the Palestinian diaspora has changed from being the central Palestinian question; Palestinian refugees are currently marginalised and neglected, while more responsibility is being placed on the host country. The forgotten Palestinian refugees have been excluded from all the agreements and accords mentioned here; the PRLs were not included in the Palestinian agenda at that time (Oslo Accord, Taif Agreement), which had not been the case in the 1970s.
4. Theoretical Framework

4.1 Social Integration

Many people have discussed the term integration, which may be defined as ‘the process by which immigrants gain social membership and develop the ability to participate in key institutions in the destination country’ (Bartram, Poros and Monforte, 2014, p. 83). Although some have different views of how the term should be defined, there is a common understanding that integration is needed for newcomers to avoid becoming marginalised in the society of their host countries. The UNHCR states that if there are no options for repatriation, refugees should be part of the ‘legal, economic, social and cultural dimensions’ (UNHCR, n.d.) of the host country, giving them rights and stronger ties with that country (UNHCR, 2013). The UNHCR (2013) stated that, to achieve refugees’ integration, the host country should offer a plan to facilitate the process.

According to Bosswick and Heckmann (2006, p. 11), social integration is ‘the inclusion and acceptance of immigrants into the core institutions, relationships and positions of a host society’. These authors discussed four dimensions of social integration that should be considered in government policies, which are as follows: structural integration, cultural integration, interactive integration and identificational integration (Bosswick and Heckmann, 2006, p. 9). These are described below.

Structural integration occurs when immigrants can gain rights and access to positions and status in the core institutions in the host society, including the labour market, educational system, welfare state institutions, housing system, and political citizenship (Bosswick and Heckmann, 2006, p. 9). Structural policies include educational support; vocational or professional training support; housing and health support; labour market, ethnic entrepreneurship and self-employment support; civic and political participation support; and naturalisation policies (Bosswick and Heckmann, 2006, pp. 12–15). If the host country cannot provide educational and vocational support policies, then nongovernmental organisations could help. The same can be said for health support. However, for individuals to obtain the requisite position, status and rights in these institutions, they must have cultural competency (Bosswick and Heckmann, 2006, pp. 12–15).
Cultural integration occurs when immigrants experience a change in their behaviours and attitudes and become immersed in their new culture (Bosswick and Heckmann, 2006, p. 10). However, this does not mean that immigrants abandon their home country’s culture; they can maintain it while also adapting to the culture of the host society. Cultural integration focuses on immigrants and their children, and the host society should consider and find solutions to help immigrants so that they have access to care for their needs; all those involved must remember that integration is a two-way process of adaptation (Bosswick and Heckmann, 2006, p. 10). To achieve cultural integration, implementing policies concerning the following would ease the transition: language training, support for religious practices, support for immigrant culture and support for sporting activities (Bosswick and Heckmann, 2006, p. 15).

Interactive integration focuses on the acceptance of immigrants in the host society in relationships and social networks (Bosswick and Heckmann, 2006, p. 10). The requirements of interactive integration are the fundamentals of cultural integration (Bosswick and Heckmann, 2006, p. 10). The policies do not play a significant role in interactive integration, but other integration policies can affect it; for example, school policies can promote relationships and acceptance for immigrant students (Bosswick and Heckmann, 2006, p. 15).

Identificational integration means that the immigrants have the feeling of belonging to the groups of the host society (Bosswick and Heckmann, 2006, p. 10). The feeling of belonging may develop during the integration process, but immigrants can also integrate without it (Bosswick and Heckmann, 2006, p. 10). Identificational integration comprises the following policies: recognition of immigrant secular and religious organisations, multiculturalism and promoting the culture of naturalisation (Bosswick and Heckmann, 2006, p. 15).

4.2 Structural Discrimination

There are different forms of discrimination, and these depend on the conditions in which the discriminatory act occurs. Direct discrimination is ‘intentionally treating a person less favourably because he or she has a protected characteristic’, whereas indirect discrimination occurs when treating ‘people equally on the surface has a disproportionately prejudicial effect on people with a protected characteristic’ (Mercat-Bruns, 2016, p. 82). Employment discrimination is refusing to hire based on skin colour, sex, nationality or religion; this extends to discrimination inside the workplace and can manifest in the lack of social rights or
low wages. The terms of employment discrimination are the same as those of housing discrimination (Mercat-Bruns, 2016). Furthermore, according to Lloyd (2001), structural racism is ‘racism [that] lies in the insight that ideologies of racism are not just matters of individual prejudice . . . [but] permeate structures’ (Thompson, 2010, p. 53). Each of these forms and definitions of discrimination is important for the present research; therefore, I utilise all the definitions under the form that best fits the topic, namely, structural discrimination.

Structural discrimination is the reason for different discriminatory actions, it leads to hiring and employment discrimination, educational discrimination in schools and universities and property ownership discrimination. In other words, it affects the essentials in life—income, housing, work and education, which are fundamental civil rights (Mercat-Bruns, 2016, pp. 97–98). Thus, structural discrimination is the result of institutional, cultural, historical and interpersonal norms from the society and government behind these acts; these institutions are responsible for the differences in treatment and harassment that negatively affect the targeted group (Mercat-Bruns, 2016; Thompson, 2010).

