Tired of Being a Refugee
Young Palestinians in Lebanon
Fiorella Larissa Erni
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Social Identification among Young Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

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After six decades of protracted refugeehood, patterns of social identification are changing among the young people of the fourth refugee generation in the Palestinian refugee camp Burj al-Shamali in Southern Lebanon. Though their identity as Palestinian refugees remains the same compared to older refugee generations, there is an important shift in the young refugees’ relationship towards the homeland, their status as refugees, Islam, the camp society, as well as in their relationship towards religious or ethnic “others” in and outside Lebanon. This ePaper examines how technology, globalisation and outside influences have impacted the young Palestinians’ interpretation of their identity and their understanding of Palestinianness. The author concludes with reflections on the young refugees’ attitudes towards their Palestinian identity in the diaspora, which, as she argues, can only survive when the young refugees see their identity as a virtue rather than as a hindrance.

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1. Introduction

“The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that ‘the child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name and the right to acquire a nationality’ (Article 7). But in light of the tremendous costs for children of contemporary nationalist claims and conflicts, we might also argue that children should have rights not to be constrained with bounded and exclusionary national identities and not to have their minds and bodies appropriated as the unprotected terrain upon which battles are fought about the nature, range and future of nations and national identities.”
- Stephens, 1997: 10

I am not ashamed of my identity, it is still under construction. But I am ashamed of some of what is written in the Ibn Khaldoun introduction: You, as of now, are someone else!
- Mahmoud Darwish

During the Football World Championship in 2010, the Palestinian refugee camp Burj al-Shamali in the coastal city of Tyre, Southern Lebanon took on a new face. Brazilian flags covered the camp walls and rooftops, and were blowing in the wind where usually Palestinian flags and the symbols and colours of political parties dominated. The Brazilian flag, and in rarer cases the flag of another football team, was printed on T-shirts and worn by young Palestinians. Everywhere I went, be it a store, a school or a bakery, the first question a young Palestinian would have asked me was invariably, “Who are you with?” This was instead of the usual “Where are you from?” Supporting a football team temporarily became the new basis of group formation; it became an important short-term determination of us and them, we and you. A sense of belonging to the Brazilian football team and its fan community miraculously brought together Palestinians, Lebanese, foreigners, volunteers, supporters of different parties as well as different gender and age
groups in the camp. Instead of Turkish soap operas, football games were on TV and appointments were made according to the schedule of the championship.

2 This is but one (albeit quite extreme) example of how the young Palestinian refugees in Burj al-Shamali are constantly negotiating their social identification at different times, responding to their very specific socio-economic, local, global and political environment. Even though the older generations may not be content to see the young’s creative interpretation of their Palestinian refugee identity, the young Palestinians do not see such new interpretations as conflicting with their loyalty to their national identity and refugee status. Yet, the young Palestinians give these imperative identities new meanings, which are often hard to comprehend for their parents and grandparents.

3 The national identity of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon has been assumed to be an imperative status of the individuals of the refugee community, not only by the Palestinians themselves but also by the Lebanese, politicians and academics until today. Palestinian national identity was either taken for granted in studies about the Palestinians’ history, living conditions or legal status in Lebanon, or its very meaning was a subject of prime concern for scholars and politicians. This ePaper attempts to take on a different, non-essentialist approach to the issue of social identification among Palestinians. I aim to do this by putting a special focus on the young Palestinians whose lived reality differs quite significantly from the reality of former refugee generations in Lebanon. Therefore, this ePaper seeks to answer the following question: Considering the influences that have actively and passively shaped the identity of Palestinian refugee children and young people in Lebanon over the past two decades until today, how can we explain changing patterns of social identification among the young Palestinians of the fourth refugee generation in Burj al-Shamali?

4 Taking a close look at the lived reality of the young Palestinians in Lebanon, this ePaper aims at “re-personalising” a group of people who have been “de-personalised” “pathologised”, “categorised”, indeed “classified” in the same way as animals (in academia as well as in politics and in popular discourses) as “the Palestinian refugees”. This reductionist approach to identity, which sees the Palestinians in Lebanon as a dispossessed collective rather than as individuals, is not only very common, but also dangerous. In his book *Identity and Violence* Amartya Sen (2007) warns of such reductionist approaches to identity especially in academia, because it is often used for policy-making and self-identification. Julie Peteet (2005) wrote that “another task [of an anthropologist] is to humanize those otherwise marginalized and demonized, giving them a voice and bringing their life experiences to others. Working with populations at risk [...] heightens the anthropological imperative to forge beyond the constitution of the refugee by a traumatic history to explore refugee agency” (Peteet, 2005: x).

5 I hope this ePaper will be able to contribute to this goal in the following lines.

6 This ePaper begins with a short methodological presentation (2) and a brief introduction to the history of the Palestinians in Lebanon (3). It then presents the theoretical framework that builds the basis for my conclusions, before giving a detailed literature overview of the studies on Palestinian identity and Palestinian children and young people that are relevant to my findings. I subsequently present my findings embedded in a comprehensive description of the “Umwelt” in which the fourth refugee generation is growing up. The presentation of these findings firstly discusses how members of the fourth refugee generation reinterpret their Palestinianness based on a new collective
consciousness. It then goes on to illustrate how the young Palestinians have taken on multiple and individual identities which coexist with their Palestinian national identity, and how various institutions and groups in the camp became important sources of social identification for young Palestinians, before outlining the ways in which they engage in a struggle over the definition of identity. Finally, I portray the perspective of the first, second and third refugee generations in light of the fourth refugee generation, and show why there is a disconnect between the two which leads to conflicts. The ePaper concludes with a summary of the arguments and a reflection on how my findings impact existing theories on identity, studies on young Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and research on young people in other protracted refugee situations throughout the world.

NOTES

2. The German word “Umwelt” is usually translated as “environment” in English. Yet, its meaning is broader, encompassing not only the physical environment, but also the geographic, social, economic, political, technological, ideological environment - indeed it encompasses the place, space and time in which an individual is living. The term was also used by Erikson (1968) when he suggested that social psychology, contrary to clinical psychology, also considers a person’s “Umwelt”.

2. Conducting Research in Burj al-Shamali

One of the central problems for researchers attempting to gain systematic insight into the processes of identity formation is an epistemological problem – identity is ultimately an internal construct and not open to 'empirical' investigation.

- Elbedour et al., 1997: 221

This ePaper focuses on changing patterns of social identification among Palestinian refugee children and young people of the fourth refugee generation. Following the approach of Peteet (2005), in this ePaper the individuals born in Palestine are referred to as the first refugee generation, the Generation of Palestine or the Generation of the Catastrophe (Jiil al-Falastiin/ jiil an-Nakbah). They are followed by the second refugee generation that Peteet (2005) refers to as the Generation of the Revolution (jiil ath-Thawrat) and the third refugee generation, the Generation of the War (jiil al-Harb). In the same vein, individuals born between 1990 and 2012 are referred to here as the fourth refugee generation, which is a very young one including mainly children and adolescents. The argument of this ePaper is based on the assumption that childhood and adolescence are social rather than biological constructs, an assumption which is by now quite well established in Social Anthropology and Sociology (Boyden and de Berry, 2005).

Burj al-Shamali’s dwellers refer to children up to 12-14 years of age as atfal or awlaad. The latter term also means “boys”. A boy is called either tifl (child) or walad (boy)/ awlaad (boys) until the age of 12-14. After having reached their mid teens they are called shabb (sg.)/ shabab (pl.) until they get married and become men who are called rajul (man), riijaal (men). The term ash-shabb can also be loosely translated as “youth” and it includes young men and young women, but never an exclusively female group. The camp dwellers call girls up to the age of 12-15 either tifl (child) or bint (girl)/ banaat (girls). In many conversations, people tend to call young women banaat until they get married. Others called them sabaiyya, a term that clearly marks the unmarried status of a young woman, until she enters womanhood through marriage. After marriage women are referred to as ‘ imra’a (woman)/ niswaan (women). This ePaper uses the Burj al-Shamali inhabitants’ way
of naming and classifying young Palestinians according to gender, age and legal status. Consequently, in the following analysis I will borrow Chatty and Hundt’s (2005) terminology, and refer to camp dwellers under the age of 13 as children (boys and girls), and to individuals between 13-22 years of age as young people, young men and young women. Chatty and Hundt (2005) do not, however, draw the line between children and young people at the age of 13, as they do not explicitly determine which age groups would fall under “children” and which under “young people”. Here the age of 13 is taken as a fixed turning point between children and young people only as an analytical simplification: in reality there is, of course, no clear cut distinction between the age groups. However, this age seems to coincide with a changing worldview among the young Palestinians in Burj al-Shamali. I decided on using the term “young people” rather than anthropological concepts such as “adolescent” or “youth”. This is because this study does not focus on how a certain age impacts social identification, but rather how the socioeconomic and political environment influences the social identification of a certain generation. It is not among the goals of this ePaper to find out how concepts of childhood and youth are socially constructed in the refugee camp.

3 This ePaper is the result of a five-month socialisation in the summer of 2010 in Burj al-Shamali and its society, through participation in and introduction to various social activities in the camp. I worked as a kindergarten teacher at Beit Atfal Assomoud (a nationalist Non Govermental Organisation (NGO) and child welfare institution) and taught English to secondary students at Beit Atfal Assomoud and Al-Hola (also a nationalist NGO). I also gave sport and nutrition classes to women at these two institutions. This was also the time in which I established a close relationship with my host family and other camp dwellers who so welcomingly adopted me and gave me a chance to actively take part in their social life. This way I was integrated into the rhythms of family life, performing all the tasks my now-married host sister would have conducted if she were still living at her parents’ home. I did not miss one wedding, birth or hospital visit of “our” relatives and I was a welcomed and frequent guest at their homes. I also befriended my colleagues at work, my students and my host brother’s friends; this gave me a lot of space to move between different families and age groups. Thanks to all of these social activities, I soon learned the colloquial Arabic that facilitated my socialisation in the camp. And even though always remaining an outsider, I was hardly ever treated as such. Nevertheless, the fact that I was a Western woman smoothed the progress of my research in many ways: as a woman I was able to enter houses without any social constraints, so I could actively take part in the life of families and I could gossip and chat with the women of the camp. On the other hand, my status as a Western woman also opened the doors to socialising with men - mainly my host brother’s friends or male members of the extended family. Young men treated me as one of them rather than as a “woman”, which allowed me to discuss politics and taboo topics with them. My status as part of Abo Wassim’s family gave me the chance to move freely in the camp, and the family’s connections gave me access to important informants.

4 I returned to Burj al-Shamali one year later in the summer of 2011 in order to conduct intensive field research for three months. I stayed in the same social environment and set up the sport and English classes again. I also took part in the summer activities of Beit Atfal Assomoud by joining the children and young people on a four-day scout camping trip to the mountains. The camp dwellers of Burj al-Shamali were all very open to talk to me and happy to take part in focus group discussions and gatherings. I was warmly
received in every house I went to, and children and young people were also quite talkative, especially given the chance to hear their own recorded voices played back to them. Whatever questions I had, there was always someone to assist me. I have never before experienced so much goodwill in a community towards a stranger. The conclusions of this ePaper are to a great extent drawn on participant observations and ethnographic descriptions of the camp and the society. I also conducted six focus group discussions with young people over 20 years of age (two all-male groups, two all-female groups and two groups with a mix of males and females), had semi-structured interviews with parents (mostly mothers) and with three imams of the camp. I conducted further discussions with eight employees of the various social institutions operating in the camp, two nursery school teachers of Beit Atfal Assomoud, one United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) school teacher, a political official of Hamas, the head of the student office of Fatah, two former members of the popular committee and the country delegate of UNRWA, Salvatore Lombardo. Moreover, I carried out five semi-structured interviews with young people under 18 years of age, and eight semi-structured interviews with children between 5 and 12 years of age. This ePaper also draws on the evaluations in a questionnaire answered by young people of Beit Atfal Assomoud with 245 participating children and young people between 5 and 18 years of age on the streets of the camp. Additionally, its conclusions are based on the analysis of 20 Facebook profiles of young people (10 male, 10 female) from Burj al-Shamali between 14 and 25 years of age. I analysed them according to three variables: “liked pages”, “uploaded pictures” and “posts on the personal timeline”. I also used the analysis of 30 drawings of children (15 boys, 15 girls) between 4 and 13 years of age. The children were given a very broad task, namely to “draw their dreams”. The children were drawing in the street or the backyards of their houses (it is important to note that while they were drawing, there were neither parents nor teachers present to monitor or otherwise influence their ideas). For my conclusions I have also used my detailed collection and study of graffiti and posters on the camp walls. Besides this empirical evidence, this ePaper also builds on an extensive body of literature.

5 A broad range of methods were applied in order to get a holistic perspective on the issue of social identification, and indeed each method has led to quite different conclusions that were not contradictory but complementary. Even though I was interested in finding out about issues of identity and identification, I did not discuss the topic of identity (hwiyāyat) with the camp dwellers as such, or in such direct terms; in interviews and discussions I never asked: “What is your identity?” or “Who do you identify with?”. Indeed, I have not used the term hwiyāyat at all. Such blunt attempts to find out about the camp dwellers’ identity would turn out to be rather fruitless because the standard answer one receives to such questions in the camp is, without exception, “Palestinian” or “Palestine”. In fact, it would be an absolute taboo to give another answer to these questions, and I would have had to deal with individuals who felt offended because I had questioned their Palestinian identity. I will elaborate later on why the Palestinians so decidedly insist on their Palestinianess.

6 I have been very cautious to keep my informants anonymous – a promise that I gave to everyone who participated in my research. Therefore, quotes are referenced only with the gender and age of the person speaking. This is also the reason why neither transcripts of interviews, questionnaires or drawings, nor the detailed analysis of the Facebook profiles are included in the appendix. I have, however, included relatively long passages
(written in italics) that are abstracts from field notes or word-by-word transcriptions of interviews and focus group discussions. These have been included throughout the ePaper in order to give the reader a “real” impression of the lived reality of the fourth refugee generation in Burj al-Shamali.

