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# **Case Study: Unprotected Palestinian Refugees in Egypt**

Including Annex: Protocol on the Treatment of Palestinian Refugees:  
1965 Casablanca Protocol

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**This paper is adapted from a forthcoming book  
'*Palestinians in Egypt, Analysis of survival and livelihoods strategies*'  
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## **Background**

There are two main groups of Palestinians in Egypt: those who sought shelter from the wars in Palestine in 1948, 1956 and 1967 and those who live in Egypt for commercial and professional reasons. In 1967, when Israel occupied the remaining Palestinian territories of West Bank and Gaza, this latter group was prevented from going back to Palestine.

Although temporary camps were set up for Palestinians after 1948 and after the 1967 war, the Government of Egypt never welcomed the idea of establishing refugee camps on its territory nor did it welcome the international assistance provided by the specially created UN body to assist Palestinians, the UN Relief and Works Agency.<sup>1</sup>

Palestinians, through their own social and professional networks, with time, settled in major Egyptian cities. On arrival, they were forced to adapt socially and culturally in response to the host community and also face the prospect of unemployment and deprivation. The following paper is based on my research into the livelihood strategies of Palestinians in Egypt done under the auspices of the FRMS of AUC. The research involved studying available sources and interviewing 80 Palestinian households throughout Egypt. Excerpts from some of the interviews are included in here.

Palestinians in Egypt have always suffered from varying levels of restrictions. For a short period they were treated almost like citizens but at other times they have been treated like unwelcome aliens and at no time have had any UN or other body to offer them protection.

## **Change in Policies**

From 1954, when Gamel Abdel-Nasser became President of Egypt, Palestinians were treated on a par with Egyptian citizens. Conforming to many agreements and protocols at the Arab League, Egypt and other Arab countries pledged to grant Palestinians their basic rights but did not naturalise them. Under the 1965 Casablanca Protocol, Arab countries, assured to preserve their Palestinian identity (see annex 1).

In practice, the pledges of securing Palestinians their rights (to work, education and mobility) or of preserving their identity, as the field research demonstrated, were not respected. Since 1978, with governmental policy changes vis-à-vis Palestinians in Egypt, subsequent generations of Palestinians have been unable to attend Egyptian public schools, they must pay university fees in foreign currency, and they cannot

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<sup>1</sup> According to Takkenberg, Egypt ratified the Refugee Convention in 1981 but was "reluctant to become bound by the 1951 Convention, apparently out of a perceived conflict between the status favoured by the Arab League and that of the Convention, and also because for many years the PLO had opposed providing individual Palestinian refugees with the status of the 1951 Convention because this was considered prejudicial to the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people." Hence, despite the fact that since 1981 Palestinians in Egypt fall under the mandate of the 1951 Convention, they have been treated according to the Arab League's special status designations and have not been protected by the UNHCR (Takkenberg 1998: 125).

work legally without a work permit. Contrary to their reputation of being educated professionals, Palestinians in Egypt are becoming an illiterate and unskilled class.

### **Limited work opportunities**

In 1962, Law No 66 had been issued, permitting the recruitment of Palestinians to the public services and they were treated as nationals of Egypt. This enabled many Palestinians to create a stable livelihood base. This stability was reflected in their purchases of houses and cars, investments in the education of their children, and in creating businesses which provided them with income after retirement.

In 1978, following the assassination of the Egyptian minister of Culture, El Sibai and the signing of the peace agreement with Israel, Egyptian policies restricting Palestinians rights in Egypt completely disrupted their economic stability, and in response to deteriorating political relations between the PLO and the Egyptian government, Section 1 of Article 16 of Law 48 of 1978 concerning employment in the public sector stipulated that the enrolment of Arab nationals should be conducted on a reciprocal basis, meaning that the government of Egypt would only hire citizens of those countries which hired Egyptian nationals. This presented obvious difficulties for Palestinians who had no country. Article 27 stipulated that foreigners were not permitted to practice their professions unless they had a residence permit and a permit issued by the Ministry of Labour Force and Training. Article 4 of Law 25 of 1982 ratified in Law 83 of 1982 stated that the number of foreigners should not exceed 10 per cent of the total workforce in any company, regardless of the number of branches of that company, in order to avoid competition between foreigners and the national labour force.