4.3 Social Identity

Social identity emerges when individuals’ self-concepts are founded on their knowledge of their social group membership and follow an emotional attachment to the membership (Tajfel, 1974, p. 69). According to Turner and Onorato (2004, pp. 259–260), social identity categorises individuals as ‘us’ versus ‘them’. In addition, Frideres (2002, pp. 2–5) stated that identity can be divided into two categories, namely, self-identity and social identity. Self-identity concerns individuals who are finding their personalities, whereas others who affect the self-identity—labelling individuals according to different categories—shape social identity; these identities are mutually dependent (Frideres, 2002, pp. 2–5).

Social identity theory defines the social situation of a group that includes individuals who have problems finding their place in the social system because of the difficulties they face; the group may have been in a high position in society, but due to sudden events, its position decreased (Tajfel, 1974, p. 76). According to Tajfel (1974), the individuals in the group may want to leave it to join another group that offers better options for their social identities; in the context of this study, the individuals cannot leave their group because of the important
values involved in their social identity, but at the same time, they want to be accepted by other groups (Tajfel, 1974, pp. 69–70). The group’s individuals need to find a solution to the difficulties of their social identities. The individuals need to accept their current situations and becoming an active part in the social activity around them or being engaged to see the beginning of changes like other groups in society (Tajfel, 1974, pp. 69–70). In other words, ‘No group lives alone—all groups in society live amid other groups’ (Tajfel, 1974, pp. 70). Social identity theory relates to individuals’ belonging to a specific social group; thus, it also involves intergroup behaviour. The behaviour of each individual in the group includes acting on behalf of the self and others in the same group. Finally, any action by the group is connected to the individuals’ backgrounds and interests in society (Tajfel, 1974, p. 87).

4.4 Summary of Theoretical Framework

As the aim of the study is investigating PRLs, using the theories of integration, discrimination and identity would help elucidate their experiences. To understand the situation of Palestinian refugees, it is crucial to consider their social identity and social integration, as well as structural discrimination. Furthermore, it should be considered that discrimination can inhibit integration, but conversely, identification with society may also overcome discrimination. The way that individuals self-identify is a part of social integration; in the situation of PRLs, it is relevant to incorporate these theories because this expands the understanding of the history of their identities and sense of belonging. Finally, considering structural discrimination, with its complex forms, by examining the interviewees experiences’ will clarify the events that Palestinian refugees have encountered and continue to witness.
5. Method

Qualitative research is not looking for principles that are true all the time and in all conditions, like laws of physics; rather, the goal is understanding of specific circumstances, how and why things actually happen in a complex world. Knowledge in qualitative interviewing is situational and conditional. (Dilley, 2004, p. 130)

According to Silverman, ‘one of the strengths of qualitative research is its ability to access directly what happens in the world’ (2006, p. 120). The constructivist perspective of ontology argues that people have different opinions concerning the world and truth depending on the way that they observe what is happening in the world, which is based on their cultural and ideological backgrounds (Moses and Knutsen, 2007). Epistemology states that, to establish knowledge, different tools should be applied to understand unique information (Moses and Knutsen, 2007). Therefore, this research follows the constructivist approach, which explains the phenomenon of the study.

Qualitative interviews are an appropriate method for collecting and analysing data. Moreover, they are useful for providing the researcher with direct access to the participants’ attitudes, opinions and understanding of events and experiences. Semi-structured interviews are employed in the present study. The findings of this study are built on primary data. Applying semi-structured interviews allows participants to speak in an unstructured manner, thereby providing an understanding of the phenomenon studied. Seidman notes that the interview process provides access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior. A basic assumption in in-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience. . . . Interviewing allows us to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their action. (Dilley, 2004, p. 128)

In this chapter, the approaches to data collection and selecting the interviewees, ethical considerations and the researcher’s role are introduced.

5.1 Data Collection

I used a contact person who was willing to introduce me to the first person in the target group of interviewees. Through that person, I was able to find all my other participants using snowball sampling. Deciding beforehand on the target group helped me to find the proper people to contribute to the study. The social networks identified and located the targeted
interviewees (Lewis-Beck, Bryman and Liao, 2004; Shoenberger, 2018). However, the risk of snowball sampling is that it gathers persons with a similar background from the same network.

Following an interview guide, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews in which the participants were encouraged to speak and introduce their thoughts, identities and experiences. There is a potential risk of bias in the interviewees’ responses when utilising semi-structured interviews because the approach explores their experiences and thoughts; however, I was aware of this risk, and to address it, I constructed the interview questions carefully based on the previous research and theoretical framework. As Silverman (2006, p. 152) stated, ‘interview interactions are inherently spaces in which both speakers are constantly “doing analysis”’. Therefore, I must be aware that qualitative research is always subjective and never completely objective; this is because I am following my research agenda. Moreover, in the present case, there is a difficulty in portraying the generalisations due to the small number of interviewees, which is evident in that the interviewees’ stories are highly subjective. However, as mentioned above, the method is useful as it provides the researcher direct access to people’s attitudes, opinions and understandings of events and experiences. During the interviews, I remained aware that I had an aim I needed to follow, so whenever I had the chance, I asked the interviewees about the themes I had in mind. The interview questions are listed in Appendix B.