My research was facilitated by two research assistants: The first, Maryam Abdallah, who is the UNRWA primary school teacher who helped me to access people for interviews, to evaluate the questionnaire and to transcribe some of the interviews. My other research assistant was Rayan Dahwish, an 11-year-old girl who lives in Burj al-Shamali. Rayan helped me to access children for interviews, conducted some of the drawing sessions and photographed the camp walls for the graffiti analysis. She helped me to understand what rocks the children’s boats the most, and what dreams and aspirations one may dare to have growing up in a refugee camp.
3. A History of Palestinians in Lebanon

One man’s imagined community is another man’s political prison.
- Appadurai, 1996: 32

Palestine was a province of the Ottoman Empire for over four decades before it became a mandate of Britain in 1920 (Sayigh R., [1979] 2007). The state of Israel was proclaimed on May 15th, 1948 in the same region. Israel was implemented with a Zionist vision of a very specific ethno-religious makeup: it should be a Jewish state, and Jewishness was believed to be rooted not only in religious belief but also in genealogy (Sand, Lotan, 2010). Jews, therefore, were considered to be an ethnic as well as a religious group. The imperative of creating a state with a Jewish identity did not leave space for those who were called “the non-Jewish communities in Palestine” in the Balfour Declaration (Khalidi, [1997] 2010), in reference to the indigenous Arab population that was predominantly Muslim, but also Christian and Druze. While the Arab Jews were incorporated into the nascent state, most of the non-Jewish communities were dispossessed and forced to flee to neighbouring countries. Others were internally displaced and settled in refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza. The refugee flow counted about 726,000 to 800,000 people (Suleiman, 2006). The day of the proclamation of Israel is now painfully remembered among Palestinians as Yaum al-Nakbah, the Day of the Catastrophe, for it marked not only the violent experience of war, dispossession and forced migration, but the beginning of an era of rightlessness, dependence, humiliation and a new essentialist identity – Palestinian refugee. This happened in an era and area where the formation of nation states had just given birth to new nationalist identities, and where nation states were struggling with state-building and independence. For the 100,000 or so Palestinians who fled to Lebanon (predominantly from Northern Palestine and Galilee), the experience of ‘refugeehood’ was particularly painful, since Lebanon is the only state refusing the Palestinian refugees not only a nationality but also civil rights (Chatty, 2009). These Palestinians, and the Palestinians of Gaza, belong to the most unfortunate refugees because they are not entitled to passports, only to travel documents, and therefore they are listed as stateless Palestinians (Khalidi, [1997] 2010). The indigenous Arab population of Palestine became victims not only of Jewish but also of Arab nationalism, and an “objectived, undifferentiated mass that is meaningful primarily as an aberration of categories and an object of ‘therapeutic
interventions” (Malkki, 1997: 65 quoting Foucault 1979 who makes reference to refugees in general and not to Palestinians in particular). As Arendt (1973) observes:

Mankind, for so long a time considered under the image of a family of nations, had reached the stage where whoever was thrown out of one of these tightly organized closed communities found himself thrown out of the family of nations altogether ... [T]he abstract nakedness of being nothing but human was their greatest danger. (Quoted in Malkki: 1997: 64)

For six decades now, the Palestinian refugees have found themselves in a state of transition and temporality – a status that makes the Lebanese government particularly nervous because they fear that the Palestinians will eventually be resettled in Lebanon. Resettlement is referred to as tawtîn, and due to the sectarian makeup of the country, the resettlement of a large Sunni population is seen as a threat to the sectarian balance so essential to maintaining peace. Therefore, Lebanon did, and indeed does, its best to make the Palestinians’ stay in Lebanon as uncomfortable as possible. However, the story of the Palestinians in Lebanon is a nuanced and complex one. Any discourse entirely dependent upon a binary opposition between passive and victimised Palestinians and an evil Lebanese society is quite inappropriate.

Like all other host states, Lebanon was struggling under the socio-economic burden that came with the influx of Palestinian refugees in large numbers. Shortly after the Nakbah, the United Nations created the UNRWA, with the mandate to provide relief and development aid to the refugees. UNRWA defines a Palestinian Refugee in the following terms: “Palestinian Refugee: shall mean any person whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948 and who lost both home, and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict”.

Due to the fact that the Palestinians are under the mandate of UNRWA, they are excluded from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and consequently they are excluded from the international legal security provided to refugees under the mandate of UNHCR (Knudsen, 2009; Peteet, 2005; Said, 2003). The number of Palestinian refugees is quite significant; UNHCR estimates about 14 million refugees worldwide (Chatty and Hundt, 2005). To date about 5 million Palestinian refugees are registered with UNRWA, 455,000 of whom are registered in Lebanon. However, due to outmigration, it is not clear how many Palestinians actually reside in Lebanon (Suleiman, 2006). 51% of Lebanon’s refugee population live in the twelve refugee camps set up by UNRWA. This is the highest number of camp-dwelling refugees of all host countries (Knudsen and Hanafi, 2010). When the Palestinians first arrived in Lebanon they were often met with compassion by the Lebanese, a sentiment that changed soon enough (Sayigh R. (1979) 2007). In the years after the Nakbah, the Palestinians were regulated and closely observed by Lebanon’s intelligence services, namely the Second Bureau (maktab ath-thamiî) (Latif, 2008). They were made passive recipients of aid from UNRWA rations and relief, and they were kept as apolitical as possible. This entailed the prohibition of political organisations or gatherings, and of Palestinian nationalism being taught in UNRWA schools (Bowker, 2003). In fact it was official UNRWA policy in Lebanon and in Jordan to wipe out the Palestinians’ sense of identity and their relation to Palestine (Sayigh R. (1979) 2007). Unlike in other host countries, where tents in the camps were replaced by brick and zinc just a few years after their arrival, the Palestinians in Lebanon were forced to reside in tents for over a decade in order to mark their temporality (Doraï, 2006). These years of
passivity and indignity were followed by the years that are still referred to as the “Golden Age of the Palestinians in Lebanon”. In the aftermath of the Arab Israeli war in 1967, where the Arab armies were humiliatingly defeated by Israel, new streams of refugees were pouring into the refugee camps. After this embarrassment, the Arab governments at first welcomed the Palestinian Resistance Movement’s guerrilla operations – conducted by the feda’yyin (the Palestinian militias) – against Israel because they diverted public opinion away from the defeat and gave new hope to the people. The Cairo Accords were signed between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Lebanese government in 1969 (Sayigh R. ([1979] 2007). With the Cairo accords, the refugees in Lebanon “received social rights, recognition of their authority inside the camps, and the right to armed resistance to Israel ‘in coordination with the Lebanese army’” (Rougier, 2007: 6). This was in addition to “the right to freedom of movement in the Arqub district in the south, and the establishment of autonomous institutions in the refugee camps” (Brynen, 1990: 50). From 1968-1982, it was the Palestinian Resistance Movement that controlled the camps and provided security, health and social services (Peteet, 2005). After the expulsion of the PLO from Jordan in September 1970 (also referred to as Black September) the PLO set up its headquarters in Beirut, and the Palestinians in Lebanon experienced a newfound sense of independence, and considerable socio-economic improvement. Moreover, the Palestinians gained control over substantial parts of Southern Lebanon. This led to accusations that the Palestinians constituted a “state within a state in Lebanon” (Khalidi, [1997] 2009; Peteet, 2005); a virtual Palestinian “para-state” as Brynen (1990) calls it. These were very much akin to the accusations faced by Palestinians in Jordan before Black September. The PLO became not only the biggest absorbent of Palestinian labour, it also set up social security and welfare institutions, as well as infrastructure and vocational training centres that allowed the Palestinians to emigrate to Gulf countries as skilled labourers (Brynen, 1990). The relative autonomy of the Palestinians was watched with suspicious and worried eyes by the Lebanese who feared the loss of sovereignty over their land, disequilibrium in the sectarian balance, and retaliation by the Israeli army. And it was indeed the sectarian imbalance and the battles of the region’s great powers working out their differences in Lebanon which did eventually lead to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1975, lasting for fifteen long years. Even though it would be wrong to blame the Palestinians for the occurrence of the war, one cannot deny that Palestinian presence was one of the factors leading to its outbreak (Brynen, 1990). The Palestinian militias, the feda’yyin, actively took part in the fighting, aligning with the predominantly Sunni Lebanese National Movement (Peteet, 2005; Rougier, 2007). By the end of the 1970s, the behaviour of the Palestinian army in Southern Lebanon became a heavy burden for the Lebanese population who had suffered the flouting of Lebanese laws, restriction of movement, and sometimes even detention by Palestinian soldiers (Brynen, 1990). Since the 1970s, Israel had been taking part in air attacks on the Palestinian camps (Peteet, 2005). In 1976, Syrian troops entered Lebanon, and the refugee camp Tal al-Za’tar was razed to the ground by Christian forces with the assistance of Syria. These events marked the beginning of the end of the Palestinians’ Golden Age in Lebanon. After the evacuation of the PLO – when Israel invaded Southern Lebanon and besieged Beirut in 1982 – the Palestinians were without protection, and the Israeli-backed massacres of Sabra and Shatila by the Christian forces in 1982 occurred as a direct result (Brynen, 1989). In the meantime, Iran was supporting the Shi’a, who were able to fill the political vacuum after the PLO had left in the South (Rougier, 2007). This was followed by a war on the camps (1985-1988) made by the Amal Shi’a militias (with the
backing of Syria), which led to the weakening, and a decrease in number, of Palestinians in Lebanon (Brynen, 1989; Peteet, 2005; Rougier, 2007). The peace treaties of Ta’if were signed in 1989, and the end of the Civil War under Syrian hegemony in the country was proclaimed in 1990 (Rougier, 2008). With the end of the Civil War, the Lebanese factions were determined to never let the Palestinians return to pre-1982 conditions, thus imposing heavy restrictions on them concerning civil rights (cultural, social, economic and ownership rights), the right to reconstruct the camps and the right to enjoy freedom of movement (Peteet, 2005). The refugees were subjected to widespread discrimination, assault and harassment. The camps once again became a symbol of the maintenance of “boundaries and control” (Peteet, 2005). The Madrid Conference in 1991, and the signing of the Oslo accords in 1993, further weakened the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The fact that Yasser Arafat agreed not to include United Nations (UN) Resolution 194 (which guarantees the refugees’ right to return) in the Oslo accords was a fatal setback for the Palestinian refugees. What is more, after Oslo, development aid was redirected from the refugee communities in various Arab host states toward supporting the Palestinian communities in the Occupied Territories for state building reasons (Bowker, 2003). Israel withdrew from Lebanon in the year 2000 and Syria pulled out in 2005 (Rougier, 2007).

NOTES

1. The mandate of Britain was formalized by the League of Nations in 1923.
2. Nowadays, many other fears (predominantly economic fears) are linked to tawtiih. Many young Lebanese fear the competition for jobs that might arise if the Palestinians were fully included in Lebanon’s labour force.
4. Identity, Identification and Nationalism

If identity is everywhere, it is nowhere. If it is fluid, how can we understand the ways in which self-understandings may harden, congeal, and crystallize? If it is constructed, how can we understand the sometime coercive force of external identifications? If it is multiple, how do we understand the terrible singularity that is often striven for - and sometimes realized - by politicians seeking to transform mere categories into unitary and exclusive groups? How can we understand the power and pathos of identity politics?

- Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 1

In the past decade, there has been an overall sentiment of fatigue regarding the concept of identity in Social Anthropology. This is partly due to the essentialist abuse of the concept in identity politics, its misuse by journalists, the countless attempts of various academic disciplines to grasp the concept of identity in its totality, as well as its overuse in popular discourse, which usually marks the point at which academia drops a concept and invents viable alternatives for it. Nevertheless, in many cases identity remains an indispensable concept of analysis. The fact is that for the Palestinians, identity is not only the source of severest discrimination, but also the only means of claiming rights and maintaining their existence as a people. This shows that, for them, and many others in similar situations, the notion of identity is indispensable for maintaining the hope of a better future. In order to analyse young Palestinians’ relationship to their identity and their interpretation of it, this paragraph will introduce a few concepts which are of importance for later analysis.

This ePaper works on the premise that identity is a social construct. An important part of the following discussion is about national identity – the Palestinian national identity. A nation is a social as well as a political construct that is the basis for an individual’s national identity. A nation is the result of the national aspirations of a group of people...
that believe they share a collective identity; “it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson, [1983] 2006: 5/6). A nation does not imperatively have its own nation state; it is the nationalist aspiration of a people, nationalism, which fixes national identity to a physical place and a socially constructed space. “Like ethnic ideologies, nationalism stresses the cultural similarity of its adherents and, by implication, it draws boundaries vis-à-vis others, who thereby become outsiders. The distinguishing mark of nationalism is, by definition, its relationship to the state” (Gellner, 1983 in Eriksen, 2010: 10). A nation without a state – such as the Palestinians, but also the Kurds, the Sikhs or the Sri Lankan Tamils – who have political leaders that claim entitlement to their own sovereign nation state are called proto-nations (Eriksen, 2010). As Gellner ([1983] 2006) observes, nationalism comes before the nation: “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist” (Gellner, [1983] 2006: 169). This may be true for European nations. However in the context of imperialism, where it was the Europeans who drew state borders fairly arbitrarily, the question of what came first – the nation or nationalist sentiments – takes on quite different dimensions. In fact, the Arabic term 
\[\text{watan}\] (homeland) is a relatively new one, which emerged with the formation of nation states in the region; it does not share the same long history as its European equivalent. It has nonetheless become one of the most powerful terms in determining identity and belonging along nation state borders. For the Palestinians, 
\[\text{watan}\] serves as an influential unifying symbol around which all narratives and the essence of their identity is constructed. As Hart (2005) observed, seeing national identity as monolithic in an essentialist sense is likely to be encouraged by conflict and displacement. In the age of nation states, people are classified along very rigid borders and they are accordingly issued identity papers by the state – a nationality – the sole source of claims to rights and being seen as a complete human being: “A man must have a nationality as he must have a nose and two ears; a deficiency in any of these particularities is not inconceivable and does from time to time occur, but only as a result of some disaster, and it is itself a disaster of a kind” (Chamisso in Gellner, [1983] 2006: 6).

Therefore, having a nationality and belonging to a state are crucial for being seen as human rather than “less than human” (Butler, 2004). It is consequently often pointed out as the determining factor of a person’s identity. National identity and nationality, with very few exceptions, are seen as a person’s main, fixed attribute, which is both ascribed by others and, in many cases, also self-ascribed. The greatest problem of the Palestinians in Lebanon is that they do not have a nationality (\[\text{jinsiyyat}\]), be this Palestinian, Lebanese or other, that would grant them civil rights in Lebanon or elsewhere. For them, national identity and nationality are therefore two very different things. Nationality (\[\text{jinsiyyat}\]) is seen merely as a piece of paper that grants them rights.\(^1\) A student once explained to me that she was free to do whatever she wanted because she had the nationality (\[\text{'indii al-jinsiyyat}\]), referring not to Palestinian nationality, but Lebanese. She told me that her parents had bought the Lebanese nationality many years ago in order to secure their children’s rights. On the contrary, national identity cannot mean anything other than the Palestinian identity, and it is linked to the sense of belonging to Palestine: a relation to the homeland (\[\text{watan}\]) and the Palestinian people. This also explains why many Palestinians who have the Lebanese nationality still choose to live in camps. Drawing on Palestinian national identity, the Lebanese government refuses to grant them civil rights, and they remain, legally speaking, “stateless foreigners”. National identity is therefore the absolute “imperative status” (Barth, 1969) for Palestinians, and in inquiries about
their identity (hawiyyat) it would always be mentioned first. Even though Palestinians’
national identity is doubtless an important part of their identity, there are always other
aspects to it.

Having established that identity is to some degree a social construct, subject to political
imposition, and that national identity is just one aspect of a person’s identity, I will move
on to defining identity aside from passports and identity cards.