As a result of such legislation, employment opportunities for Palestinians in the private sector became scarce. Due to the difficulties of gaining qualifications and the quotas system on 'foreigners', working in the private sector was largely done illegally. Entreprises tend to hire skilled and unskilled workers without contracts, paying them wages that may help them in their daily lives but no paperwork is involved. Such employees were vulnerable to exploitation by the employer in terms of working hours, conditions and payment. Working in small-scale enterprises does not to secure the employees with social insurance.

Unexceptional group, those Palestinians affiliated with the PLO were largely unaffected by these policies. They have secured a regular salary/pension and various privileges, such as exemptions of school fees and reduced university fees for their children, and secured health care at the Palestinian Red Crescent.

Work in the informal sector was the only viable option for most Palestinians. The economic survival of the household depends on the type and number of income-earning activities in which members are engaged. The choice or the combination of activities depends on the accumulation of financial, human and social capital. Being engaged in multiple activities can reduce one's vulnerability and act as a coping strategy. The income of a wage labour (*arzouki*), for example, depends on the number of legal and illegal activities and the market demand for his or her skills.

### **The Challenge of Getting Basic Education**

The repercussions of the political events in 1978 seriously affected the provision of education for Palestinians in Egypt. Although they had been treated as nationals, in 1978 they were categorised as "foreigners". With changing regulations, educational services became possible only in private schools and universities with fees to be paid in sterling pounds. While there were 20,000 Palestinian students at universities from 1965-1978, the number in 1985 was only 4,500 (Sarraj 1986, Yassin 1996) and those enrolled in public universities between the years 1997-1998 and 2000-2001 fell to 3,048.

Palestinians only had access to private schools and were required to pay university fees in foreign currency. Administrative governmental decisions until 1993 also restricted the access by 'foreigners' to certain faculties at the university, hence preventing Palestinians from applying to study medicine, pharmacy, economics and political sciences and mass communication faculties. These rules affected all Palestinians, whether in urban or rural areas, with the exception of the children of PLO employees/retired and former Egyptian government employees.

In 1993, an official letter from the department dealing with immigrant students (*Maktab Wafidin*), Ministry of Higher Education, to the cultural attaché of the Palestinian Embassy, clarified the categories of Palestinians which may be exempt from paying 90 per cent of school and university fees. These included the children of government employees, including retirees; the children of Egyptian widows and divorcees; the children of mothers who have obtained their Egyptian high school diplomas; continuous residents of Egypt (those who were born in Egypt and have completed all levels of education in Egyptian schools); students in need of financial assistance who can submit papers verifying their socio-economic conditions. In addition, the children of employees at the PLO, the Ain Jalout Forces and the Administrative Office of the Governor of Gaza were also included in this exemption.

Even those exempted from paying 90 per cent of university foreign fees had difficulties finding the funds to educate themselves. Some interviewees reported forging birth certificates to indicate they were Egyptian in order to get free education. Others initially paid the minimum fees that Egyptians pay, promising to pay the remaining foreign fees after graduation. Often, however, these students were unable to pay and did not get their certificates.

### **Limiting Ownership and Property Rights**

Egyptian legislation allows foreigners to own some types of property but, for the security reasons, certain restrictions are imposed. Article 1 (Law 62 of 1940), stipulated that a foreign national could own, except through inheritance, any property located near Egypt's borders. According to the same law, foreigners could own agricultural land. Law 15 (1963) prevented foreigners owning any land at all. However, Article 1 made an exception, allowing Palestinians, until "the Palestinian territories are liberated from the occupiers and Palestinians return to their homeland", to own land in Egypt.

In 1976, Law 81 prevented foreigners from owning real estate except in certain cases. Article 2/B stipulated that when the ministerial council grants permission, foreigners may own such real estate if only one property is owned for the purpose of private residence or private business; the property does not exceed 1,000 square metres; payment for the property is made through a local bank in foreign currency; and ownership is not in partnership with an Egyptian. Law 104 (1985) prevented foreigners and companies from owning agricultural properties, fertile land or desert

lands. Article 1 stipulated that ownership reverts to the state within five years of the law coming into force so Palestinians had to sell their land. Some tried to register their properties in the name of Egyptian family members. Others sought to register the property using the names of Egyptian friends or partners. The legislation led many Palestinians to share their properties with Egyptians to protect against property loss in the event of new regulations on ownership rights for Palestinians and other foreigners.