The interviews were conducted by phone; suitable times for the phone calls were decided beforehand with each interviewee. The interviews lasted 45–60 minutes with each participant. During the interviews, I wrote notes that were later transcribed. Although the interviews were not face-to-face or recorded, I could understand the reactions that specific questions elicited through their voices; for instance, when two of the interviewees were asked about what integration means, it took them a while to answer, and their silence was significant. In addition, I was able to note that the interviewees sometimes answered with ‘I think’, meaning that they are expressing what they felt concerning an issue, as when all five interviewees were asked about how they identify themselves. The interviews included both planned questions and follow-up questions; as the participants gave their responses, I noted more than the spoken information, such as the frequency and uncertainty of speech. The
interviews were conducted in Arabic, and I translated all the collected data into English independently.

In analysing the findings from the conducted interviews, I took several steps. First, I performed an in-depth review of the collected data, specifying the core of each interview. After I conducted the interviews, I reflected on each interview individually and collected the data related to the research topic. In addition, after working with each interview individually, I began to look into the similarities and differences in the collected material to find the themes that I could apply in analysing the material. If the interviewees said something that was unclear, then a follow-up question was asked for clarification. In the process of analysing, I discovered words that the five interviewees had each used while discussing the same theme.

5.2 The Interviewees

All five interviewees were born and lived in the Ein El Hilweh camp. They were between 24 and 45 years of age; three were females and two males. Two interviewees were third generation PRLs, while the other three were fourth generation PRLs. The reason for this specific selection of interviewees was that the third generation witnessed the Lebanese civil war period, whereas the fourth generation was raised in the aftermath of the war. Both generations have continued to struggle in this period. I wanted to explore their viewpoints and how the interviewees identified themselves despite their different experiences, as well as their commonalities in the experiences regardless of their differing generations.

Three of the interviewees held university degrees; the other two held Siblin Training Centre (STC) diplomas. As mentioned above, I used snowball sampling to find the participants, which means the possibility of recruiting people from the same social network; as a result, the participants were relatively highly educated, which was not a representative characteristic, since many people in the camp drop out of school. Unfortunately, it was not possible to interview someone who had dropped out or never attended school. The interviewees’ family situations varied between them; one male interviewee had a Palestinian mother from Jordan, and one female interviewee had a wanted father by the Lebanese authorities. More information is provided in chapter 6. The interviewees gave permission to use their
information; however, some information cannot be presented because it could put the participants at risk.

5.3 Ethical Considerations

All five interviewees were informed of the aim of the research in a simplified way so that they could understand it; they all participated voluntarily. The five participants consented to the use of the information collected from the interviews if their identities were not revealed; for this reason, any information that could lead to the interviewees directly was deleted. During the interviews, the participants were asked again for their consent. In addition, after thoroughly checking the data, the participants were offered the opportunity to view the data before it was included in the analysis. To maintain the interviewees’ anonymity and to protect them from any potential harm, each interviewee was given a pseudonym in the research. The participants were informed that they could choose not to answer if a question made them uncomfortable; furthermore, they were assured that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without explaining their reason for withdrawal. The participants were permitted to review their interviews to ensure that all interview information was correct and accurate (Silverman, 2006).

5.4 Self-reflection

During the research process, I encountered factors that I did not expect. When it was decided to use the interviews, I thought it would be easier to be in contact with people who live in the camp, but I quickly realised that it would not be as easy as I thought. On the contrary, it was challenging because I do not have a social network in Lebanon.

As a researcher who holds the same Palestinian background as the participants, there were three ramifications I needed to consider. First, the risk of being biased was present throughout the whole process, from interviewing to analysing the collected data, because of my goal of presenting the PRLs’ life and struggles in the camp. Second, when I decided to study the situation of PRL utilising the interview methodology, I thought that participants would place a high level of trust in me and feel comfortable discussing their lives with me. Finally, I did not expect to be called a ‘real Palestinian’ numerous times by several of the interviewees; there was a clear distancing between me, as a Palestinian from Palestine, and them, as Palestinian refugees in a camp.
When I introduced myself to the interviewees as a Palestinian student who desired to study their situations and present my findings in research form, I was asked many questions. For example, they inquired concerning the part of Palestine I came from and where I now lived. After we began the discussion, I realised that several of the interviewees were asking me if I understood their meaning when they mentioned the PLO members and their history in Lebanon or when they mentioned the different Lebanese political parties. As far as being called a ‘real Palestinian’, they explained that they thought Palestinians who live in today’s State of Palestine would not understand what the life of PRLs is like; however, that concern arose only in the first half of the interviews, as the respondents later asked me about the situation in Palestine. I think I was able to avoid being biased, as I only introduced what the interviewees expressed. Yet, there is a possibility that my role as both a researcher and a Palestinian may have affected how the interviewees responded to the questions. Nevertheless, there is nothing that indicates that the interviewees I spoke with did not tell me their true opinions.