Identity can be seen as a tool to make sense of ourselves in our social environment, and as
a means “through which individuals understand themselves in their social context”
(Elbedour et al., 1997: 217). Or as Lévi-Strauss said, “[identity is] a sort of vital center to
which we must refer to explain certain things, but without it ever having real existence”
(Quoted in Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 9). Identity gives us a sense of belonging and it is a
source of opportunities as well as constraints. Identity is partly self-ascribed and partly
ascribed by others. In popular discourse, identity is the answer to the question “Who are
you?” Still, the concept of identity is more complex than that. Johann Gottlieb Fichte
would answer the question “Who are you?” with “Ich bin ich!” (I am I). “Identity means
being the same as oneself as well as being different” (Eriksen, 2010: 71). Two entities must be
considered in the study of identity: the collective and the individual. Sameness and
difference may be individually and collectively perceived subjectively, or attributed to
individuals and collectives by others. “There is no simple sameness unmarked by
difference, but likewise no distinction not dependent on some background of common
origin” (Jenkins, 2003: 9). It is only possible to determine sameness when we can
determine otherness; hence identity is based on a constitutive other. As Said observed in
Orientalism:

[...] the development and maintenance of every culture requires the
existence of another, different and competing alter ego. The construction of
identity [...] involves the construction of the opposite ‘others’ whose
actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and
reinterpretation of their differences from ‘us’. (In Khalidi, [1997] 2010: 10)

In this sense, collective identity is exclusive, which means not everyone can take part in a
group as he or she pleases (Eriksen, 2010). This process is the construction of the I and you
and the us and you. Within the group, this process leads to what Sartre calls the
construction of “us-hood” and “we-hood”; us-hood is the loyalty and social integration of
individuals in a group in relation to the other group, and we-hood is the social
integration based on shared activities within a collectivity (Eriksen, 2010). However, only
those features of sameness that the group members themselves regard as noteworthy and
socially important are objectively identifiable (Barth, 1969). Such collective identities are
strengthened and maintained through belief in a shared ancestry, a shared history and
narratives, collective action, shared consciousness, dispositions and solidarity (Brubaker
and Cooper, 2000). Conflict and outside pressure tend to intensify collective identities,
and individuals tend to take on their collective identity as their “imperative status”
(Barth, 1969), which overshadows other identities. Moreover, in such situations,
individuals also tend to classify their opponents by their collective identity in an
essentialist manner. Likewise, conflict enhances group cohesion, as Simmel’s Rule
states: “internal cohesion of a group is contingent on the strength of external pressure” (quoted
in Eriksen, 2001: 22). Elbedour et al. (1997) argue that this process homogenises the
individual members of the in-group, because in these situations individuals form their
identity as intertwined around and connected to the conflict. Collective social identities
are also particularly important for diasporas who must maintain the sentiment of connection to a specific identity that is attached to a homeland. This strategy works in resisting the normalised processes of distancing, assimilating and forgetting (Clifford, 1994). In the case of transnationalism, forced migration and occupation, it is resistance assimilation that leads to essentialism and to a solidification of particular collective social identities constructed on locality. What is more, it also creates new identities that are connected to collective action (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). Therefore, in such cases, the notion of homeland is often one of the most powerful unifying symbols. However, there is a bi-focality of the notion of homeland that may lead to serious tensions: the homeland as a unifying symbol and place of desire from a distance, or the homeland that becomes a lived-in space (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997).

Even though one could argue that the Palestinians find themselves in the exact situation of transnationalism and conflict that tends to homogenise individuals and to “essentialise” the collective identity (national identity in the Palestinian case), this analysis shows how among the young Palestinians of the fourth refugee generation there is space for individual identities to emerge. No matter how important a person’s collective identity may be, every person has an individual identity and a social identity, which signals that individuals are part of “a variety of relationships, occupy different roles, and are members of different organizations, groups, and communities. They identify themselves to, and are in turn identified by, others in terms of any of these” (Parekh, 2009: 272). The person’s individual and social identity makes up his or her overall identity (Parekh, 2009). Shibutani (1955) argues that every person, in some way or the other, is an actor who performs for an audience that he or she values. The audience – the significant others – serve as reference groups. According to Shibutani (1955), this audience may be real or entirely imagined. The reference group can on the one hand be an individual’s we-group, but it can also be a group the individual does not belong to, but values. In order to establish group identity, people take on the values, attributes and behaviour of the reference group (Elbedour et al., 1997). With this in mind, we can conclude that a person’s overall identity is inherently plural, and it has multiple foci. Or, to be more precise, a person’s ego is plurally made up of a multitude of identities. Therefore people develop hierarchies of identity, and it is this situation that defines according to which of these identities a person behaves or acts (Stryker, 1987 in Elbedour et al., 1997).

As I have shown, the notion of identity has many aspects and it can be a slippery concept to grasp. Therefore it is a problematic analytical concept. In the literature, a strong emphasis is placed on the fact that identity is a dialogue; that it is plural, situational, contextual, relational, in flux and temporal – all words with “no meaning” as Brubaker and Cooper (2000) would say. Indeed the concept is, as Tilly said, “blurred but indispensable” (quoted in Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 12). Developing this line of thought, Brubaker and Cooper (2010) wrote in their article “Beyond Identity” about how the notion of identity could be substituted. They argue that identity either means too little or too much. Therefore, they propose the concept of identification to substitute the notion of identity. They write on identification:

It invites us to specify the agents that do the identifying. And it does not presuppose that such identifying (even by powerful agents, such as the state) will necessarily result in the internal sameness, the distinctiveness, the bounded groupness that political entrepreneurs may seek to achieve.
Identification - of oneself and of others - is intrinsic to social life; "identity" in the strong sense is not.
(Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 14)

They posit that identification is relational (student-teacher for instance) or categorical (a group of people who share some categorical attribute, such as language). They go on to argue that it is on the one hand a self-identification, and on the other hand identification through others. They conclude that while identity is a condition, identification is a process. This is where I would like to take up Brubaker and Cooper, and use the concept of identification – not, however, as a substitute for the notion of identity, but as a supplement to it. Looking at the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, I would argue that an individual or collective has some identities (self-ascribed or ascribed by others) that are, even if socially constructed, a given (or if not a given, at least very hard to overcome in the individual’s social context). Besides these "strong" identities – such as national identity – an individual or collective has other “weak” identities that are easier to overcome and change in time. Therefore, at certain points, some aspects of an individual's identity can indeed be considered a condition. Despite this, each individual and collective is capable of interpreting and giving meaning to his or her identity, whether self-ascribed or ascribed by others. Moreover, an individual as well as a collective can interpret and give meaning to the identity of the “other”. The process of giving meaning to an identity, and of choosing an identity, is what I would call identification. Looking at identification from this perspective, it is indeed a dialogue; it is situational, contextual, relational and temporal, even though the identity may remain the same.

Hence, unlike scholars who believe identity to be temporal, contextual, and in flux, I believe that identity is quite stable. It is the process of giving meaning to identity – the process of identification – that is in a constant state of negotiation and change. This point may be illustrated by the finding that among young Palestinians of the fourth refugee generation in Lebanon, young people gave a new meaning to their Palestinian national identity. On the collective level, young Palestinians have creatively reinterpreted what Palestinianess means, but this fact does not imply that their national identity has changed – it is still the Palestinian national identity. On the individual level, each child and young person in Burj al-Shamali has his or her own idea of what it means to be a Palestinian, and therefore he or she gives his or her national identity its own meaning. It is both their individual and collective identification as Palestinians that give their identity a meaning. I would therefore argue that the process whereby an individual gives meaning to an identity and chooses new identities is what we could call “identification”. Consequently, even though identity may remain apparently static in its meaning, identification is very flexible and open to interpretation. Barth (1969) makes this very point when he observes that culture is the result of ethnic group organisation and not its precondition, and therefore an ethnic group will remain the same even if its culture changes. Consistently with Barth’s notion of status identity and role, Jenkins (2003) also argues in a similar vein when he observes that social identity is both nominal (a name) and virtual (an experience or meaning, etc.), the former being a process of categorization, and the latter a process of internal identification.
NOTES

1. One should bear in mind however that Palestinians who take on Lebanese nationality are often seen as traitors by the Palestinian community - even though to them it may be just a piece of paper.
5. Academia, Palestinians and Identity

The quintessential Palestinian experience, which illustrates some of the most basic issues raised by Palestinian identity takes place at a border, an airport, a checkpoint: in short, at any one of those many modern barriers where identities are checked and verified... The checkpoint and the crossing point proves that they are a people if nothing else does. - Khalidi ([1997] 2010): 1/5

Looking at the troubled history of the first three refugee generations of Palestinians in Lebanon (and elsewhere) as outlined above, it has already been shown how the Palestinian national identity became the essential identity for Palestinian refugees. For six decades now, the Palestinians have found themselves in a protracted refugee situation, or under Israeli occupation; throughout this entire period they have been in a situation of conflict and struggle for statehood. It comes as no surprise then that to them, and to others, their national identity and their refugee status has become their “imperative status” (Barth, 1969) and monolithic identity. On the one hand they are categorised as Palestinian refugees by others, from the first days of refugeehood as beneficiaries of aid agencies (Peteet, 2005) and later as a label for unwanted guests, as a category of intervention and as a subject for political discourse and negotiation. On the other hand, their identity as Palestinian refugees is a self-ascribed status that is linked to perceived rights to land and the right and determination to return to that land. Until now, only a little has been said about where this identity came from, how it has changed throughout the period of exile, and how it has been treated by various scholars of different disciplines. This is important background knowledge in order to understand why patterns of social identification are changing among a fourth refugee generation which finds itself in a quite different social and political context to the former refugee generations in Lebanon. Therefore, a short overview will be given here of the existing literature on how the self-ascribed aspect of the Palestinian identity emerged and transformed among the first three refugee generations. The subject has been of great interest to various scholars who wrote about how a Palestinian national identity has emerged, how it was maintained and how it has changed over the years in exile. Among

5.1. Palestinian Identity

Khalidi ([1997] 2010) goes far back in history when he looks at how a distinct Palestinian identity has emerged. In his book “Palestinian Identity” he examines the development of a distinct Palestinian national identity starting in the Ottoman period until the mid 1990s. Khalidi argues that even though the Arab communities of Palestine have always had several overlapping identities, such as family affiliations, transnational identities, local patriotism, and village, regional and religious identities, there has always been a sense of Palestinianess. He traces the beginning of a modern national consciousness back to the early 20th century. According to him, the idea of Palestine as a political entity emerged in 1908-09 when also a newspaper called al-Falastin came into view. Al-Falastin promulgated nationalist ideas over the following decades. Khalidi believes that this modern form of national consciousness has its roots in the 18th century, when Palestine was seen as a holy land under threat, something that sharpened the focus of identity. In the light of severe external threats, and borders imposed by the British, the attachment to Palestine as a political entity was reinforced and became the lynchpin on which modern Palestinian nationalism was based in the early 20th century. Yet due to the fact that the Palestinians have always been deprived of statehood and sovereignty, they lacked the tools and institutions required to spread and impose the uniform national criteria for identity. Khalidi identifies Zionism as one factor in the shaping of a Palestinian national identity, but he insists that Palestinian identity is not solely a response to Zionism. Contrary to Khalidi, Bowker (2003) is less concerned with the beginnings of a distinct Palestinian identity but rather with its development after 1948. In his book “Palestinian Refugees: Mythology, Identity and the Search for Peace”, he argues that the essence of Palestinian identity is the collective memory and mythologies of perceived rights (return and compensation), flight and dispossession, and the narratives of Palestine before the war. He further argues that it is ongoing conflict that has created much of the distinctive Palestinian identity, and attributes a great deal of importance to UNRWA in the construction of this identity, due to the Palestinian’s dependence on UNRWA relief and welfare services. According to him, the role of UNRWA goes far beyond its humanitarian responsibility; he argues that it has contributed to the Palestinians’ sense of an imagined community through the embodiment of mythologies vital to their aspirations regarding identity. Al-Husseini (2000) even argues that the ration card issued by UNRWA “has constituted an official - and often unique - piece of documentary evidence attesting to a physical link with Palestine, thereby becoming a symbol of Palestinian identity” (Al-Husseini, 2000: 52). He also observes that “while the nonpolitical character of UNRWA’s mandate remains unchanged on paper, its assistance has progressively acquired an eminently political dimension that has gradually become embedded in the Palestinian nation-building process” (Al-Husseini, 2000: 51) and attributes a great importance to UNRWA schools in this development. Shabaneh (2012) makes the same observation regarding UNRWA schools when he argues that these institutions have provided an important basis for the continuation and evolution not only of a personal Palestinian identity, but also for the reconstruction of a national identity. He illustrates how UNRWA
teachers have used the educational facilities to reconstruct national identity and to awaken a national consciousness through extracurricular activities.

Brynen’s (1989 and 1990) analysis also focuses on the role of an institution in the Palestinians’ process of identity formation. He examines the development of a Palestinian national consciousness and identity in Lebanon due to the essential role played by the PLO between 1970 and 1982. In his article “PLO Policy in Lebanon: Legacies and Lessons” (1989) he wrote:

[Through the strong presence of the PLO] Palestinians were able to institutionalize their own national consciousness, to solidify the sense of resurgent Palestinianism which had accompanied the rise of the modern Palestinian resistance movement after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. (Brynen, 1989: 52)

He argues that the initiation of guerrilla actions by the Palestinian fedda’yyin fighters from Lebanese soil revitalised a Palestinian identity in Lebanon. Hanafi and Long (2010) argue in a similar direction, writing that: “From 1969 to 1982, the PLO played a key role in promoting a collective political and national identity among the exiled Palestinians, who until then had seen themselves ‘merely’ as refugees” (Hanafi and Long, 2010: 138).

Contrary to the aforementioned authors, Peteet (2005) presents a more anthropological perspective on Palestinian identity in her work “Landscape of Hope and Despair”. Her focus is on the construction of a Palestinian identity in the diaspora and how the refugees have created a sense of place “and meaning in new spaces, using the tools of culture, memory, and militancy” (Peteet, 2005: 1). She argues that “the construction of the Palestinian refugee as a category of person and object of intervention both constrained and enabled the refugees’ practice of crafting new worlds” (Peteet, 2005: 1). Peteet puts great importance on places in the formation and reformation of the Palestinian identity, especially the refugee camps, where people from all of Palestine have met and shared their identities and experiences. Moreover, Peteet (2005) considers specific historical events as essential to the formation of identity and the collective imagination of a community, and therefore suggests “periodising” identity with the denotation to jeel (generation) or ayyam (days). Just like Peteet, Doraï’s (2006) book “Les réfugiés palestiniens du Liban : une géographie de l’exil” places great importance on the camp in the lives and identity formation of the Palestinians. For Doraï, the camp has four main functions: it is a place to live, a space for economic activity, a place of memory and the affirmation of identity, as well as a field where political and military power can be developed and exercised.

Turned towards a construction of identity in which memory plays an important role, but also turned towards the host society, as problematic as this contact may be, the camp as a living space is a “true laboratory for future Palestinian society”, according to Mohamed Kamel Doraï. Yet, the camp is also a laboratory for control and surveillance, with the presence of a variety of authorities, whether those of the hosts or those of the Palestinian political factions.