The 1985 decision, obliging Palestinians to sell their agricultural lands within five years, was a warning to them. Some of those interviewed reported that they had lost their properties by registering them in the names of Egyptians who betrayed them and denied their ownership rights.

These ownership laws undermined the economic power of Palestinians in Egypt. In many cases, they must register their ownership using Egyptian names or partners. But false registration makes them vulnerable and limits their access to legal redress. Relationships between Egyptians and Palestinians had been strengthened through business partnerships and work relations. Egyptian regulations limited ownership rights for Palestinians and as a result, many formed partnerships with Egyptians as a way of circumventing legal obstacles.

Palestinians remained vulnerable until 1997, when Law 8, the Guarantees and Investments Incentives Law, was ratified. It gives foreigners the right to own businesses on a larger scale by permitting partnerships if 49 per cent is owned by a foreigner and 51 per cent by an Egyptian.

### **Impact of Politics on the Palestinian Community**

In such a restrictive environment, the Palestinian identity has been shaped and influenced. This paper studies the factors that affected Palestinian identity, a major one being their lack of legal rights in Egypt. Under Nasser's rule, Palestinians could work in government and public sector jobs, they were treated as citizens and education was free—the golden era for Palestinians in Egypt. Following the Camp David Accords, their conditions changed dramatically and all of the privileges they had had were rescinded.

As a weak, dispersed minority, Palestinians were constantly affected by political tensions between the PLO and the Egyptian government. During these periods, the government clamped down on Palestinian activities and the Egyptian public was heavily influenced by media campaigns projecting negative images of Palestinians.

Political tension also led to the arrest of many Palestinians and increased security measures regulated their activities. Although no specific information is available on the number of Palestinians arrested after the assassination of Culture Minister Yusef El-Sibai's in 1978 by a Palestinian group affiliated with Abu Nidal, some interviewees reported that searches were held regularly to round up young Palestinian men.

Egyptian policies regulating the activities of minority groups have fuelled suspicion and distrust among the members of the community itself. Intense regulation and surveillance of minorities, particularly Palestinians, continues today. Interviewees said Palestinian "agents" report to the Egyptian security forces on any actions or expressions of rejection of the status quo. It is important to remember that Egypt has been under emergency law for nearly four decades, involving stringently enforced security measures limiting the actions of many groups. In such an

environment, Palestinians tend to be cautious when dealing with Egyptians as well as other Palestinians.

### **Legal status of Palestinians**

The Egyptian Higher Committee for Palestinian Immigrants in 1948 defined Palestinian refugees as persons who fled to the country from 1948-1950. To prove this, a person needed an identity card for temporary residence in Egypt from the Department of Passports and Nationality. A ministerial decision was promulgated to allow issuing of the temporary residence documents for Palestinian refugees.

In 1960, during the brief period of unity between Egypt and Syria, Decision No 28 was issued allowing the provision of travel documents for Palestinians. To receive one, a Palestinian had to prove refugee status by producing the ID issued earlier by the Egyptian Department of Passports and Nationality and also had to prove legal residence in Egypt. Article 2 prohibited the document's holder to travel between the northern (Syria) and the southern (Egypt) regions without a visa and a return visa. Meanwhile, Egypt again reassured Palestinians that they would not lose their Palestinian nationality.

Decision 181 on travel documents was issued in 1964. Article 1 said that Palestinian refugees should be given temporary travel documents but required applicants to provide proof of refugee status and have a valid Egyptian residence permit. This document was valid for a maximum of five years and did not permit its holders to enter or transit through Egypt without a visa, transit visa or a return visa.

### **Finding Residence Permit Guarantor**

Despite the fact that Palestinians are refugees or displaced persons, being granted residence permits is conditional on providing a reason for remaining in Egypt. This could be for education, licensed work, marriage to an Egyptian or a business partnership with an Egyptian. In all cases, an official document proving that the applicant lives in Egypt for one of these reasons must be provided.