Finally, the data collected from the five interviews were designed to fit the aim of the research; however, if the timeframe and scope of the research had been extended, a broader data collection could have been implemented by interviewing additional PRLs. Still, utilising the interview method demonstrated that it was the proper approach for collecting suitable data.

5.5 Reliability and Validity

In any research, it is crucial to demonstrate its reliability and validity. Silverman (2006) claimed that the research reliability could be addressed by taking notes and having them transcribed later in the research process. That is what was done in the present research during and after the interviews. However, Silverman (2006) argued that the reliability of the collected data is not sufficient for a qualitative research study, but the validity of the collected data must also be ensured.

Validity in qualitative research is strongly connected to the logic and truths of respondents’ accounts, which was available in this research via the respondent validation method (Silverman, 2006). During the interviews, the interviewees’ answers were validated by confirming what they meant; moreover, I asked follow-up questions if I was unsure of what they had said.
6. Results

The following analyses are the results from the five semi-structured interviews I conducted to answer the following questions: How are Palestinian refugees integrating into Lebanese society? What are the experiences of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon? How do Palestinian refugees identify themselves? The PRLs’ situation is presented from their perspective in this section. The materials from the five interviews were analysed according to three themes: integration, the experiences of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and the identity of Palestinian Refugees.

6.1 Theme 1: Integration

All the interviewees confirmed that integration is necessary to identify themselves in their place of residence; they want to be part of Lebanese society. When the interviewees were asked about what integration meant for them as PRLs, they took a while to answer, because according to them, they had not been asked about this before. Their answers differed regarding integration. For instance, for Ayman, it meant being able to enrol in all the Lebanese schools and being able to work in all the available professions in Lebanon. In contrast, for Bahiya, integration was simply being the same as all the Lebanese nationals living in Lebanon. Bahiya described this as ‘being treated as they treat each other’. Nana shared the same opinion as Ayman, while Mohammed specified that, for him, integration is ‘to have rights, rights, rights’ by law; he thought that the Lebanese law should be implemented such that all the PRLs could live securely in Lebanon. Finally, when I asked Fatma about what integration meant for her, she first answered, ‘work’. When I asked what that signified for her, she answered, ‘If I could secure and get good work, all the other [hindrances] would be easier to bear, and we would be able to work in the public sector’.

Examining the five interviewees’ answers led me to discover that, despite their differing opinions concerning integration, their thoughts mainly depended on their personal opinions regarding their needs in their lives in Lebanon. Although the interviewees offered a different perspective regarding what integration means, they all agreed that integration is the key to gaining a social position in Lebanese society and institutions. Nana expressed how integration into Lebanon would benefit both Palestinians and Lebanese people if Lebanon
would implement an integration plan for Palestinian refugees. As mentioned above, Nana shared the same opinion as Ayman that integration means having access to Lebanese schools and work in any profession. She added that Lebanon must offer all the PRLs integration opportunity, as it would lead to a better future that would benefit everyone’s interest—both the PRLs and the Lebanese. When Nana was asked how this is supposed to happen, she responded,

I feel that when we will have a full integration process, our situation as PRLs will be looked [at] in a better manner; we will be able to receive proper education and jobs. Basically, we will have a much better social life, and for sure, we will have a better relationship with Lebanese society. I really hope that will happen and Lebanon will offer us the chance to be integrated.

In the interviews, it was indicated that the five interviewees thought that the comparable factors PRL and the Lebanese society share would be an advantage for them in the integration process. All the interviewees said that their integration in Lebanon should have been easy because they shared the same language, a similar culture and religious practices, so none of these elements should have hindered them in their progress to become part of the society. Bahiya insisted that the fundamentals needed for successful integration for all the PRLs already exist. I asked her if PRLs’ integration in Lebanon would be hard, and she answered,

Integration should never be an issue. Language? No need to mention it. Plus we have almost the same culture, traditions, not to forget that we share a religion, even though they [have] many religions, but we also do share that as Palestinians. . . . Whenever I think about if my parents and grandparents had not gone to Lebanon or any other Arabic-speaking country—Oh . . . it is a privilege to my generation, to the new generations and Lebanese society gained without requesting it. We have to use them, the similarities we have.

In the interviews, it became clear that education was one common point for the five interviewees in the discussion regarding integration. When Bahiya and Ayman were asked if they felt they were integrated in Lebanon, both of them said ‘no’. Asked to elaborate on this, both gave similar answers, pointing to the example of education as a form of not being integrated. Ayman and Bahiya explained that, in Ein El Hilweh and all the Palestinian refugee camps, there are UNRWA elementary, middle and high schools, as well as one vocational and training centre, in addition to the Lebanese governmental and private schools and universities, to which PRLs demand greater access. When Bahiya and Ayman were asked if UNRWA’s support is important for PRLs, they stated that, for example, having STC as the only higher education institution for Palestinian refugees is a great blessing, because there is a high poverty rate, and their parents and others did not have the ability to send their children to private or national universities. Thus, UNRWA’s support has helped them a lot so far.
Bahiya and Ayman have two-year diplomas from STC. In addition, they stated that it would represent an essential difference if their children had access to Lebanese schools. Explaining how it would be much better if all the PRL children could attend the Lebanese schools, Ayman said,

In UNRWA schools, the class capacity is up to 25 students, but now, the class[es] have 45–50 students in schools. I live inside the camp, but there is a Lebanese school 10 minutes away from my home, whereas the school my children go to is 30 minutes away. It [would be] much better to send them to the school next to us.