(Hanafi, 2007:6. Our own translation)³

Among the most prominent authors writing about Palestinians in Lebanon is Rosemary Sayigh. Sayigh’s many studies on the Palestinians focus mainly on their suffering (Knudsen and Hanafi, 2010). She wrote two pieces that are concerned with identity in
particular: The book “From Peasants to Revolutionaries” ([1979] 2007) and a more recent, unpublished article “Palestinian Refugee Identity/ies; Generation, Class, Region” (2011). Sayigh ([1979] 2007) writes that before expulsion, the Palestinian peasant (fellah) identified himself through his occupation, social status, way of life and his village; a way of identification that has now been overlaid by a Palestinian national consciousness. She shows how the Palestinian peasant identity has changed to become a refugee identity, which only became a national identity when Fatah launched the Palestinian revolution in 1965; the victim identity became an identity of struggle. According to Sayigh, the idea of the armed struggle and the fedda'yyin (the resistance fighters) became central to Palestinian self-identification. The Resistance has also overtaken the role of the old Palestinian elites in the definition of Palestinian identity.

While all of the works and authors discussed above have focused on the national aspect of Palestinian identity, Rougier (2007) has shown in “Everyday Jihad” that the ground is laid for other forms of identification to emerge in the camps. He explores “how a new religious ideology took place in the camp environment - a salafist jihadist one based on the literal interpretation of the sacred texts and an emulation with the first Muslim communities al-Salaf” (Rougier, 2007: 2). He outlines the path along which a Salafist Jihadist identity that strips the Palestinians of a national identity and invites the Palestinians to identify with the greater Islamic Ulema, rather than solely with the Palestinian nation, has emerged among some camp dwellers in the Ain al-Hilwah camp. Rougier concludes that a re-socialisation towards a religious identity has changed the camp environment in Ain al-Hilwah, and suggests a great part of the responsibility for such trends lays in the aforementioned Salafist groups that emerged in the camp in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He makes a strong case for the Salafists having had a great influence in islamising the camp, and in recruiting new members, where nationalism has been replaced by islamism as a mobilizing ideology (Khalili, 2007).

5.2 Researching Young Palestinians of the Fourth Generation

The anthropology of youth is characterized by its attention to the agency of young people, its concern to document not just highly visible youth cultures but the entirety of youth cultural practice, and its interest in how identities emerge in new cultural formations that creatively combine elements of global capitalism, transnationalism, and local culture.

- Bucholtz, 2002: 525

Looking at the existing literature on identity and Palestinians in Lebanon, authors have been very careful to stress that the Palestinian identity has been subject to change and that there are other foci of identity such as clan, village, Arabism and religion. Yet the centre of attention for these authors has been placed on the Palestinian identity. In my research among the young Palestinians of the fourth refugee generation in Burj al-Shamali, I experienced far more diversity, a fact that may be attributed to the specific political and socioeconomic environment and the young makeup of this refugee
generation. Some researchers who have studied this age group and generation over the past decade came to similar conclusions, as will be shown in this paragraph.

In academic literature, there has been an inclination to study war-affected and displaced children and young people from a psychological and psychiatric perspective, with a tendency to medicalise and pathologise the effects of the children’s living situations. Such studies leave only very little room to consider children’s voices and to look at them as agents, as anthropology of youth would suggest. This tendency has been very prominent in studies about Palestinian children and young people, be it in the Occupied Territories or in Arab host countries (Chatty and Hundt, 2005). Even though still modest, there is now a fairly well-established body of anthropological literature on Palestinian children and young people. Among the most important of these are the studies of Chatty (ex. 2009; 2010), who published various articles on the lives, experiences as well as agency and aspirations of children and young people in protracted refugee situations, Chatty and Hundt’s book “Children of Palestine” (2005), which is a collection of articles on the lives of children and their coping strategies in West Bank and Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, as well as Mansour’s book “Des Enfants et des Pierres: Enquête en Palestine Occupée” (1993). Research on identity among Palestinian children and young people of the fourth refugee generation is quite scarce. Such research has been conducted in Jordan by Farah (1997, 1999, 2005) and Hart (2000, 2002, 2005), in the Occupied Territories by Bisharat (1997), Elbedour, Bastien and Center (1997) and in Lebanon by Fincham (2012) and Sayigh R. (2010) among others.

Farah wrote her Ph.D thesis (1999) on the reconstruction of a Palestinian identity and popular memories in the al-Baq’a Camp in Jordan. In her article “Palestinian Children and Caregivers in Jordan” (2005) she not only shows how children have different and innovative mechanisms for coping with exile, but with regard to identity she argues that there is a discord between the former and the present refugee generations:

[T]hus children and young people are seeking a niche, a status and a role for themselves in society. This struggle for social and physical space involves the creative appropriation of multiple discourses form their milieu. Children and young people today are creatively reshaping a range of ideas, social practices and political and religious ideologies. These discourses cover Islam, nationalism and modernist visions of society. They critically engage ideas that flow from television, from NGOs, state activities and policies, as well as from their local network and their families and community. (Farah, 2005: 112)

She concludes that this very fact makes the older generations uneasy because they fear the young generations have lost their morals. This fear inclines the older generations to hold the young Palestinians even closer. My own findings among young Palestinians in Lebanon are consistent with Farah’s (2005) observation. Hart was also concerned with children and young people in Jordan. Based on his research among refugee children and young people in the Jabal Hussein camp, Hart (2002, 2005) observed that children display multiple methods of social identification. He states that the identification of being Muslim was of significance for the children, but media consumption also shaped children’s imagination of lifestyles and aspirations. As we are going to see shortly, my own findings are also consistent with this. Hart (2005) makes very clear that he does not assume that the children solely identify with a global youth culture but that one has to acknowledge new information sources as one factor of shaping identity. With regard to
plurality and multiple ways of identification, Hart (2000, 2002, 2005) argues that children in the Jabal Hussein camp in Jordan do not necessarily exclusively identify with their Palestinian identity. He writes: “In certain everyday contexts, the conformity of young people with the discourse of particular national communities is apparently achieved. However, as I show, the ‘imaginings’ of the children in Hussein camp are in no way confined to one single ‘community’” (Hart, 2002: 36). Hart shows that refugee children develop their own individual and collective identities despite the fact that their parents and grandparents, and also political leaders and journalists, would like to portray the children’s and young people’s accounts in a more singular and uniform way. He shows that even though some sentiments of belonging to the Palestinians as a political community were expressed, the children also had individual and collective aspirations going far beyond nationalism. He also detected that these children’s identities are very situational and dependent upon who is present. Hart (2002) also observes a very strong and institutionalised pressure towards nationalist determination; this manifests itself on the institutional, communal and domestic levels.

Against the backdrop of Hart’s findings on how children develop individual identities in Jordan, it is interesting to consider a study conducted by Elbedour et al. (1997) in the Occupied Territories and Israel. In their article “Identity Formation in the Shadow of Conflict: Projective Drawings by Palestinian and Israeli Arab Children from the West Bank and Gaza”, they compared the drawings of Palestinian and Israeli Arab children, and found that children who are raised with the greatest external conflict, the Palestinian children under the Occupation, not only identify most with the conflict but also with the Palestinian we-group; while children raised in relative peace, such as Arab nomad children in Israel, have a greater tendency towards individualism and individual identifications. They write that in order “to protect themselves from […] the fear of anxiety about their personal futures, children identify with their larger social, ethnic and peer groups since it gives them more directness, similarity, predictability, and closeness” (Elbedour et al. 1997: 226). The authors contest that these processes of identity formation led to the impoverishment of individual identities, since personal accomplishments remain unrecognised by the we-group. Recognition is almost solely based on engagement in the conflict and heroic martyrdom. Finally, the children in the Occupied Territories have organised their definitions of the self around participation in the conflict. In his article “Transformations of Social Identities of Refugees in the West Bank”, Bisharat (1997) focuses his attention on the collective rather than the individual aspect of identification. He argues that through displacement, a community (the Palestinians) defines itself through shared experiences, and is united through the determination of a physical return. However, as refugeehood is prolonged over generations, the community defines itself through a specific experience of life and it is united through the commitment to an abstract return. He does not believe this abstract return to be the actual return to the homeland, but the imagination of a natural society free from Israeli occupation. Birsharat (1997) compellingly argues that even though the homeland continues to be romanticized, it is now the experience of a life under occupation that shapes social identification.

With regard to Palestinian children in Lebanon, Chatty (2009) argues that, compared to other fields, Palestinian identity in Lebanon is more important for children and young people because the denial of the most basic rights serve to intensify the extreme othering of the Palestinians by the Lebanese. Serhan and Tabari (2005) argue that “although most
children have a scent knowledge of the 1948 exodus of Palestinian people, all have a
definite sense of their identity [as Palestinians], at an individual and collective level”
(Serhan and Tabari, 2005: 48). They base this argument on the observation that all of the
children know their village of origin and speak about Palestine in nostalgia. Moreover,
they observe a certain pride in the Palestinian identity, which gives the children and
young people a clear point of reference. Fincham (2012) shows how the young
Palestinians in Southern Lebanon construct their identities even though Palestinian
institutions are absent. She argues that identities are constructed through nationalist
narratives, kinship, culture and religion, which are the source of notions of
Palestinianess. According to her, these sources contribute to producing internal others
within the Palestinian nation. Her main argument is that the social cohesion of the
Palestinians is threatened through the essentialist way of constructing Palestinianess. In
her recent work, Sayigh (2010) directed her focus away from the strong unifying aspects
of the Palestinian revolution on the collective identity, towards looking at the various
expounds that a strong national identity does not imply unity among the members of a
nation, and that there are heterogeneities that were established before the exile, such as
region or village, occupation, religion, etc. and new ones such as class, city or camp
dwelling, party affiliation, and level of education. One of Sayigh’s main arguments is that
that the self-identification as Palestinians among young Palestinians is still as strong now
as it was in the 1970s. She bases this argument on interviews with refugee youth who
responded to various questions she asked about how they would present themselves in
certain situations. Replies always followed the same pattern: name, Palestinian, refugee
camp. Interestingly, my findings are consistent with Farah’s, Hart’s, Bisharat’s and
Elbedour’s et al. While their observations do not concern the young Palestinians in
Lebanon, I find less concord between my findings and studies conducted in Lebanon by
Serhan and Tabari, Fincham and Sayigh, as the following analysis will show.

NOTES

1. Tourné vers une construction identitaire où la mémoire joue un rôle important, mais tourné
aussi vers la société d’accueil si problématique que soit ce contact, le camp comme espace vivant
est un « véritable laboratoire pour la société palestinienne à venir », selon Mohamed Kamel
Doraï. Mais, le camp est aussi un laboratoire de contrôle et de surveillance avec la présence de
différentes autorités, qu’elles soient celles d’accueil ou celles des fractions politiques
palestiniennes. (Hanafi, 2007 : 6)
6. Changing Patterns in Social Identification

... [A] discord is developing between the older generations and today's children and young people. In a manner of speaking, these younger generations have nothing to show for in the present: neither do they have a future through education that will eventually contribute to their households economically and socially; nor are they part of a larger Palestinian liberation movement. Moreover, they are not the children of the Intifada, who acquired heroic stature in Palestinian society; rather they seem like their invisible unrecognized shadow across the border, strongly linked, but unable to participate or support the way they would like to.

- On Palestinian children and young people in Jordan, Farah, 2005: 111

According to UNRWA statistics from 2002, 20% of the Palestinian refugee population in Lebanon is between 9 and 18 years of age, (Serhan and Tabari, 2005) and about 50% of all Palestinian refugees are under 25 years of age (Chatty, 2009). These figures portray a highly youth-centred society. Most individuals who make up the age group between 1-25 belong to the fourth refugee generation.¹

The first refugee generation in Lebanon, the Generation of Palestine or the Generation of the Catastrophe (Jiil al-Falastin or Jiil an-Nakbah) has the memories of the homeland and the trauma of war and dispossession as a common denominator and unifying power for the imagined community (Anderson, 2006) of the Palestinians with a collective identity. The second refugee generation, the Generation of the Revolution (Jiil ath-Thawrat) has the heroic tales of the Palestinian Resistance Movement that brought the Palestinians in Lebanon even closer together and shaped the collective identity. The third refugee Generation, the Generation of the War (Jiil al-Harb), has the experiences of the war and its horrors, as well as the idea of steadfastness as a source of a collective Palestinian identity
The fourth refugee generation however, has neither a name that would mark their collectivity, nor a shared experience of heroism or outside terror. It does not have strong and defined visions of a happier future in Palestine that would bring it together. The fourth generation is certainly considered to be *jiil al-‘awdah*, (the Generation of the Return) by most Palestinians as well as non-Palestinians, and yet, taking a closer look at this generation that is growing up in a very particular political, economic, physical, technological, social and historical environment, one can observe new patterns of social identification that may clash with the older generation’s expectations, aspirations and ideas about a “proper Palestinian identity”. One may as well call the fourth refugee generation in Lebanon “the forgotten generation of forgetfulness”. The children and young people of the fourth generation are forgotten by the Palestinian authorities and by the world since the signing of the Oslo accords; they are paralysed by Lebanon’s restrictive policies and they are disconnected from the unifying experiences of the Palestinian people such as the First and Second Intifada. And while forgotten by the world, they are about to forget, because narratives and first hand information about the homeland are vanishing due to the fact that only very few Palestinians of the first refugee generation are still alive and able to transmit knowledge about Palestine (Farah, 2005). Only the institutionalised narratives remain – those that portray a very different picture of Palestine than what the children and young people see on television. Yet, neither the lack of a stark unifying narrative that would mark a collective identity in the present, nor the blurred vision of a collective future imply that the fourth generation of Palestinians in Lebanon does not have shared experiences to serve as a centre of gravity for collective identification. On the contrary, the new socio-political environment of the 21st century allows them to vividly reinterpret the meaning of Palestiniansess and to reinterpret their identity in new ways; ways that might carry more individualistic and modernist trends without posing a challenge to their loyalty towards a Palestinian national identity, as many members of the older generations may fear. Against this backdrop, one could argue calling the fourth generation “the Generation of Innovation”.