Those working with or had worked with the Egyptian government, the Office of the Governor of Gaza or the PLO have the fewest problems renewing permits. A letter from their workplace proving employment or retirement facilitates renewal of their permits. The majority of Palestinians in Egypt who work in the informal sector without work permits or stable jobs, face the greatest obstacles. Many have found ways to overcome this problem. When performing illegal or unlicensed work, they often present a taxi driver's licence to the authorities when renewing their residence permits. These licences are not difficult to obtain. Alternately, an agricultural labour licence, which can be obtained with a letter from the Palestinian Labour Union, may also be used for proof of being an unskilled labourer.

A major concern of interviewees was residence renewal for young Palestinian men. They can be deported at age 18 if they had to drop out of school because of inability to pay school fees, or at age 21 if they graduate from university and cannot find licensed work. In such a position, they are forced to live illegally until they can provide the authorities with a reason for their stay. If no justification can be provided, a bank statement showing a bank balance of at least LE 20,000 may be accepted.

We had to deposit 20,000 pounds to get a residence permit for my eldest son when he turned 21. Now, we have to deposit another 20,000 for our younger son (AP2, Hilmiat Al-Zaytoun, August 5, 2002).

Stateless Palestinians without legal residence or renewed travel documents not only put themselves at risk but also their children. For many young Palestinians, early marriage to Egyptian partners is a means of obtaining a guarantor to legalise one's stay in Egypt. While an Egyptian man can naturalise his Palestinian wife and her children, women are not able to do the same for their children. A committee was formed in September 2003, in response to President Husni Mubarak's call, to amend the law and enable Egyptian women to naturalise their children.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, residency renewal fees for poor Palestinian families without regular income are a major concern. In case of any delay in renewing the residence permit, they may be threatened with fines.

Statelessness is a critical obstacle to the enjoyment of basic rights. Palestinians who have Egyptian travel documents are *de facto* stateless. The travel document does not designate nationality; it is merely a *laissez-passer* that is only useful for travel when endorsed by the required visas.

Due to the limited work opportunities in Egypt, many Palestinians go to Gulf countries, Libya or elsewhere. They may be reluctant to do so, however, since return to Egypt could be denied. Palestinians returning to Egypt from abroad, particularly after the 1990-1991 Gulf War, encountered many problems as a result of the PLO's stance on the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

Egyptian newspapers published reports on Palestinian students registered at Egyptian universities who were prevented from entering Egypt (*Al-Sha'b*, October 9, 1990). There were also reports of Palestinians held at airports and then deported to Sudan (*Al-Ahali*, Tharwat Shalabi, September 11, 1991) and other countries. As well, several Palestinians were in orbit for months being deported from one country to another before being granted asylum, sometimes in a European nation. Many with Egyptian travel documents and who lived in Kuwait or elsewhere in the Gulf were denied re-entry to Egypt in the early 1990s.

As described, being stateless and only holding an Egyptian travel document is problematic for many reasons and stateless Palestinians may be detained for indefinite periods.

Regardless of the duration of their stay in Egypt and whether or not they once held an Egyptian travel document, Palestinians with Palestinian travel documents are required by Egypt to apply for residence permits as foreigners. The "privileges" they used to have in Egypt have been lost.

### **Further Difficulties for Stateless Palestinians**

Many who spoke to the research team said that young Palestinians who had problems renewing their residence permits at age 21 and had problems finding employment were more likely to try to go to Gaza. Young men applied to join the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/print/2003/663/eg4.htm>

Palestinian Authority in the hopes of earning a regular income and regularizing their status. Those unable to join the PA still tried to move to Gaza. Some applied for a visitor's permit through family. Once in Gaza, some would overstay their permits. Leaving Gaza would then be difficult because they could be penalized by the Israeli authorities. In many cases, returning to Egypt became impossible since their Egyptian residence permits would have expired after six months. During interviews, many of the Palestinian women who married in Gaza said that they had subsequently lost their legal status in Egypt. The outbreak of the Intifada in 2000 further delayed the processing of family reunion applications under which Palestinians could, in theory, legally return to and remain in Gaza or West Bank.