Finally, when the interviewees were asked whether integration would mean losing their identities as PRLs and whether that would affect them, they all responded that it would not. I thought that because they are part of the new generation, it could be easier for them to lose their sense of identity, but they insisted that being part of Lebanese society would not be an obstacle for them. Fatma explained, ‘We can continue being who we are, belonging to our land, being called Palestinian, then it’s [a] personal choice if we want to feel attached to Lebanon also, but we will never lose our identity’.

Based on the five interviews, it is possible to apply the presented integration theory, which is the specific integration that fits well and can be employed in the PRLs’ situation. The interviewees frequently expressed that they wanted to be part of Lebanese society and that social integration dimensions and policies can be connected to their opinions concerning integration. As Bosswick and Heckmann (2006) discussed in relation to structural integration, core institutions, such as educational and governmental institutions, determine the immigrants’ positions and opportunities that can be offered to them in the host society. These institutions hold a prominent place in the Palestinian refugees’ integration because they help PRLs to be active members of society.

According to the five interviewed PRLs, the first three policies of cultural integration—language training, support for religious practices and support for the immigrants’ culture—are not a problem because they already have the same language, religion and culture. Interactive integration is vital for Lebanese society, as well as for third- and fourth generation PRLs. Identificational integration policies should be achieved by the host country, Lebanon, which should provide this for Palestinian refugees; all the interviewees expressed that they desired the chance to be part of society.
For immigrants to achieve successful social integration into the host society, the four
dimensions of social integration must be connected. In the case of the five interviewed PRLs,
the issue is no longer settling in the host country temporarily; the issue is currently
integrating in Lebanon, because Palestinians have been living in Lebanese society for more
than seven decades. Until now, the issue of integrating the PRLs has been floating on the
surface, whenever the Palestinian refugees are one step closer to being active members of
Lebanon’s society. The reasons for this delayed integration are mentioned in Theme 2, which
presents the experiences the PRLs have had and are still experiencing.

6.2 Theme 2: The Experiences of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

All five interviewees agreed that employment is one of the main difficulties they are
experiencing in Lebanon; when they were asked about the experiences PRLs face and that
affect their life in the camp, they all argued that being unemployed affected everything in
their lives. When the five interviewees were asked about how difficult employment is for
them, there was one answer that offers a clear picture of what Palestinian refugees face
concerning employment is the story Mohammed told, as outlined below.

Mohammed is a physiotherapist. As his story illustrates, he has been forced to leave his job
twice due to Lebanese governmental practices. Mohammed expressed that it is difficult for
Palestinians in the physiotherapy profession to work in Lebanon; they may only practice
privately in the camps. However, five years ago, a decision was made to allow non-Lebanese
people to apply for physiotherapist working licenses. According to Mohammed, it was a
precious opportunity to be permitted to apply for a working license; fortunately, Mohammed
applied, passed the entry exams and gained the license. He was able to find a job outside the
camp in a private Lebanese clinic; although it is difficult to find work, it is easier in the
Lebanese private sector with a working license. After one year, it was time to renew his
working license; however, the license renewal was not completed, and when Mohammed
asked why this was the case, no clear explanation was provided for the delay:

No one was accepted after I received my license, nor was anyone else able to renew their licenses.
I guess the minister of health signed the decision paper without reading it, that is why; when he
realised the decision he agreed to, he directly signed the cancellation of the previous decision.

Mohammed argued that, although Palestinians can no longer apply for physiotherapy
licenses, there is no legislation against renewing the licenses for Palestinians who were able
to receive them before the decision was revoked. He is still waiting for his license to be renewed. This was the first time Mohammed was forced to leave his job: He could not work without the license.

Mohammed later began working with UNRWA in their vocational and training centre, STC, as one of the head teachers in the newly established two-year programme, which offers physiotherapy classes for Palestinian refugees who have the kart Al Ea’ashaa³. Mohammed stated that, after the first class graduated, the STC leaders decided to continue offering the programme. However, despite the success of the programme and the increasing number of Palestinian refugees applying, a new decision was enacted by the Lebanese government that forbade teaching physiotherapy outside Lebanese universities. Mohammed stated,

It was already hard to encourage many Palestinian refugee youth to start thinking about and focusing on their future and studies, but without seeing this act coming, I do not know what we are going to do. It is my second time losing my job without being able to do anything about it.

Mohammed is still waiting to learn where UNRWA will place him in Lebanon. Although UNRWA work is not satisfying in the eyes of the refugees, it is better than working with public or private Lebanese institutions, because working for UNRWA guarantees certain rights, such as health insurance and retirement, whereas working at Lebanese institutions means ‘to give them your best, without receiving the least benefits’ (Mohammed, interview with the author).