### 6.1. The ‘Umwelt’ of the Fourth Refugee Generation in Burj al-Shamali

The Burj Al-Shamali refugee camp is located on the outskirts of Tyre, a coastal city in Southern Lebanon. Most of its inhabitants came from northern Palestine and Galilee, and they are, to a large extent, Sunni Muslims. The camp is built on a hill. In the lower part of the camp, near the entrance, a significant number of families hold Lebanese citizenship. Still, they decide to stay in the camp. The road from Tyre to Burj al-Shamali is in a bad condition. It takes you through the outskirts of the coastal city, where small industries line the road. The entrance of the camp is guarded by Lebanese soldiers, armed with heavy guns and tanks, and about one hundred metres further inside the camp, armed Palestinian soldiers control the main road. Palestinian flags, pictures of Yasser Arafat saying, “you inspired in us a revolution”, and posters of various martyrs decorate the entrance. These same things are spread all over the camp, together with the images of Hamas leaders and other politicians. Burj al-Shamali has a surface of about 135,000 square metres. It was built to host 5,000 refugees, but now its population numbers approximately 19,000 inhabitants. The lower part of the camp is accessible by one navigable road. The rest of the camp can only be reached by foot, on the various narrow paths that cut
through the camp like a maze. The main road is usually very busy, and the honking and swearing of desperate drivers trying to proceed on a one-lane road in two opposite directions is the constant background noise of the camp. The houses are so densely built next to each other that there is hardly space for a green spot. Desperately overcrowded, there only remains space to stack up the houses vertically. The homes are grey and unplastered, box-like and ramshackle. The walls are covered with lettering, paintings of Palestinian emblems, and posters of martyrs alongside political propaganda. On the roof tops, Palestinian flags – green for Hamas, yellow for Fatah and black for resistance – flutter in the wind together with the laundry, exemplifying just how factional the camp actually is. The houses are built so closely together that sunlight only shimmers in feebly through the windows, and you can hear your neighbour’s every word, their children’s cries, their music boxes, TV programmes and one neighbour’s complaints about the other’s noise. The roads are dusty and full of waste and flies. Only upon entering the houses and backyards is something of the socio-economic stratification of society is apparent. Some of the houses are desperately overcrowded and in devastated and poor conditions from the inside to the outside. Yet others, especially the apartments of young families, are new or renovated. But even in the new apartments, space is a rarity and often up to seven people share one or two rooms. There is no privacy, and hardly five minutes of silence. During the hot summer months, the streets are usually quiet until twilight because the heat is unbearable. The young Palestinians of the fourth refugee generation spend almost their entire time in this environment, hardly ever leaving the camp.

The fourth refugee generation of Burj al-Shamali is growing up in a very particular political environment because the 1990s brought significant changes to the reality of the Palestinians in Lebanon. With the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1990, the fourth refugee generation in Lebanon is the first to have experienced a relatively peaceful childhood, and have never been the target of deliberate armed assaults. Yet being the post-war generation, they are the ones that are being punished for the crimes the Palestinians are said to have committed during the war, and they are therefore growing up with the post-war restrictions placed on the Palestinians by the Lebanese. Moreover, with the Gulf War in 1991 and the open support of the Palestinians for Saddam Hussein, the Arab League decided to punish them with an amendment that made the status of the refugees a national responsibility rather than an Arab one as it once was (Suleiman, 2006). This allowed Lebanon to progressively strip the Palestinians of the rights they enjoyed during the Cairo period (Knudsen, 2009). After the war, the Lebanese government once again tightened the restrictions on Palestinian refugees, to make sure they would never regain the power they once had (Brynen, 1989), but also to ensure that Palestinians do not aim to settle in Lebanon. The primary objection to this is that it would lead to tawtîn, a fear that has gained increasing prominence after Oslo. To achieve this, until recently the Palestinians were not allowed to repair the homes that had been badly damaged during the war. Moreover, Lebanon imposed tight restrictions on movement, Palestinians have been denied the right to work in 72 professions, alongside being denied access to public higher education, to public health services, social security, land or property ownership (Barake, 2008; Suleiman, 2006; Knudsen, 2009; Said, 2003). What is more, Palestinians who obtained property during the Cairo period are not able to pass this property on to their heirs (Suleiman, 2006). In August 2010, the Lebanese Parliament approved an amendment to a labour law that would grant the Palestinians the right to work in specified jobs.
without obtaining work permits. Yet Palestinians remain barred from professional and civil service occupations. Even if they find employment, they are discriminated against in terms of salary and working hours, and they are excluded from receiving social services, such as pensions or maternity leave (Baraka, 2008). In fact, this has all been done to ensure that there are no future prospects for the fourth refugee generation in Lebanon whatsoever.

5 It is not only Lebanon’s policies towards the Palestinians that leave the young generation without future prospects, but also factionalism within Palestinian society in Lebanon. With the evacuation of the PLO in 1982 and the end of the Resistance Movement, the Palestinians in Lebanon found themselves without leadership and therefore without protection or a social security network. For the young Palestinians, the end of the Resistance also means that there is no opportunity to actively take part in a heroic armed struggle to liberate their homeland, and so they are condemned to passivity. Since 1982, the Palestinians have been almost exclusively dependent on UNRWA’s services and the contributions of various NGOs and other charitable institutions. The fourth refugee generation is growing up in an environment of dependency and within the struggle of various political and religious groups that are fighting for political supremacy and representation. This leads to a highly fractioned society. This generation is also going through the increasing Islamisation of the camps (Hanafi and Lang, 2010; Rougier, 2007, Suleiman, 2006). A trend towards Islamisation is not, however, an exclusively Palestinian development, but a trend observable throughout the Muslim world since the “green threat” (Islam) took over as the constitutive other of Western identity after the “red threat” (Communism) was crushed so resoundingly in the 1980s.

6 While the Palestinians in Lebanon constituted quite a prosperous society until 1982, the community became gradually impoverished in the ensuing years, a situation that became increasingly aggravated throughout the 1990s. This can be traced back to Lebanon’s heavy post-war restrictions, alongside the Oil Crisis that led to the expulsion of Palestinian guest workers from the Gulf countries. This was fatal for the camp communities who largely depended on the remittances of Palestinians working abroad. The impoverishment of the refugee community was compounded further, and hopes of future prospects crushed for evermore, with the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 (Knudsen, 2009). Since then, financial flows of the PLO as well as international aid and UNRWA services have been redirected away from the Palestinians in Lebanon to the Occupied Territories for state building reasons (Bowker, 2003). But what is worse than impoverishment for the camp dwellers of Burj al-Shamali is that their prospect of return to their homes in a Palestinian state have been shattered. Coming from Northern Palestine and the regions of Galilee, their homes will always remain within Israel, and even if they returned to a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, they would find themselves as unwanted guests. As a mother of six children pointed out to me:

Even if we went to the West Bank or Gaza we would go from the camp and move into a tent (min al-mkhaiyyem ilal khemi). The only way not to be considered as strangers even within Palestine is when our proper villages are liberated (Mother of six children, age 37).

7 The fear that the Palestinians will remain in Lebanon has increased among the Lebanese population since Oslo, and Lebanese politics has focused more intently than ever before on avoiding a naturalisation of the Palestinians by depriving them of civil rights. This has led to a severe marginalisation of the Palestinians in Lebanon (Knudsen, 2009). This in-
between situation puts ever more pressure on the fourth refugee generation, which has already been denied a future in Palestine as well as in Lebanon, a fact that the young Palestinians are well aware of. As Suleiman (2006) writes:

Palestinians in Lebanon probably face the most uncertain fate relative to other Palestinian refugees. Furthermore, their anxiety over their fate has deepened because the peace process has reached a deadlock and whatever agreement could be reached it would not craft durable solutions based on the right of return, the legal underpinnings of which are to be found in three main bodies of law: human rights law, humanitarian law and law of nationality (Suleiman, 2006: 28).

The 1990s brought with them not only political changes, but also new technologies and satellite television (Peteet, 2005). By the mid 1990s, satellite TV had invaded almost every household in the camp. Over the past decade, the internet and mobile phones have become well established in the camp, and an essential part of life. Television has become the most significant pastime for children and young adults as well as their parents. In my host family, and I would say in most other families in Burj al-Shamali, the TV is switched on with the first person who gets up, and it is only switched off when the last person goes to bed. TVs are even installed on the rooftops to escape the stuffy rooms. For children and young people, TV and the internet have become a window to the world. They have acquired the chance to actually see Palestine, and to talk to Palestinians in Palestine. And they also greatly enjoy watching Western movies such as romances (censored versions from Saudi Arabia in the living room, and the uncensored versions under a blanket on a private laptop) or action movies, as well as Turkish series – which are criticised for showing scenes of romance and too much violence – and a wide range of other series from Syria, India and other countries. As much as these series and their influence on the community have been under fire for spoiling young people’s morals and enhancing violence, they are watched in most households, where even the youngest family members are exposed to them. The influence of this window to the outside world is quite apparent, and an Imam pointed out to me that technology is like a virus for society, because it blasphemes Islam and curses Palestinian traditions.

For the young Palestinians, TV and the internet are only one way the image of a globalised as well as wealthy Arab lifestyle enters the camps. Especially among the young men, more and more Palestinians have the opportunity to leave the camp in their free time and to take part in the bustle of a rapidly developing Lebanese society, especially in Beirut. Lebanon’s society is very transnational; many citizens have emigrated and many others are returnees. It is the case, therefore, that a global influence blended with Lebanese and sectarian cultures is quite visible and also impacts the Palestinian youth. What is more, most families in Burj al-Shamali have one or more family members who emigrated to the Gulf and other foreign places such as Europe or the United States. On the one hand, those carry images of a prosperous West back to the camps, and on the other hand, their remittance offers the refugees a chance to take part in the new trends of globalised lifestyles. All of these impressions shape the young’s imagination on life, love and romance, consumerism, fashion and the future. To combine all of these trends and impressions in their reality with the traditions of their society, as well as to live their vision of life in the restrictive and prospectless environment previously outlined requires a lot of creativity, and the results are new creolised interpretations of Palestinianess: modernism and tradition, faith and future.
6.2. The Fourth Generation’s Reinterpretation of Palestinianness: A New Collectiveness

So, I guess we are who we are for a lot of reasons. And maybe we’ll never know most of them. But even if we don’t have the power to choose where we come from, we can still choose where we go from there. We can still do things. And we can try to feel okay about them.

- Stephen Chbosky, The Perks of Being a Wallflower 2010

6.2.1. Shared Experience of a Lack of Rights in Lebanon

The following description of life in the Burj al-Shamali refugee camp is based on a gathering I had one evening in summer 2011 with six young men in their early 20s on a rooftop next to the main road of the camp:

“Today many kids leave school at 13 or 14 years old and then they sit on the scooter... they have nothing else to do, all day on the scooter, up and down and down and up...” The group laughs. “The boys here think about marriage and about travelling, but they don’t think any further.” “But what do you expect from a boy that grows up in waste...” “Here, 10-year-old boys start to work in agriculture, these boys, who work hard they just come home and sleep... but the others, the ones on the scooters, they don’t do anything, they don’t have anything to do because they don’t study... They remain in the streets and roam around.” “The houses are so small and hot. Where should the children spend time? There are so many more people in the camp than it was built for; the camp was built for 5,000 people, now there live up to 20,000 people in this camp, so tell me how should the people fit in the camp?” “There is no other place than the street, there the boys go and they learn bad things from others... when the children play at home, there is just so little space that they ‘destroy’ everything with a ball or running around for example... then the mother scolds them... a child is not comfortable in a home like this. And then eventually the nerves will explode; human beings need to breathe!” “So they end up in the street. There is a lot of violence in the street, the boys are nervous, they have too much energy, they feel useless, they are bored, they watch too many of these Turkish series at home.” “Oh yes, these Turkish series really destroy our community (‘an byakheebu mujtama’na).” “Every household has a television and the parents have no idea what their children watch.” “They all have a telephone and internet at home as well, the children see everything: violence, Western morals and so on.” “Personally, I always carry a knife. Once I got attacked, since then I always carry a knife. All boys carry knives, they need it and they like it”. I ask about the customs. “The problem is, we want to make things right, the way they should be, according to our customs. For example, I want to marry and be a good husband. But the women these days, they ask for so many things, they want everything. A nice flat, a fridge, a TV, a salon, an AC... How can a young man afford this? The salaries are so low. A home here costs 30,000 USD. How long will it take me until I get married? So I remain alone and the women remain alone as well. This is not how it should be.” “This is why many men do not want to study; first of all because you won’t
find work in Lebanon with a degree, second if you study you won’t marry until you are old, so the boys leave school and start to work at 14, and then maybe they can marry when they are 20.” “And once you find the one you want to marry, the family does not agree.” I ask about constraints. “Everything is forbidden in this camp. If a boy wants to smoke, forbidden; if he wants to drink, forbidden; if he wants to make noise, forbidden. In the end you feel like you just want to fight everything, society, rules everything... He feels ‘I want to destroy’ (beddee akhrab!)” I ask what has spoiled the society. “...everything is for free, everything is provided for. This has spoiled the society.” After two hours talking, the word Palestine has not come up once. I ask them, “You have never talked about Palestine or about the fact that you are Palestinian and this is why you suffer from all of these hardships. How come?” – “Well, maybe because even in Palestine we would have the same problems.”

In a questionnaire, 245 children and young people were asked what they wished for the most for their camp, or what they wished there to be in their camp. The question was intentionally formulated very broadly to allow creative answers that may tell about the current most important concerns of a child or a young person. The answers varied according to age group. Children from 5-12 were primarily concerned with rather unrealistic, utopian wishes such as an amusement park, a zoo, a big swimming pool or wishes that would improve their immediate state as a child, such as a playground or a football field. Usually the answers were non-gender specific. Even though there were occasional references to leaving Lebanon, it was by far not the dominant concern of the children. Even though they have already been actively indoctrinated about their Palestinian national identity by their parents and other figures and institutions, they have not as yet felt their Palestinianness as opposed to the other – the Lebanese – because for the children, there is very little interaction with the surroundings of the camp. They do know that they are Palestinians, and they know their village of origin, they are well informed about the plight of their people and they are taught to draw the Palestinian flag in nursery school. Yet for them, their national identity is not relevant in their daily life at this stage.

This is also well reflected in another observation drawn from interviews with children. Up to the age of twelve, most children would reply to the question “What are the nice things in your life?” with a simple, “Everything is nice!” (Kullshii helew!) (e.g. Ryian, age 11 and Aya, age 7). When I posed the very same question to children above 13 years, they would reply with a determined “Nothing at all!” (Walashii!) (e.g. Rim, age 13 and Layal, age 16). From the age of twelve onwards, young people start to realise that their identity as a Palestinian refugee is the source of the constraints that are imposed upon them. Their prime concern is no longer to improve the situation in the camp, and to turn the camp into a big playground, but to improve their status from being seen only as a refugee to being seen as an entire human being with rights. Hence, at around the age of twelve, there is a change in the young Palestinians’ perception of their status, and accordingly their aspirations change from a desire to change their situation to a desire to change their status. Statements such as, “I am tired of being a refugee,” or, “I want the same rights as children who live in their own country” were quite prevalent amongst the answers of young people. Words such as “security”, “rights”, “perspectives” and “education” were the leading themes in the answers of this age group. Moreover, children from 5-12 referred to themselves as individuals (“I want a playground!” (Female, age 7)). Young people increasingly referred to themselves as being part of a defined
collective and referred to this collective as “we” (“I want for the Palestinian people that we have rights ...” (Female, age 15)). This shows a sense of collectivity based on narratives of the past and the future as it is shaped by older generations, but it also shows a sense of collectivity based on shared experiences of exclusion and constraints in the present. Moreover, it illustrates recognition of a collectivity where status is determined by national identity.