### **Assistance and Protection under International Refugee Law**

While agreeing to shelter Palestinian refugees on a temporary basis, Arab countries have been keen to place responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem on the "international community". Arab countries have reminded the international community of the moral necessity to keep the issue on the agenda and have reiterated the need for implementing international resolutions concerning this group of refugees. Considering that the United Nations adopted Resolution 181 of 1947, which created the State of Israel and displaced Palestinian refugees from their homeland, Arab countries have called for the implementation of other UN and international conventions to protect the Palestinian refugees rights, such as UN Resolution 194 of 1948 on the right of return for Palestinian refugees.

Palestinians in Egypt, who do not receive assistance from UNRWA, fall, therefore, under Paragraph 2 of Article 1D and should automatically be entitled to the benefits of the 1951 Convention and fall within the mandate of the UNHCR, "providing of course that Article 1C, 1E and 1F do not apply".<sup>3</sup>

However, the Convention has not been consistently applied to Palestinians outside UNRWA's area of operations. Suzan Akram (2001) analyses the article's "protection or assistance" and "*ipso facto*" phrases, which intended to provide Palestinian refugees with continuity of protection under various organisations and instruments. In a regime of heightened protection, Akram argues, two agencies have been set up for Palestinian refugees: UNRWA, the assistance agency, and the UNCCP, which was to be the protection agency. Article 1D was to ensure that if for some reason either of these agencies failed to exercise its role before a final resolution of the refugee situation, that agency's function was to be transferred to the UNHCR and the Refugee Convention would fully and immediately apply without preconditions. According to Takkenberg, Egypt ratified the Convention in 1981 but was "reluctant to become bound by the 1951 Convention.

### **Adaptation to Egypt**

Of the 50.000 Palestinians today living in Egypt,<sup>4</sup> some have adapted while others have not. What differs from case to case is the amount of time it takes to move along the continuum of integration, the specifics of the social rules and behaviours, and the reversibility of the change that both the new arrivals and their hosts

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<sup>3</sup> The fact that such a person falls within paragraph 2 of Article 1D does not necessarily mean that he or she cannot be returned to UNRWA's area of operations, in which case, once returned, the person would fall within paragraph 1 of Article 1D and thereby cease to benefit from the 1951 Convention (Note on Applicability 2002).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.refugees.org/world/countryindex/egypt.cfm>

undergo. The wider environment of the host country was also a factor in their political, economic and cultural integration. The changes were in physical, economic, political, cultural and social relations. Berry (1994: 87) defines these changes as acculturation, which refers to the change that results from continuous, first-hand contact between two distinct cultural groups.

I do not feel different from Egyptians. My brothers and I have been living here all our lives. We have definitely been affected by the Egyptian life. To a certain extent, we differ from our parents in the way we talk, the way we live. We differ even from the young people who are in Palestine. I went to live in Gaza and I felt a great difference. I do not know how, but the men there are strong and stubborn. They do not talk much and they do not make jokes. Their lives are very serious and hard, the exact opposite of here. They [Palestinians] are very kind people and [it may take me time to adapt but] I like living in Palestine (8/13, Shubra Al-Khaima, June 11, 2002).

With the exceptions of those living in Qanayat, Arish and Abu Fadel, three of the few known communal groupings of Palestinians in Egypt, for the most part they have seldom lived in exclusively Palestinian communities. In most cases, they mixed with Egyptians and interacted socially, professionally and culturally.

We never felt we were strangers here. It is only that some people make fun of our dialect when we talk. We never changed our dialect and people here find it strange (7/31, Belbeis, July 11, 2002).<sup>5</sup>

Over time and due to intermarriage, it has become difficult to determine who is Palestinian and who is Egyptian based on physical appearance and the use of the spoken Egyptian dialect. Several factors have played a role in molding Palestinian identity in Egypt. The interviews did not reveal a clear pattern. Some Palestinians chose to "assimilate" and build stronger ties with Egyptians than with Palestinians. Others have successfully integrated but continued to have a strong sense of Palestinian identity and belonging. The following points consider various factors affecting Palestinian identity in Egypt.

### ***Political Circumstances***

Egypt played an important role in the birth of the PLO but political tensions between the PLO and the Egyptian government have had been detrimental for Palestinians. In times of aggravated political relations, search campaigns, deportations and imprisonment of Palestinian activists were carried out with greater frequency. Such experiences hindered the formation of community associations and often made people avoid politics or other activities that would draw suspicion.