The five interviewees also related that PRLs are prohibited from working in many professions, and most Palestinians in the camps have low skills and work status. Nana explained that, in the 1990s, more than 80 professions were forbidden to Palestinian refugees. She recounted, ‘Now it is not the same situation anymore. It is around 40 professions that we cannot work in yet, but even with the professions we are allowed to work in, we are not hired most of the time’ (Nana, interview with the author).

PRLs are required to obtain an annual work permit to be able to work; however, obtaining a work permit requires complex procedures. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Lebanon, the number of PRLs holding a work permit is extremely low (UNHCR, 2016). All five interviewees argued that, even in divisions that are officially open to Palestinian refugees, such as education (teaching in schools) and the Lebanese statistics centre, their work applications are denied even if they are the superior candidate. Moreover,

³ UNRWA’s identification card for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.
between 2005 and 2010, the Lebanese law presented legal access to some formal employment in the private sector that had been limited to Lebanese people only (UNHCR, 2016). However, legal prohibitions continue on 36 vocations, such as public transportation, the fishery and farming. PRLs have limited access to the Lebanon national social security fund, and if PRLs do work, they receive a low salary that is not only lower than that of Lebanese people but also lower than what other foreigners receive (UNHCR, 2016).

Another example of the restrictions against PRLs can be seen in Ayman’s comments regarding Palestinian doctors. Ayman said that doctors are prohibited from working in Lebanese hospitals and clinics, but so that they can work, they work for some Lebanese clinics off the books, and they sign prescriptions under Lebanese doctors’ names with the clinic’s consent.

Discussing education, Nana and Fatma said that many young students drop out of school because the higher education options are limited to PRLs, while they face work restrictions once they complete their educations. Fatma said that, while the high dropout rate is increasing because of the poverty rate, which is growing every day, it is common inside the camp for children to work, some serving as armed guards (UNHCR, 2016):

> Many children leave their schools and start working, as they saw that the ones that finished their schools and continued to universities are in the same boat as the ones who did not continue their education. Even if they continued their education and found the resources for that, where will they work? They just stop dreaming and think about reality unfortunately from a young age. (Nana, interview with the author)

> They leave their schools to work because they have to; they have to help their parents. In some families, both parents are out of work, while in other families, one of the parents is working but has a low salary that does not even cover the first 10 days of the month. They have no other choice. (Fatma, interview with the author)

The five interviewees also described troubles related to housing. In their case, housing is found inside the camps, where they are not allowed to build new houses. When the family grows, they must find new lodgings, but they cannot have a license to build inside the camp. Palestinians who have financial resources build without breaking the law—they build vertically, as they have no other choice. The camp is crowded. In addition, as Fatma recounted, it is even forbidden to reconstruct a house after it has been destroyed due to bombing or any other disaster.

Under Lebanese law, PRLs were able to own property until 2001. For example, Bahiya says, ‘When our grandparents arrived, they were able to own property, but after everything that
happened, Palestinians were not able to own property’. However, the five interviewees also described restrictions in owning property in practice. Nana stated,

Because of the restrictions on ownership, the Palestinians who were able to afford to buy a house or shop did buy it under a Lebanese person’s name. It is the same when we want to rent an apartment outside the camp.

Currently, by law, all property purchased by PRLs before 2001 cannot be bequeathed to the owners’ descendants (Saleh, 2019). Confirming this, Ayman stated, ‘Having a house that you cannot leave to your kids after you die—what would the Lebanese do with the house? They can do nothing’.

All five PRLs shared the same opinion concerning their desires: They want the same level of rights that any Lebanese citizen has, such as having access to employment, healthcare and education. They repeated that they do not want to naturalise, but they want to have the same rights. Furthermore, the five interviewees think that the right of return to Palestine is a double-edged sword for all PRLs. On the one hand, they argue that this is the only way they can dream of and hope to return to their home country, which they have never seen. On the other, Lebanon employs this right as an excuse for their discriminatory practices against PRLs, such as the denial of their citizenship.

Ayman said that he could not forget what the Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, a Sunni Muslim, said about them when he was in power, which was that ‘Lebanon will never, ever integrate Palestinians. They will not receive civil or economic rights or even work permits. Integration would take the Palestinians off the shoulders of the international agency which has supported them since 1948’ (Haddad, 2004, pp 486). Ayman stated, ‘We thought maybe we were on the way to accomplishing something, but we discovered that [we] are totally just dreaming’.

In 1994, a Palestinian organisation presented a suggestion asking Prime Minister Hariri for the right to gain limited civil rights, such as employment and reconstruction of the camps, but the organisation received no response from the prime minister (Peteet, 1996). This confirms that, although the Sunni Muslim community in Lebanon would grow if PRLs settled and integrated, this does not concern the government anymore.

Based on the five interviewees’ experiences as third- and fourth generation PRLs, an explanation is needed regarding the similarities and differences in their perspectives. Analysing the data collected from the interviewees, it is clear that the generations grew up in different political climates. As previously mentioned, the third generation grew up in the civil
war period, while the fourth generation grew up after the war ended. Both the third and fourth generations want to acquire fundamental rights and better living conditions in Lebanon. However, the third generation PRLs long for a better inside the camp because they still remember the PLO glories. They have not faced the same discrimination from Lebanese society as the fourth generation PRLs have. The third generation received help from the PLO, whereas the fourth generation has received nothing. Members of the fourth generation wish to accomplish their goals both inside and outside the camp for a better future. The goals the PRLs want to achieve are being able to study in a good environment, apply for their dream jobs, choose their new homes and have their voices heard.