Analysing focus group discussions, interviews, Facebook profiles and drawings, my research has shown that when looking at young people rather than children there is a shift in the centre of gravity of collective identification, due to a change in the shared experiences of the fourth refugee generation in comparison to former refugee generations. While the identity of the former generations was mainly shaped around the experiences of dispossession, war and suffering, the young Palestinians of today share the experience of exclusion, a lack of civil rights, and the condemnation to passivity without having the possibility of gloriously fighting for the Palestinian cause. Also, as mentioned previously, only very few members of the Generation of Palestine that would be able pass down the narratives of collective dispossession and the romantic images of Palestine are still alive. Even though these narratives of dispossession and war are still dominant in the young people’s discourses and pertinent for their collective identification, they have new, much stronger, common and unifying experiences, such as the post-war politics of exclusion and marginalisation outlined above. When asked about their lives, their problems and their worries as well as their struggles as a society, it is always their lack of rights in Lebanon that is blamed for shaping their lives and for negatively influencing the community. Long stories about a lack of prospects due to restrictive labour laws and discrimination were the major concerns in the young Palestinians’ narratives. Discrimination and a lack of prospects also shaped the feeling of Palestinians as the we-group that is different from the Lebanese. Young Palestinians hardly ever made statements like, “The problems we are facing are because we, the Palestinians, have been expelled from our homes...” as I heard from members of former generations. Young Palestinians, instead, made statements along the lines of, “The problems we are facing are because we, the Palestinians, do not have rights in Lebanon.” Quite often it was not return that was proposed as the solution for Palestinians in Lebanon, but the right to work and civil rights in general.

Almost all of the social problems that the refugees in Burj al-Shamali are facing – such as drug abuse, violence and factionalism – were nearly exclusively based on the argument that young Palestinians do not have a future due to Lebanon’s restrictive policies. Besides, while the older generations tended to explain to me that they would return to Palestine because it was their land, the young Palestinians tended to argue that they would return to Palestine because they did not have a future in Lebanon. When I asked older generations if they would go to Palestine right now, they almost all said, “Yes, even if I would have to sleep under a tree” (Female, age 42). When asking young Palestinians, they tended to think about my question for a second and then reply less determinedly with many “buts” and “maybes”. One young woman, for example, said, “Well, maybe I would go, but only if I had the guarantee that I would have the same apartment there as I have it here, and I could be sure to have this or a better job” (Female, age 22). A return to Palestine did not appear to be the most pressing solution for the young Palestinians’ problem of prospectlessness, but rather emigration to any other country. When I asked young Palestinians where they would travel if they could go anywhere, the answers were,
contrary to my expectations, hardly ever Palestine but predominantly Europe, America and, more rarely, African or Asian countries. Here we find some consistency with Bisharat (1997), who observed that among young Palestinians in the West Bank, their shared experience of occupation has shaped their collective memory, and the vision of return has changed from being a physical desire to being an abstract vision standing in for the desire of a life without occupation. For the young Palestinians in Lebanon, it is their shared experience of lacking civil rights in Lebanon that shapes their collective memory, and the solution to this problem is a change of status through gaining rights, and not necessarily return to Palestine. In fact, Palestine does not appear to be a great source of hope for young Palestinians at all, as seen in the transcript above, in which the six young Palestinians said that their problems would probably be same even if they were in Palestine.

So even though return (and especially the right to return) remains pertinent in the Palestinians’ discourse – and most young Palestinians would tell you at some point that it is their right to return home – “return” has taken on a new meaning. For young Palestinians, the vision of a physical return has somehow become blurred when compared with the older generation’s dream of a future in Palestine, and a more abstract idea of return as a life lived in dignity and with civil rights substitutes the urge for an immediate physical return the homeland.

Somehow Palestine is far for us now. Of course we claim the right of return, and even in the Qur'an it is written that it is our right to return back home. But for the children this thought is far. They just want to improve their lives and therefore they want to leave to any place that is not that far. They just want to go somewhere and take a break from the pressure. We may travel anywhere but the thought about reclaiming the land will always remain, even if we might not actually return in the end. (Female, age 34)

6.2.2. Identification with or against Lebanon and the Lebanese

My research has shown that even though the young Palestinians did stress that Lebanese policies discriminate against the Palestinians, and that those policies were the source of their misery, their attitudes towards Lebanese society were not shaped by resentment. Among the young Palestinians, I found very little or no bitterness towards the Lebanese, except for the fact that the host country refuses to grant them civil rights. Apart from this, there were many positive statements about the Lebanese. The fact that the camps have opened up over the past decade and that the Palestinians were allowed to leave the camp and to take part in Lebanon’s social life has created some sort of “we-feeling” together with the Lebanese. This view often differs from the narratives of the older generations who portray a much clearer cleavage between “us-Palestinians” and “them-Lebanese”, and more often talk about Lebanon and the Lebanese with resentment. One has to consider that the young Lebanese, just like the young Palestinians, belong to the post-war generation. A recent study by Rassi (2010) shows that the idea of permanent resettlement of the refugees in Lebanon does not trigger as much widespread public opposition among Lebanese youth as has been argued before, mainly by Khasan (1997) and Haddad (2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004). During a focus group discussion, one young Lebanese woman who is married to a Palestinian from Burj al-Shamali was present with her husband and their son. She said that she enjoyed coming to the camp every two weeks to stay with her in-laws. Their eight-year-old son also convinced me that he liked
the camp better than Beirut. Such positive attitudes in the South were heightened by the fact that during the 2006 Hezbollah-Israel war, many Lebanese found refuge in Palestinian camps. This turned the host-guest relationship upside down, and for many Lebanese it was the first time they set foot in the refugee camps (Ramadan, 2008). I found that the young Palestinians defined themselves less as opposed to their Lebanese neighbours based on ethnicity than on their religious identity. Young women often said that they wouldn’t mind marrying a Lebanese as long as he was Sunni. When I was there, a friend of mine even considered accepting the proposal of a Lebanese man who was Shi’a. However, her parents refused the proposal - based on the fact that he was Shi’a, and not because he was Lebanese. Both young men and young women said that they often befriended their Lebanese peers.

I don’t care whether my husband is Shi’a or Sunni or Palestinian or anything else but my family cares. Of course it would be difficult with a Shi’a husband because there are many differences between Sunni and Shi’a Muslims. But if he was Sunni from Lebanon or any other place, it’s okay, it’s normal. See, for friendship it is all fine. I love my Lebanese Shi’a friends. We don’t see the difference between us. (Two young women, ages 18 and 19)

Young men in particular reported enjoying going out in Beirut, “Just where the Lebanese go” (Male, age 22), and said that their relation to the Lebanese was very good and normal (‘adil). Even though most of the young men insisted on marrying Palestinian women – because this is what is expected of them – they did not mind having Lebanese women as friends or even as girlfriends. Indeed, the young Palestinians of Burj al-Shamali did not stress any major differences between themselves and the Lebanese. Looking at their Facebook profiles, young Palestinians often liked pages of regions of Lebanon, pages called “I love Lebanon,” or pages of Lebanese politicians. In many institutions for children, there is the Lebanese as well as the Palestinian flag adorning the walls. Even though most of the interviewees said that they like to mingle with the Lebanese, many of the young Palestinian women and girls said that they liked to live in the camp and that they even preferred it to the idea of living outside the camp. On the contrary, young men and boys often said that they would rather live and work outside the camp or even outside Lebanon. Consequently, even though the Lebanese somehow still are the constitutive other for the Palestinians, in many ways they have also become the significant other (Shibutani, 1955 in Elbedour et al., 1997) for young Palestinians, and they have become an audience that the young Palestinians like to please. This does not imply that the Palestinians try to adjust to the Lebanese dialect or culture, only that it is important for them to make a “good and proper” impression. One mother, whose daughter attends a Lebanese private school, explained to me before she went to the annual school feast that she would buy new clothes for her and her daughter so that they would make “a proper impression [on the Lebanese] and present the Palestinians in a good light” (Female, age 36).

6.2.3. The Muslim We or the Shi’a Other: Islamic Identity

While the image of the Lebanese as the strong constitutive other may have weakened in many ways, in terms of religious identity the Shi’a other certainly remains important in the construction of the Sunni identity of Burj al-Shamali’s children and young people. In
fact, the Islamic Sunni identity has become an increasingly pertinent part of the Palestinians’ social identity over the past two decades.

Hanafi and Long (2010) maintain there has been a power vacuum in the refugee camps since the departure of the PLO from Lebanon in 1982. There is in fact a lack of formal governance in the refugee camps. They conclude that this power vacuum has not only led to a struggle over power and representation between different parties, clientelism and factionalism in the camps, but also that people have gone back to traditional and religious morals and values as a form of governance, rather than relying on formal institutions. On the contrary Rougier (2007) traces the increasing awareness and practice of Islamic morals and values back to the arrival of Islamist groups operating and recruiting in the camps. While both of these theses may be valid in Burj al-Shamali, Hanafi and Long’s (2010) explanation seems to be more relevant than Rougier’s (2007). Yet, I believe that there are other factors that have led to an islamisation of Burj al-Shamali’s society. In Burj al-Shamali the power vacuum has not only encouraged the emergence of Islamic morals and values as means of governance; it has also facilitated Islamist Nationalist parties, namely Hamas and Islamic Jihad as well as various religious charitable institutions, in establishing a power base in the camp. Interestingly, Hamas has been operating in Burj al Shamali for eleven years and, according to some camp dwellers and Imams, the starting point of the new appreciation and intensified practice of Islam can be traced back to the year 2000. Just as Islam has become more and more important in people’s lives over the last decade, during this time Hamas has also successfully increased its power base in the camp. Now, it would be wrong to assume that society has been islamised because the majority of the population supports Hamas; this is indeed not the case. Yet Hamas’ politics in the camp has certainly contributed to an islamisation of society, because gaining traction within the political landscape of the camp also means being able to contribute to societal change. In Burj al-Shamali, there has been a clear shift in the balance of power between the parties. Until the last decade, Burj al-Shamali had been dominated by the PLO and Fatah. However, “the PLO and Fatah could no longer deliver the necessary services to the people. Therefore, they have started to try new things to improve their living conditions; this gave space for Hamas and religious groups to emerge in the camp” (Male, age 61). In fact, Hamas has taken on an attitude of actively reforming society. They offer religious lessons in people’s homes, criticise unveiled women quite publicly, and are also critical of secular NGOs for teaching children and young people Western attitudes. Rumours say that if a woman decided to wear Islamic clothes, she would be rewarded with either a set of Islamic clothes or with money. A camp dweller said, “When a part of a society decides to practice Islam more seriously, it pressures the rest of the society, and step by step also they will do the same” (Male, age 61). A quite striking indicator for this is the number of women who wear the veil in Burj al-Shamali today, compared to women in pictures taken in Burj al-Shamali ten to twenty years ago, in which almost none of the women are veiled. Hence, newfound religiosity has become a group dynamic to which Hamas has certainly given impetus, even among non-Hamas supporters. Quite remarkable, and along the same lines, is the observation of a former scout leader of a Fatah scout institution. In response to my question, “Do you teach Islam during your activities with children?” he replied:

Fatah does not teach religion but patriotism. However, over the course of the past years, we have started to teach the children some religious values during our activities [...] because religion has become more important in the
camp, especially among mothers. Hamas is teaching them religion at home. Now that religion has become more important, a mother wants to be a good Muslim and raise her child in an Islamic way, so that the society does not criticise her. Therefore, we have to keep up with this trend and also include religion in our agenda. If we did not do that, the mothers would decide to send their children to an institution that has more emphasis on religion.”

“Such as Hamas?” “Exactly, such as Hamas. (Male, age 23, former leader of a Fatah scout programme)

Similar statements were made by UNRWA teachers and secular non-party-aligned NGOs. A UNRWA teacher, for instance, stated that even though religious classes are not part of the UNRWA curriculum, she and other teachers have brought private religious schoolbooks and started to teach the children religious lessons, because Islam has become an important part of life for the refugee community. This observation is pertinent in explaining how a new religious identity has emerged, and how it is intensified through the struggle for supremacy in the camp. It also shows how the camp society’s policy of surveiller et punir (Foucault, 1994), a result of the above described power vacuum, exercises an extreme power on its subjects and contributes to the spread of new ideologies. It is particularly interesting to compare these observations to a camp dweller’s reasoning about how Islam has gained new prominence in Burj al-Shamali:

Religion has always been important for us. But back then we did not know a lot about it. We could not read and no one taught us religion. But now we can read the Qur’an. Nowadays, there are so many religious programmes on TV, we watch them and learn how Islam should be practised. This is how we learned about the right practices. (Female, age 52)

This statement is not only in clear contrast to the previously cited observations, but it is anomalous in relation to the results of the survey. In the survey, not one of the young Palestinians replied to the question about what their parents watch on TV with “religious programmes”. Moreover, it was extremely rare to see religious programmes on TV when visiting people at home. It is quite interesting to note how subtly strong ideologies can infiltrate a society without the individual actually noticing their source.

One has to be careful, however, to not see the Palestinians’ Muslim identity as novel. Indeed, Khalidi ([1997] 2010) demonstrates how religious identity has always been an important focus of identity for the Palestinians, and how it has always provided them with a source for identifying with a greater entity than the Palestinian nation – namely the Islamic Ummah. Furthermore, it is important to regard Burj al-Shamali in the greater context of the Shi’a Hezbollah-dominated Tyre, and the gradual islamisation of Southern Lebanon. Since the 2006 Hezbollah-Israel war, a new hope that Islam might be the solution for the liberation of their homeland has emerged in the refugee camps. Moreover, Hezbollah is actively islamising the South through the establishment of religious centres, charity and proselytising. The gradual islamisation of the South clearly affects how people live and interpret Islam in Burj al-Shamali. This interplay works on two different levels: First, the awareness of Islamic values has increased in accordance with the spread of Islamic values in the South, and there is identification with the Hezbollah that fights Israel. Second, a particular Sunni identity has emerged as an opposition to the increasingly strong Shi’a identity in the South. Difference between the two sects is stressed and communicated more intensely, since Shi’a Islam is practised more orthodoxy in the South. Therefore, the particularities of Sunni Islam seem to have
gained extreme pertinence as a means of maintaining boundaries between Sunni Palestinians and Shi’a Lebanese, to use Barth’s (1969) terminology.

Finally, Burj al-Shamali, Tyre and Lebanon must be regarded in a global context. The last decade has not only marked the emergence of Hamas in Burj al-Shamali’s political landscape, the arrival of various religious groups, and a “Shi’aisation” of Lebanon’s South, but also a shift in post-9/11 global politics. 9/11 was a very clear turning point in the USA’s foreign policy – from promoting democracy to promoting security and a global pathologisation of Islam. The new millennium has brought a new state enemy number one: the Islamic “terrorist” upon whom the world has declared war (be it America’s quite undefined “war on terror,” or China’s “war on the three evil forces” in order to fight separatism, religious extremism and terrorism). In this age, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, as well as many other Islamic political parties, Islamic groups, Muslim individuals who dare to question post-imperialist nation-state borders, or those who struggle for independence have been categorised as terrorists and terror organisations. In this context of external threat, Islam has gained a new dimension among its followers. On the one hand, Islam is seen as a heroic identity that resists the threat of the West and, on the other hand, a “cold resistance war” has led Islamic institutions to mushroom all over the Muslim world. This trend has not passed Burj al-Shamali by, and again has heightened the people’s sense of belonging to a greater collective - the Islamic Ummah, which constructs an imagined “us” as opposed to the imagined “they” (the West).