Palestinians were portrayed by the media as having sold their land to the Jews and are thus responsible for their own tragedy. "Disloyalty" was a trait attributed to them. This attitude was accentuated after the assassination by Palestinians of Egyptian Minister of Culture Yussef El-Sibai (Yehia 1986).

The media played a major role in turning sympathy for Palestinians into antipathy. "The fifth column" was one of the images journalist Ibrahim Saada in *Akhbar Al-Youm* used to depict Palestinians coming back from the Gulf in the early 1990s. Palestinian and Jordanian support for Iraqi President Saddam Hussein during the

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<sup>5</sup> In certain structural aspects, Arabic dialects have common core features and elements yet differ in certain other features and elements. A large body of vocabulary is shared in all varieties (Luciani & Salame 1988).

Iraqi occupation of Kuwait was interpreted as approval of the occupation while Egypt, Syria and Morocco allied themselves with the western powers to liberate Kuwait. An estimated 70 to 80 per cent of the 450,000 Palestinians who had been living in Kuwait were expelled and thousands more were forced to leave other Arab countries.<sup>6</sup> This exodus brought thousands of Palestinians back to Egypt.

### ***Generations***

I do not bring attention to myself. Some people look at me as a Palestinian, others as an Egyptian. I try not to say I am Palestinian. I like Egypt and I do not want to leave because I know it. We all feel like Egyptians (7/30, Belbeis, July 2002).

The ways in which Palestinian identity was molded among the first generation in Egypt, those who had lived in Palestine and witnessed the dispossession and the dispersion of the Palestinian community, differs completely from that of second- and third-generation Palestinians who were born and raised in Egypt. The role that the first generation has played in the fight and in the formation of a Palestinian national entity may have strengthened a sense of identity. Nostalgia for the homeland, dreams of liberation, defeats in the wars, the oppression of Arab systems and disappointment with the Arab position made the first generation feel differently from other Arab nationals. In many cases, those who were interviewed for the study told us they felt more distinctly Palestinian.

My father refused to accept other nationalities. He could have applied for Saudi or Egyptian nationality. But he wondered if Palestinians take other nationalities, who would try to take back the occupied homeland? I always try to look for any activity related to Palestine. Unfortunately, there is very little happening (7/37, Faqous, July 14, 2002).

For the second generation, the situation is quite different; they do not have the same ties with Palestine. Born and raised in Egypt, they have been brought up in a community where Palestinians are not easily identifiable as being different. Some interviewees reported that their own family members asked them not to draw attention to the fact that they were Palestinians, telling them to lower their voices when talking about Palestine or Palestinian relatives. Some reported that their closest ties and contacts were with Egyptians. Others said they did not feel Palestinian at all and that only visiting the *Mogamma* (the massive, forbidding administrative offices for bureaucratic matters in Cairo) or the Administrative Office of the Governor of Gaza to renew residence permits or travel documents reminded them of being different.

I do not consider myself Palestinian at all. I consider myself Egyptian. It is only the papers that make me Palestinian (P15, Dar Al-Salam, June 2, 2002).

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<sup>6</sup> Many Palestinians had been living and working in the Gulf states since 1967. However, when the labour market contracted, they were confronted with a basic dilemma. They are not able to return to their homeland and in many cases are not able to return to the first country of refuge or to the state which issued them their travel documents. This dilemma was highlighted during the Gulf War, when thousands of Palestinians were collectively expelled or forced to flee from Arab countries. Palestinian sources estimate that around a quarter of a million did not reach a place of secure residency during this time. <http://www.web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/index/MDE010011997>.

There are many factors which may lead to identity confusion, for example, having parents of different nationalities or having a Palestinian family name yet also having strong sentimental ties to Egypt, as is evidenced in the following case:

Here [in Egypt] I am known as Aref Al-*Filistini* (the Palestinian). In Palestine [when he briefly made a visit] I was known as Aref Al-*Masri* (the Egyptian). I am quite confused about whom I should be. Anyway, I am proud of being Palestinian and at the same time, I do not hate being Egyptian. Whether I like it or not, I live the way they live. There are some people who keep making us feel different and keep undermining us with the claim that we have sold our lands. I always try to convince them that we did not sell our lands but they have rigid beliefs and do not want to discuss their ideas (8/13, Shubra Al-Khaima, June 11, 2002).