The five interviewees’ experiences confirm the results from Haddad’s (2003) study, which showed that PRLs face different integration restrictions, such as limitations on political rights and naturalisation, economic integration and education. The integration restrictions can be considered discrimination, similar to the discrimination PRLs face in universities, workplaces and social scenarios (Haddad, 2003, pp. 40–44). In relation to the right of return, Allan (2013) argued that the Lebanese government allowing Palestinian refugees to be integrated would conflict with the right of return. Ultimately, the Lebanese government employs the right of return when it works for their benefit (Allan, 2013, p. 97).

Based on the five interviews, structural discrimination is depicted in the experiences and restrictions against PRLs. Palestinian refugees face both direct and indirect structural discrimination. They are allowed to work but then are not hired, and other people are hired although they do not meet the requested qualifications—they are hired merely because they are Lebanese. As discussed by Mercat-Bruns (2016), structural discrimination is the result of many factors; for example, historically and culturally, Lebanon’s society and government have been responsible for the Palestinian refugees’ experiences to date.
6.3 Theme 3: The Identity of Palestinian Refugees

All five interviewees used the words *us* and *them* to describe the society of PRL and Lebanese society, and they all used the word *we* when referring to their Palestinian identity and unity between PRLs. These words were taken into consideration in the analysis, and as the themes were being analysed, they were connected to the theories applied in the study.

Ayman said in Theme 2 that the former prime minister’s words affected PRLs strongly. According to Ayman, PRLs wish to be integrated, settled and allowed rights. They desire to be a part of Lebanese society, but Hariri’s words destroyed their hopes.

All five interviewees emphasised the importance of Palestinian identity, despite the hardships they have had and still face. When they were asked about how they identify themselves, Mohammed answered,

> I am a refugee. They call me a refugee. But I am a Palestinian who tries to find his place among all the chaos we live in. I do not want to be blamed for the war, the war that killed my family members.

Nana also expressed the Palestinian identity clearly: ‘I am a Palestinian, who has Palestinian parents and grandparents. I am a Palestinian refugee who lives in the camp in Lebanon’. Fatma stated, ‘I am a Palestinian from Lebanon, and my grandparents always told my siblings and told me about who we are, where we come from, and always told us never to forget our history’. Mohammed, Nana and Fatma all identified themselves as Palestinians who are refugees and Palestinians from Lebanon. When Mohammed and Nana were asked why they identified themselves as refugees, they responded that it is how they are identified in Lebanon by society. In addition, Nana and Fatma said that Lebanon is where they grew up and had spent their whole lives. When asked about the importance of connecting Lebanon with their identities, they stated that they are Palestinians from Lebanon.

The importance of the Palestinian identity especially emerged when Mohammed said that he is called *refugee* by *them*, meaning the Lebanese. He explained that being continuously labelled as a refugee does not benefit him or the other PRLs living in the camp. He understands that they are called refugees to have their rights as Palestinians who were forcibly displaced and may return home someday—or may never do so. However, Mohammed thought that PRLs should demonstrate to the Lebanese that they are part of Lebanese society.
The five interviewees’ words depicted how the political scene inside and outside Ein El Hilweh and the other camps plays a significant role in connecting them to their Palestinian identity in Lebanon. All the interviewees mentioned different events that affected their identification as Palestinians. One of the most mentioned events was the PLO presence in Lebanon; although the fourth generation grew up when the PLO was not on the scene, it was still clear how the PLO affected the younger generation. They also described all the events and conflicts that happened and were still happening inside the Palestinian territory.

Based on the five interviews, when there is a conflict with the Lebanese government, PRLs becomes more attached to their Palestinian identity. This also occurs when an event is occurring in Palestine, such as the wars that happened in Gaza. The interviewees expressed that, in these moments, the refugees’ feelings of Palestinian identity reach their maximum levels.

Again, the sense of Palestinian identity and being part of Lebanon was seen throughout the data collected. All five respondents stressed the importance of their identities and their needs, hopes and demands to belong in Lebanese society. In addition, they did not want to be blamed for past events about which no one knows the exact truth, and they did not want to be categorised as second-class residents. The events that the interviewees were talking about mainly related to the Lebanese civil war. After Fatma and Mohammed were asked about their identity and how important Lebanon is to Fatma’s identity, they were asked what Lebanon means for them. Fatma stated,

"Living inside the camp does not mean we are isolated from the outside world. Holding onto our identity does not mean that we do not want to be part of the life our Lebanese sisters and brothers are living."

Mohammed also expressed wanting to have a relationship with the Lebanese nationals; he stated, ‘We do not want to be seen as an obstacle that is affecting their lives; we want to help build the future with them’. When she was asked about how she identified herself, Bahiya responded, ‘I am a Palestinian’; asked about what Lebanon means for her, she explained,

"I was born here; I was married here, and my children were born here. I know we are Palestinians, and I am proud to be called and referred to as a Palestinian, but the camp is my home. Lebanon is home. I want to have a better future for our children, the Palestinians and the Lebanese."