As a response to outside influences penetrating the camp, the older generations of Burj al-Shamali have a new tendency to directly link Islam to Palestinian culture and tradition. They see Islam as a tool for the preserving Palestinian culture from the Arab and global cultures that have entered the camp through various channels, and that now pose a perceptible threat to the Palestinian identity.

Among children and young people of Burj al-Shamali, Islam is not interpreted quite as rigidly. For young Palestinians, Islam – and especially Sunni Islam – is a very important part of their identity. And yet Islam is also very often considered to be a source of restriction. Even though young Palestinians identify strongly with Islam, they by no means consider it an exclusive identity that does not allow other forms of identification, nor one that is contradictory to their global and modern identities, as will be illustrated in the following section.

6.2.4. Identification with a Global and Arab Youth

Armed with modern technology and living in a rapidly developing post-war Lebanon, the Palestinians are not excluded from the effects of globalisation, and this is very much apparent in the camp. In focus group discussions, it became clear that foreign movies and series have a great influence on the children and young people of Burj al-Shamali. The older generations tended to have a very sceptical attitude towards such programmes, especially towards Turkish series that contain a high degree of violence and sexual references, and Western movies, which are criticised for displaying violence, but also for their free treatment of sexuality, nakedness and “loose morals”, freedom and wealth. In the eyes of the older refugee generations, such programmes pose major problems in the camp because in some ways they contradict the society’s norms and values, and in other ways they expose children and young people to different realities than what they encounter in the refugee camp.
My children watch Arab movies and series on TV. And they say, 'Mama, how come they live like that and we sit here in the camp?' Or they see how the Lebanese live, their houses and their gardens, and they say, 'We want to live like that too, mama.' (Female, age 36)

Various visits to people’s houses confirm that foreign series, movies and video games are widely consumed and that children are constantly exposed to them. Even very young children were often watching action movies and playing violent video games. One can observe that young people are quite eager to watch Western movies, and in some way they take pride in it because, according to them, watching such movies shows a certain worldliness. In conversations with young people, I found that teenagers often watch foreign movies secretly on their laptops or at a friend’s house. Foreign movies and series do indeed have a great influence on the children’s and young people’s behaviour: not only in shaping their ideas about the West, but also regarding themselves and their lives. In fact, TV constitutes a major part of children’s and young people’s lives and provides them with a second reality. Children and young people, and especially young women, spend most of their time at home in front of the TV.

“Where are the girls?” “Where should they be? At home, of course.” “All day?” “All day.” “What do they do all day?” “Nothing they just sit at home, maybe they help their mother. But in the end they spend most of their time sleeping and watching TV.” (Female, age 32)

“What do your children do all day?” “They are at home. I don’t like them to go out in the streets. They are at home, watching TV and playing with the phone.” (Two young mothers)

TV and video games have become indispensable for children and young people. They have incorporated the world of TV into their reality, and into the interpretation of their identity. This is well represented in the children’s drawings, which do not reflect the children’s lived reality at all, but rather a world they have seen on TV. The drawings show that children have a “big window” outside the walls of the camp. I made an interesting discovery in conversation with two Swiss teachers: the drawings of the Palestinian refugee children resembled almost exactly the drawings of Swiss children in the same age group. Even though Islamic symbols are spread all over the physical and social space of Burj al-Shamali – be it on the walls, flags, clothing (a majority of the women are veiled), images and pictures that decorate flats, the active celebration of Islamic holidays, the strong presence of mosques etc. – out of 30 drawings, I found only one reference to Islam. The people in the drawings were only wearing Western clothes; women were not veiled and there was no gender segregation. What is more, the houses in the drawings did not resemble in the slightest the densely packed camp where houses are cubical, with flat roofs and grey bricks that are full of scripts, Palestinian flags, and posters. The houses that the children drew show detached houses, surrounded by gardens with flowers and one or two trees. They have triangular roofs, which are very rare throughout the whole of Lebanon. What is more, except for one picture, the houses and gardens did not portray the agricultural Palestinian utopia that children would have picked up from narratives about Palestine; there are neither fields, nor olive trees, nor livestock. Furthermore, the Palestinian flag was only painted on one picture of a 13-year-old boy and none of the other drawings depicted any Palestinian symbols. This shows that television has indeed become an important factor in the shaping of the children’s realities.
On a social level, young Palestinians pick up the fashions and behaviour of young movie stars that they see on TV, and interpret these in their own creative, sometimes Islamic, ways. There are only very few young women who dress in the Abaya. Most of them wear Western clothes – skinny jeans and tight shirts, short skirts with leggings, kitsch jewellery and heavy makeup – even though they wear the hijab. Also, boys and young men like to dress in modern clothes – either in jeans and T-Shirts that show their muscles, or in suits once they grow older. From talking to young people, I found that they spend considerable amounts of money on clothes, and when I asked them in interviews what they would do with 10,000 USD, the first answer was usually, “shopping” for young men and young women alike. Boys and young men showed a tendency to pick up gestures of their heroes in action movies. They imitate the actor’s ways of talking, walking, of driving a car and so on. They move and talk in “an action-movie style,” throwing English phrases into conversation. Some boys had the same hairstyle as Rambo, others had Bob Marley scarves tied around their forehead or wrists. Bob Marley and Che Guevara T-shirts were also highly fashionable. Among young men, Islamic clothes were extremely rare, except when they went to the mosque. How the young Palestinians’ second reality (that which is shown on television and the internet) influences the children and young people of Burj al-Shamali is also obvious when looking at their Facebook profiles. As will be outlined in more detail below, the pictures young men have uploaded of themselves on their Facebook profiles have strikingly little resemblance to Palestinanness or their life in the camp. Instead, they show wealthy, fashionable young men posing in front of expensive cars or in fancy living rooms. Young Palestinian men prefer to portray themselves as modern men rather than as traditional Palestinians wearing Palestinian national symbols such as the kiffaya, as their parents would expect from them.

In conversations with some young men, I learned that most of them carried a knife with them, since one never knows when he might be attacked. This attitude was heavily criticised by older generations, and blamed on Turkish and Syrian series and action movies. In fact, Syrian series have a great influence, especially on young men. They present a very specific picture of Arab masculinity: the man as the patriarch who defends his family or his village. They portray the Arab man with a knife and gun, quite ready to kill anyone who threatens his property - one could almost call such series “auto-Orientalist”.

Movies and the internet shape ideas of how the young in the West live, and one can see how Burj al-Shamali’s youth identifies with Western youth or a wealthy Arab youth, both of which have become important reference points for Burj al-Shamali’s children and young people. This is, of course, not only a result of TV but also of the Palestinians’ integration into a flourishing and international post-war Lebanon. All of this contributes to the young Palestinian’s imaginings of beauty, love, marriage, romance, freedom, wealth and consumerism.

6.3 Multiple and Individual Identities: Facebook

We [humans] are diversely different.
- Sen, 2007: xiv

For older generations, the narratives of war, suffering and dispossession not only made up their collective memory; they also served as “glue” for internal cohesion. I found that, having been socialised in the absence of an external physical threat, young Palestinians
present themselves as a less homogenous group than the older generations. While the older generations presented quite similar discourses about their past, present and future visions, young Palestinians presented various different stories, and showed much more individuality. This is, to some extent, consistent with Elbedour’s et al. (1997) study, which posits that external threat increases internal homogeneity, and that a low degree of external conflict allows more individuality among the members of a group. Looking at children’s drawings and young people’s Facebook profiles, as well as talking to children and young Palestinians about their lives and aspirations, Palestine took up strikingly little narrative space when compared to the narratives of the older generations. The absence of threat has made room for other identities to emerge, identities that are not exclusively constructed around the conflict (Elbedour et al. 1997). Young Palestinians grow up in an environment where many reference groups - significant others - give their personal identity multiple foci and facets, as becomes apparent when looking at the Facebook profiles of young Palestinians.

In an increasingly globalised and transnational world, anthropology moved beyond its traditional sites of research a long time ago. With the strong presence of the internet and social networking sites, the definition of space and “imagined communities” (Anderson, 2006) has reached a new dimension, and a holistic description cannot but include the virtual space in its analysis any longer. In conversations with young Palestinians in their early 20s, it became apparent that the internet has not only become a source of entertainment and information, but an essential part of their social life. In a questionnaire, 52% of children and young people stated that they used Facebook. Looking at Facebook profiles, one can see how an individual tries to please a wide range of audiences and seeks individuality as well as conformity and recognition. In some respects, Facebook is used as a tool to circumvent the gaze of the camp society, and in other respects, it offers a new platform where “surveillance” (Foucault, 1975) takes on a new virtual character.

On Facebook, a person creates his or her own profile. The person presents him or herself in the way that he or she would like to be seen, because unlike other social networking sites, Facebook is not entirely anonymous and Burj al-Shamali’s society – young and older generations alike – is well linked through Facebook. Therefore, a Facebook profile is the presentation of an identity that has to comply with diverse situations and relations. Consequently, an individual creates a profile that is approved by the family, by his or her Palestinian and Lebanese friends, by international friends, by the norms of camp society and many more audiences. Since Facebook is used in various ways by the same person – as a tool to bond with other Palestinians, as a dating page, as a means to exchange ideas, as a space for freedom of expression, to share pictures and emotions etc. – the individual has to carefully weigh the gains and losses that certain traits of identity might cause in relation to certain audiences. Therefore, Facebook appears as a tool for identifying the dominant norms of a community, and as a means of seeing individuality among individuals. It is important to note that the Facebook profiles analysed here were not the profiles of Palestinian activists, but average young Palestinian camp dwellers. The results of the analysis would differ greatly if looking at the profiles of Palestinian or Islamist activists. Moreover, twenty Facebook profiles are by no means representative for the fourth generation, but they serve as a basis for reflection.
6.3.1. The Facebook Profiles of Young Women

The ten Facebook profiles of young women from Burj al-Shamali differed greatly. The young women presented themselves very differently from each other. Moreover, their profiles showed a broad mix of identifications.

The most commonly “liked” pages among young women are patriotic groups such as, “Palestine”, “Lovers of Palestine”, “The Electronic Intifada” or “The Right of Return”. Groups with religious connotations such as, “I am Muslim” or “Qur’an al Karim”, for instance, are very strongly represented, even though not on all profiles. Interestingly, there is a correlation between the frequency of liking religious groups and liking patriotic groups; when there is a strong presence of “liked” patriotic groups on a woman’s profile, there is also a strong presence of “liked” religious groups. Apart from that, the profiles show how young women identify with a wide range of other themes, causes, groups and persons by “liking” various different pages. Among those were the pages of Arab singers, movie stars, books and magazines. I found a strong presence of pages that discussed love, romance and marriage. Generally, pages of Palestinian public figures and artists such as Ghassan Kanafani, Naji al Ali or Mahmoud Darwish are “liked” quite frequently, but I found little reference to Palestinian political figures. On the contrary, and rather interestingly, there are “likes” of Lebanese political figures, namely Michel Aoun and Suleiman Frangieh. What is more, all women “like” groups that are linked to Lebanon or regions of Lebanon, such as, “I love Lebanon”, “Boys and Girls of Lebanon”, “Saida”, “Sur”. Other themes present on young women’s profiles are funny pages, Western movies, English books and magazines, make-up, fashion, Arab news channels, Western singers such as Akon, Chris Brown, Justin Bieber etc., football clubs and football players, and other celebrities.

It is interesting to observe that no theme ever made up the majority of “likes” on a young woman’s profile. Also remarkable to detect is that women were cautious not to make political statements (other than ones related to the Palestinian cause) or indeed any opinionated statements. The vast majority of pictures uploaded on the women’s profiles were downloads from the internet; only in rare cases was there more than one picture of the owner of the profile, and the women used nicknames instead of their own actual name. In some respects, this demonstrates the modesty that society requires from them; but it also reveals a certain desire for anonymity amidst fear that their Facebook profiles might be considered socially unacceptable. Young women tried to strike the perfect balance between being a pious Muslim, a firm patriot and a modern woman open to the West. It was one of their prime concerns to stress their gender identity. The strong dominance of themes of love shows what troubles the young women’s minds the most. For most unmarried women in their early twenties I talked to, unhappy love in the present or the past and marriage were the prime concerns. The most important reason for this is that they belong to a society that expects women to get married at a young age. The society is quite openly mocking and pitying of a father who has many unmarried daughters, even if they work in good positions and contribute to the household income. Therefore, in order to be respected in society, girls and young women dream of finding the “perfect match”. What is more, young women dream of romantic love as they know it from Arabic and English songs and Western movies, and their image of the perfect husband is strongly shaped by such Western movies. Additionally, marriage brings young
women a certain level of independence, a new apartment that often is a bride’s greatest pride, and great worries about a groom with limited means. The various love messages sent out via Facebook, however, do not only represent young women’s inner feelings. They are also a message to marriageable young men on the internet, sent as a means of presenting themselves as the warm and loving woman that a man supposedly dreams of. The statements of love and romance are perfectly inoffensive, in order to make sure their reputations as women of integrity are not spoiled. Apart from their national, religious and gender identity, young women also stressed their open-mindedness by “liking” various international pages.

6.3.2. The Facebook Profiles of Young Men

38 Young men present themselves as much more opinionated on their Facebook profiles than young women do. They have clear convictions that they loudly communicate. They are much less cautious about being seen as “politically correct,” and less concerned about violating any social norms. This reflects a general opinion that I heard countless times: “A boy may be wrong, but a girl is always more wrong!” (Female, age 45). Just like young women, young men also identified with a broad range of themes, causes, groups and persons by “liking” a variety of different pages.

39 Among the top “likes” are pages supporting the Palestinian cause, Palestinian cities and regions, and also religious pages, which are “liked” on all profiles. Almost as many “likes” were for the pages of Arab artists - producers, singers and actors. Most of the young men “liked” Lebanon, as well as Lebanese regions and cities. Leading themes are pages related to sport, football clubs and athletes (most of them non-Arabs), pages of Western movies (predominantly action movies) and pages about technology. I found little reference to Palestinian political figures except for Osama Hamdan and Mahmoud Abbas. Some profiles “liked” the pages of Lebanese political figures, namely Ziad Baroud, Michel Nair Aoun and Suleiman Frangieh. Interestingly, some “likes” seem completely contradictory. For instance, one young man “liked”, among others, Osama Hamdan, the White House, the Qur’an and whisky. In fact, pages of alcohol are “liked” quite often. Images downloaded from the internet often include jokes of a sexual nature, or show very scantily clad Western women. Young women predominantly download images from the internet instead of uploading their own pictures. For young men this is quite the opposite; while young women were careful not to appear on their profiles, young men happily presented themselves in creative poses in hundreds of pictures. We find snapshots of men with their circle of friends, of excursions, football games, etc. Apart from the snapshots we also find images where they are quite consciously posing for the camera. Such images rarely present the men in Palestinian or Arab clothes, and only in some instances do they wear a kiffla. More often, they wear quite fashionable Western clothes, just like the Lebanese youth. Interestingly, the camp is cut out of the men’s life in such images. They are posing in front of expensive cars and tourist sites. In fact, going through the personal images, one would hardly guess that they belong to the profile of a Palestinian camp dweller.