The fieldwork reflected varying levels of identification with being Palestinian according to social, political and economic factors. No clear pattern emerged among interviewees, since one's identity is a personal choice. In some cases, for the reasons mentioned before, they tended to hide their identity and assimilate socially. In other cases, they integrated but maintained Palestinian cultural behavior and dialect.

### ***Education***

Second-generation Palestinians in Egypt have had different cultural and educational exposure to Egypt than their parents had. Jason Hart (1998), an anthropologist who was an English teacher at United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools in Jabal Al-Hussein refugee camp in Jordan, noted that the teaching staff, who are Palestinian refugees themselves, often taught children about Palestine and about their villages of origin. Living in a camp divided into districts named after the towns from which they originally came encouraged children to express their feelings, belongings and concerns by relating to their Palestinian identity.

The situation differs in Egypt. A study on the political education of Egyptian children through school textbooks (history, geography, and civics) noted that in 1981, "only 16 per cent of instruction was aimed at promoting the sense of belonging to the Arab nation, whereas 54 per cent was devoted to Pharaonic Egypt and 30 per cent to the Egyptian identity per se, above and beyond the stress placed on Egyptian citizenship considered independently of the Arab or Islamic nation" (Yehia 1986).

The Egyptian educational system did not encourage study of Palestine in the way that it was encouraged in refugee camps where UNRWA provides schooling. In addition, the creation of private Palestinian schools was not permitted.<sup>7</sup> However, Palestinian identity and cultural heritage are encouraged through activities of the Palestinian Women's Union and the Abbad Choral of the Palestinian Red Crescent, where some folkloric Palestinian dances are performed. But participation by Palestinians is limited to those affiliated with the union or living in Cairo.

### ***The Family***

The role of the immediate family in forming identity and in exposing younger generations to Palestinian culture is very important.

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<sup>7</sup> A school was created in Arish that was funded by the Businessmen's Association and the Ministry of Education of the PA, however it was not permitted to serve Palestinians students and not Egyptian students (Interview with Ali Jowhar, head of the Palestinian Charitable Association and the Palestinian Businessmen's Association, October 22, 2001).

My father is originally from Jaffa, but I do not know anything about my father's family. He himself has never been to Jaffa. All I know about Jaffa are stories my father was told by his father. I know no Palestinians here (7/43, Hehya, July 15, 2002).<sup>8</sup>

Interviewees suggested that when the father of a family was either a fighter with the PLO, in which case he rarely spent time with his family, or was busy working in the informal sector earning an income for the house, memories of Palestine and the history of the Palestinian family were rarely communicated to the children. Traditional authoritarian relations between the children and the father also limit the friendly, participatory home environment through which an exchange of ideas, stories and questions can take place to educate children about the homeland.

Except for the travel document I hold, I do not consider myself Palestinian. I have lived all my life here and I work here.... I know nothing about my family in Palestine. I saw them only when I was a child and since then we have had no news from them.... I do not even imagine myself going to Palestine since it is a place I have never thought of in my life (7/44, Hehya, July 15, 2002).<sup>9</sup>

Whether or not she appreciates Palestinian culture, an Egyptian mother naturally tends to pass on her own Egyptian culture to her children. In most families we interviewed, second-generation Palestinians expressed stronger ties with their Egyptian maternal family than with Palestinian relations since they know them better and see them more often.

Communication with family in Palestine is a way to reflect solidarity and to express concern. Events in the Palestinian Occupied Territories are often discussed at family gatherings. Concern about the uncertain future of the state-to-be and about family members there all tie Palestinians in the *ghourba* (diaspora) to their homeland and to their social networks there.

My wife's family lives in Gaza. We are very worried about them during this Intifada. They have sent us a mobile phone so we can send to each other messages to know how things are going since we don't have a telephone line...We are very close to our family in Palestine. My uncles tried to help me find work in Gaza when they found out that I was unable to find work here. They are both painters and cement professionals. They sent me a visiting permit and I worked with them in the construction field a few years back (8/13, Shubra Al-Khaima, June 11, 2002).