Allan (2013, p. 4) contended that identity for Palestinian refugees in exile is ‘a function of memory’ that allows them to continue relating to their home country. She noted that holding onto their identity is a ‘form of resistance’ (Allan, 2013, p. 4). For Palestinian refugees,
holding onto their identity means preserving that identity for the next generations, not only for the sake of their identification with their Palestinian heritage but also to regain their political identity (Allan, 2013, pp. 4–5). Compared to Allan’s (2013) study and my study, the present interviewees stated that it is vital for them to hold on and continue being Palestinians, for instance, as Fatma commented that her grandparents taught her never to forget who she is and where she comes from. The PRL identity is strongly connected to Palestine history, especially from the day Palestinians were forced to leave their homes. Holding onto their Palestinian identity was the interviewees’ way of carrying on through all the struggles. Moreover, beyond wanting to be Palestinians forever, the interviewees also wanted to be a central part of the Lebanese society along with the Lebanese nationals, something Allan (2013) did not discuss in her study.

In the interviews, it became clear that PRLs’ social identity comprises an ‘us versus them’ mentality, something that occurs when individuals categorise each other (Onorato and Turner, 2004). In this case, it is Lebanese society versus Palestinian refugees. Palestinians enjoyed a better situation in Lebanon for a short period, but due to a series of events, their place in society was eroded, as Tajfel (1974) confirmed in his theory. Moreover, in his findings, he stated that individuals should discover a solution to their problems with other groups (Tajfel, 1974), and this was the desire of the five interviewed PRLs: They wanted to experience better relations with Lebanese society, and they wanted the distance between them to disappear. Finally, the PRLs wanted their identity to overcome discrimination.
7. Conclusion

This thesis studied current Palestinian refugees’ situation in the primary refugee camp in Lebanon. The research questions were as follows: How are Palestinians integrating into Lebanese society? What are the experiences of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon? How do Palestinian refugees identify themselves? Five participants from the third and fourth generations of PRLs in Ein El Hilweh camp were interviewed via semi-structured questions related to their presence as a part of the group of Palestinian refugees who have lived in Lebanon for more than seven decades. The collected data from the interviews were analysed by applying social integration theory, structural discrimination theory and social identity theory. The research analysis demonstrated that different events, which were mainly connected to religious matters, affected their identity, integration and presence in Lebanon. The integration of PRLs into Lebanese society should not be an obstacle for the PRL settlements. However, their presence is unwanted by the Lebanese government and some groups in Lebanese society, such as the Sunni Muslims and Christians in general, and such views manifest in the different structural discriminations that PRLs experience. Furthermore, the interviewees indicated that the importance of being Palestinian would not change; however, they also want to be engaged in Lebanese society. Significantly, PRLs understand that if they want to be accepted and settled in Lebanon, that would mean sacrificing their right of return; yet, they desire civil rights because they believe they are the solution to their problems. For example, they believe civil rights will guarantee the opportunity to live in security, safeguard their permanent residency and allow them to pursue a livelihood in Lebanon.

To further understand the phenomenon, extensive research is needed; especially on the light of the arrival of Palestinian refugees from Syria to Lebanon and living inside the PRLs camps. For example, additional study on the events that affect PRLs’ integration and other events that influence the limitations they face in Lebanon would be helpful. In addition, researchers should examine how and why religion is affecting the relationship between PRLs and Lebanese society. Because this thesis was limited by time, some parts could have been improved and developed if more possibilities and an extended timeframe had been available. In the five interviews, I realised how central the roles of the political parties are inside the camp. I heard many stories about political parties in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.
Lebanon, and it became apparent that PRLs’ rights and how much their voices are heard are connected to politics. Due to the limitations on this research, it was not possible to analyse the political parties and related issues; therefore, for future research, it could be of interest to study the role of Palestinian political parties inside the Palestinian camps, especially Ein El Hilweh. Furthermore, a comparative study with another Palestinian refugee group in another host country would shed additional light on the situation of PRLs regarding their integration and identity.
References


Frideres, J. (2002). *Immigrants, Integration and the Intersection of Identities*. [online]


Appendices

Appendix A

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<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<td>Nana</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>Mohammed</td>
<td>Physiotherapist waiting for work appointment</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Fatma</td>
<td>Unemployment social worker</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female, the interview was conducted through phone, 24 years old, interview on the 5th of April 2019, Fatma was recommended by Nana</td>
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<td>Bahiya</td>
<td>Teacher in UNRWA elementary school</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female, the interview was conducted through phone, 45 years old, interview on the 6th of April, Bahiya was recommended by Nana</td>
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<td>Ayman</td>
<td>Personal guard who was a taxi driver</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male, the interview was conducted through phone, 42 years old, interview on the 8th of April, Ayman was recommended by Nana</td>
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### Appendix B

#### The Interview questions

- What is your name, age, education and profession?
- What does integration mean for you?
- Do you think you are integrated in Lebanon?
- What/how do you identify yourself as?
- What are the experiences that affected and still affecting people mostly in the camp?
- Do you have anything more to add?