### **Marriage**

Marriage to Egyptians, in many cases, is a means of ensuring legal residence in Egypt. The Egyptian wife is the guarantor for the Palestinian husband. Children of Egyptian women have also better opportunities in paying lower fees at university and in ensuring a residency permit renewable every five years. In turn, marriage to Palestinians, as suggested by interviewees, is considered a means to strengthen ties

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<sup>8</sup> This interviewee was a third-generation Palestinian in Egypt whose grandfather arrived in Hehya with his Egyptian wife, who was from Jaffa, in 1948. He was involved in selling clothes between Jaffa and Egypt.

<sup>9</sup> Mustafa's father arrived in 1948 from Jaffa and lived in Hehya with his Egyptian wife. He started his work as a construction labourer and then bought a grocery shop with an Egyptian partner. Later, he took full ownership of the shop. Today, Mustafa owns three shops for dairy, drinks and food rations licensed by the government.

to Palestine and hopes for a final return. Intermarriage within Palestinian families is another important tool for preserving identity, since both the man and the woman share the same values, culture and rituals. Most importantly, marrying a Palestinian can be a means of long-term planning and creating a basis for returning to Palestine.

All my children are married to Palestinians, so when the situation gets better in Gaza, we will be able to go back. It will then be very easy for both the husband and for the wife to return (8/11, Shubra Al-Khaima, June 12, 2002).

Out of a strong desire to belong and to discover their roots, Palestinian parents find in marriage an chance to introduce their children to the village network. Palestinian villages, like Egyptian villages, share many of the same ceremonial practices. In Egypt, some Palestinians tend to build a replica of the culture they left behind.

### **Conclusion**

The few factors mentioned here explain some of the reasons why Palestinians choose to either emphasise or de-emphasise the fact that they are Palestinian. However, even those who feel strongly about their identity often find ways to conceal their "Palestinianism" for various reasons. The majority of Palestinians in Egypt speak the Egyptian dialect. This linguistic assimilation is a means to being accepted in the host community and avoiding scrutiny. Revealing one's Palestinian identity is not always prudent, particularly during times of heightened political tension. The compulsion to hide their identity in turn affects the construction of social networks and a sense of community among Palestinians. It has also distorted feelings of belonging to Palestine.

As stated previously, the Casablanca Protocol, in which Egypt and other Arab countries pledged to treat Palestinians on a par with nationals by protecting their basic rights while preserving Palestinian identity, has not been upheld. The deprivation of rights and the unstable legal and economic conditions of Palestinians in Egypt resulted in encouraging many to hide and even *lose* their sense of Palestinian identity. Thus, in practice, quite the opposite of what was promised in the protocol actually occurred.

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ANNEX 1

**Protocol on the Treatment of Palestinian Refugees:  
1965 Casablanca Protocol**

(Unofficial translation) – [www.Badil.org](http://www.Badil.org)

On the basis of the Charter of the League of Arab States and its special annex pertaining to Palestine and of the LAS Council resolution concerning the Palestinian issue, and, in particular, of the Special resolution pertaining to safeguarding Palestinian existence,

The Council of Foreign Ministers of Member States agreed, in its meeting in Casablanca on 10 September 1965, upon the following regulations, and called upon member states to take the necessary measures to make arrangements for their implementation:

- (1) Whilst retaining their Palestinian nationality, Palestinians currently residing in the land of \_\_\_\_\_ have the right of employment on an equal basis with its citizens.
- (2) Palestinians residing at the moment in \_\_\_\_\_ in accordance with the dictates of their interests, have the right to leave and return to this state.
- (3) Palestinians residing in other Arab states have the right to enter the land of \_\_\_\_\_ and to depart from it, in accordance with their interests. Their right of entry only gives them the right to stay for the permitted period and for the purpose for which they entered, so long as the authorities do not disagree.
- (4) Palestinians who are at the moment in \_\_\_\_\_, as well as those who were residing and left to the Diaspora, are given, upon request, valid travel documents. The concerned authorities must, wherever they be, issue these documents or renew them without delay.
- (5) Bearers of these travel documents residing in LAS states receive the same treatment as all other LAS state citizens regarding visa and residency applications.

On behalf of:  
General

The Secretary

Casablanca, 11 September 1965