40 The description shows that young men do not have to be as careful as young women with regard to possible violation of the norms and morals of camp society. While for a young woman socially unacceptable behaviour leads to social exclusion, young men may even receive recognition for their bravery in opposing such norms. By liking alcohol pages or
uploading pictures of scantily clad women on their profiles, young men are addressing a very specific audience: men of a similar age. This is partly to show off their modern attitudes and experience, and partly to prove their bravery in opposing social norms.

It is particularly interesting to observe that the downloaded pictures that young men posted – images with Palestinian symbolism and patriotic messages – are in marked contrast to how the young Palestinians present themselves in pictures that they uploaded of themselves. As the abstract shows, young men prefer to cut camp life and Palestinianess out of their pictures. This huge discrepancy is particularly interesting as it shows what society expects of the men and what they actually feel like being. Society would expect a young man to have a strong national and religious identity, and this is represented in the downloaded images. On a personal level, however, they identify more with a wealthy modern world, and this is how they present themselves in their own pictures. This discrepancy appeared to be something particularly troubling for many young men I talked to. In fact, it seemed that for young men it was harder to cope with the imposed social constraints than for young women, even though they enjoyed much more freedom than their female counterparts.

The analysis of Facebook profiles has shown how plurally the young Palestinians see themselves, how many significant others they identify with, and how they try to compact all aspects of their identity into one comprehensive identity. The young people’s multiple foci of identity range from a national identity to a religious identity, an Arab identity, a global youth identity, a sports identity and a gender identity and so on. The analysis has also shown that for young Palestinians, gender identity is very important. Individuals were very creative in presenting their gender identity in different lights. So young men present their masculinity either as the wealthy young Arab, as the open minded Westerner, as the loving husband or as the strong fighter. Moreover, one can see the sense of individuality the young Palestinians have, which they try to live up to in the virtual world. Yet looking at the profiles, there appears to be a fear of stating opinions other than those relating to the Palestinian cause. Critical statements and irony are categorically absent throughout all the profiles. There seems to be a fear of individuality and, in fact, Facebook does not always prove to be a site of individuality, but one of severe self-censorship.

### 6.3.3. Children’s Multiple Foci of Identity

Multiple foci of identity and individuality also became apparent in the questionnaire and interviews with children and young adults. The children did not appear as one homogenous group of young Palestinians at all, and they all had their own creative ideas about their lives, aspirations and future plans. For some of them, Palestine and Palestinianess was a dominant topic in their storyline, but many did not even mention it once, except when specifically asked. Young children seem to consider their Palestinian refugee identity as nothing but a natural given, and they take on various other forms of identification such as the football or scout club they attend, their dream of becoming a star in Norway or anywhere else, their circle of close friends, their music group, and so on. The children stressed very different future plans that often did not quite reflect the dominant cultural norms. As an example, for girls it was very uncommon to say that they would like to become mothers and housewives. Instead, they saw themselves as doctors, physicians, decorators, and so on. Children and young people showed a great deal of
individuality in their preferences of music, TV shows and favourite games, as well as fashion, and their own personal interpretation of how to be a good Muslim or Palestinian. For instance, some very young girls decided all by themselves that they wanted to wear the veil, and some young women refused to wear the veil against the will of their families. If forced to veil, or even if deciding to veil themselves, they use it as a fashion accessory to show their individual taste. (According to my survey about 25% of the 9 to 12 year old girls wear hijab.) The young Palestinians showed a lot of resistance to imposed traditions by reinterpreting them and living them according to their own ideas, as they creatively worked around the three words that dominate every child’s life: ‘eip (shame), mamnu’ (forbidden) and haram (forbidden by the Qur’an).

6.4. Institutions as a Source of Identity

Most people are other people […] Their thoughts are someone else’s opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.

- Oscar Wilde in Sen, 2008: xv

If less external threat implies less homogeneity in a society, and therefore more individuality, it also leads to the formation of new collectives within society and therefore the creation of “internal others,” to apply Fincham’s (2012) terminology. Internal others are created on two different levels in Burj al-Shamali: on the individual level and on the collective level. First, Burj al-Shamali’s society has a very clear definition of what a good Palestinian is. Society imposes extremely strict norms and morals on its individuals, and socially unacceptable behaviour is likely to be sanctioned with social exclusion. Second, internal others are constructed with the formation of new collective identities among the camp dwellers through the “struggle over the definition of identity” of various factions and groups (Rougier, 2007: 147). As a young man said to me in an interview:

We used to be strong, as one group against Israel. Today, political reasons have divided our society. We are not strong anymore. Even families are split now. Sometimes brothers do not greet each other anymore because they support different political groups. (Male, age 19)

The following extract of my description of the camp environment gives an impression of how such a struggle over representation is carried out on the camp walls:

The walls of Burj al-Shamali’s houses are covered with lettering, scribbles, drawings and posters – some are half torn down, and others are newly put up. On the rooftops there are flags and huge posters with various messages. Raiyan and I had set out to photograph the messages on the camp walls. Taking a close look at these pictures leads to some interesting observations: patriotic messages are spread all over the camp. We find national emblems such as the Palestinian flag, but also drawings that picture the nakbah and the suffering of the Palestinians everywhere. The slogan “Inshallah, we will soon return to Palestine,” or “May 16th, the people want to return to Palestine,” are sprayed or written in huge letters over the house or camp walls. Furthermore, there is a strong presence of anti-Zionist symbols such as crossed out Stars of David and, in rare cases, the swastika. It is important to note that the pro-Palestinian symbols are much more frequent than anti-Israel or anti-Zionist symbols. The most common images we found
were the posters of martyred, mainly young men whose faces are printed in front of the al-Aqsa mosque. On some of these posters, guns are “photoshopped” onto the picture. Sometimes the life story of the deceased is written on the poster and sometimes just the year of his birth and something along the lines of, “God is merciful. He died martyred for claiming the Right of Return.” Even though these posters of the martyred carry strong patriotic and nationalistic messages, upon closer inspection it transpires that they also carry tough political messages. Each of the posters carries the emblem of a party: Fatah, Hamas or Islamic Jihad. In fact, what we find here are “branded martyred”, and the parties fully support it:

The martyred [of Marun al-Ras] died first of all for patriotic reasons, but also for political and religious reasons. It is important that people die for their father country, to raise global awareness but also that smaller children do not forget about Palestine. They have to see that people die for their country.

(Member of the Fatah Student Office)

For the parties it is important that “their people” die as martyrs in order to increase their representation in the camp. One of the martyrs, killed on May 15th, 2011, was a young man of 18. He attended the scout group at Beit Atfa l Assomoud. Fatah has put up his picture, portraying him in front of the shining al-Aqsa mosque carrying a machine gun.

Not only do the posters of the martyred carry political messages and portray the power struggle between the parties; portraits of Yasser Arafat of Fatah, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and Mahmoud Zahar can be found everywhere. Some Hamas posters also show heavily-armed resistance fighters covering their faces with the Kifayya, and read, “because of you we parted... because of you we will continue...” A poster on Islamic Jihad reads, “Jihad will bring victory”. Some walls carry the posters of one particular party, while others present posters of different parties. The division of the households according to parties is represented in the yellow (Fatah) and green (Hamas) flags that are blowing in the wind on the rooftops. Religious messages can also be found on the camp walls. Such are the shahada: “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God.” Or simple words and phrases like, “God”, “Muhammad”, “Sabhan Allah” (Holy God). What is more, there are banners reciting parts of the Qur’an. These are put up by the various religious institutions of the camp, and carry their emblems.

The struggle over supremacy in the camp is largely a struggle over defining identity, as Rougier (2007) wrote:

The battle [...] is fundamentally a battle for identity. In that sense, all the camp dwellers, even the poorest are involved in the struggle. When faced with uncertainty and vulnerability, displaced people search for something with which to identify. [...] In this perspective, mobilization entails creating identities that modify the way individuals represent and interpret their social and political universe. (Rougier, 2007: 3)

Over the past two decades a wide range of caregivers and charitable institutions have emerged in Burj al-Shamali. This trend can be traced back to the aforementioned political developments of the 1990s, when the socio-economic conditions of the Palestinians in Lebanon went from bad to worse. With the departure of the PLO and its welfare institutions, there are hardly any charitable institutions available any more, except UNRWA. Being in this desperate state and having lost faith in the organisations that formerly cared for the welfare of the Palestinians (the PLO, Fatah and UNRWA), the
refugees are quite ready to accept help from any source. With the decreasing power and influence of a strong PLO, the young no longer have a centre of gravity in their identity. Among the fourth generation, patterns of social identification are changing, new collective identities are emerging, and multiple foci of individual identities are developing, as discussed above. Looking for a new collectivity and a new individuality, and looking for a solution to their desperate state of “inbetweenness” that nationalism has so far not been able to provide, the young Palestinians have proven themselves to be highly receptive to the new ideologies, perspectives and identities which various different groups offer. Therefore charitable institutions set up by political parties, religious groups and foreign countries have mushroomed in Burj al-Shamali over the past two decades. These institutions find the young refugee generations to be a fertile ground upon which to implant new ideologies by offering new sources of identification and future perspectives. Charitable institutions find themselves working in a field where despair has supplanted the revolutionary spirit of the Palestinians. This environment has made it possible for international actors, religious groups and political parties to introduce welfare institutions and youth clubs as their “arms” in the struggle for supremacy in the political landscape of the camp. The local struggle over supremacy takes on international dimensions when looking at the international donors of the caregivers, many of whom seek to realise their strategic interests in the region rather than to improve the Palestinians’ welfare. This is how the Palestinians become the pawns in negotiations between various Arab governments and Iran and Israel, between different Lebanese parties and sects, between transnational religious groups and even between the Palestinian factions themselves.

6.4.1. Institutional actors in the Burj al-Shamali camp

The institutions in the camp do not work with but against each other. (Male, age 32)

I have identified about 30 institutions that work with children and young people in Burj al-Shamali. Most of the institutions that work with children are either loyal to or set up by a political or religious organisation in the camp. The main objective of these organisations appears to be the recruitment of children in order to make them loyal supporters in the future, rather than the introduction of projects that would really offer the children and young people future prospects. Recruiting children now means more political traction in the future.

No one in the camp will help you if you are not with these people. You will have to adopt their way of thinking, attend activities, and wear their clothes, and so on. Each organisation is looking for new members in order to increase their base. Even the NGOs are trying to get the majority, even those who are not attached to a party or other organisation. They organise activities and want a great number of children to attend. It is all about influence in the camp, so the ones responsible for the institution want to have more influence. So sometimes if one child attends several institutions, this is difficult for the children because they learn different ideologies. Each institution puts a certain ideology in the children’s heads. This leads to confusion. (Female, age 27, social worker)
Interestingly, many social workers of all institutions regretted the limited coordination and communication between each other and found it desirable to increase the dialogue between different institutions. From the perspective of the people who actually work with children on the ground, the desire for cooperation seems to be quite honest and well intentioned, while this desire is often hindered by the more powerful individuals in leading positions. One of the Imams of the Old Mosque said, “The internal hierarchies of the institutions are the problem; everyone is trying to climb the ladder, while the children are merely a tool to achieve personal goals” (Male, age 64).

The following paragraph maps the organisations and institutions that operate in Burj al-Shamali, with a focus on those interested in children. The term “organisation” will be used as a translation from the Arabic term munatima when referring to formal administrative organisations (URNWA), formal institutions of governance, political parties, religious groups and mosques. Likewise, the term “institutions” will be used as a translation from the word mu’assisat when referring to schools, collective actors working with children such as NGOs and Youth Clubs (nadii) and charitable institutions set up by parties or religious groups.

The Appendix lists all the organisations and institutions that work with children and young people and have an interest in their loyalty. The table is to be read from left to right. Actors that share a line are directly interrelated. The first column lists the international donors that support organisations and institutions listed in the same line. The second column lists the organisations that work in the camp.

The activities of organisations operating in Burj al-Shamali

I identified various organisations that work in Burj al-Shamali. These are the formal administrative organs of the camp, UNRWA, the popular committee, and the PLO office. UNRWA is responsible for the infrastructure and welfare in the camp but it has no function of governance. It provides a hospital, a school, water and electricity, as well as waste disposal services. The popular committee, on the other hand, is an organ of formal governance, even though its decision-making power is indeed marginal. The same is true for the PLO office of the camp. The PLO is greatly dominated by Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). Other members are the Palestinian People’s Party (PPP), the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF), the Arab Liberation Front (ALF), As-Sa’iqa, The Palestine Democratic Union (Fida), the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (PPSF) and The Palestinian Arab Front (PAF), while Hamas and Islamic Jihad refuse to be part of either of the organisations (Habashi, 2008). In the green box of the second column, also categorised as organizations, are the political parties that are active in the camp. Even though about a dozen Palestinian parties exist, and most of them have established offices in Burj al-Shamali, there are four parties that actively work in the camp and have an influence on children’s lives. These are Fatah, the Democratic Front, Hamas and Islamic Jihad [...] Fatah and Hamas are the two parties that are the most involved in the struggle over representation, and they are the biggest factions in the camp. While Hamas and Islamic Jihad are relatively new to the camp – they have been operating for approximately 10 years only – Fatah has the longest history in the camp, followed by the Democratic Front.

The red box of the second column lists religious groups also categorised as organisations. Hamas and Islamic Jihad are included in the category of political parties as well as the
category of religious groups, because in these cases the categories overlap. Islamic organisations are centres for studying the Qur’an, such as Beit Takfed al-Qur’an, Salafist groups and Ahbash (these organizations are transnational). All of them are relatively new to the camp (5 – 10 years). Ahbash is the newest of these organisations. According to Rougier (2007), Ahbash was introduced into Lebanon by Syria in order to weaken Salafi Islamism and the Muslim Brotherhood, which had begun threatening the Hafez Assad regime. In the camp, Ahbash is met with suspicion; some people express fear and worry, others just called them crazy. Rumours say that they talk to children in the street and ask them to join in religious lessons for small rewards. However, I have not met one child that actually studies the Qur’an with Ahbash in the camp. It appears that people mainly worry about Ahbash’s extreme interpretation of the Qur’an. Even though Ahbash does not have a lot of representation in the camp as yet, it clearly plays a role in the field of recruitment, and the camp dwellers fear that it may gain as much representation in Burj al-Shamali as it already has in refugee camps in Beirut.

Rougier (2006) considers the influence of Salafi groups in the Ain al-Helwe camp as extremely important, but my research does not show any evidence that such groups are very present in Burj al-Shamali, or that they have made a major contribution to islamising society. The same is true for the jihadist group Ansar Allah. Their presence seems to be marginal in the camp. There are small schools of religious learning such as Dar Takfedh al-Qur’an, which distance themselves from religious groupings and claim to be purely teaching the Qur’an and Hadith. One of the teachers said, “There should be no difference between Islamic groups because all Muslims are One” (Female, age 39). The three mosques of the camp are also listed as religious organizations in the red box. These are: Masjed al-qadimah (the oldest and biggest mosque in the camp), Musallah as-saghira (a small mosque at the border of the camp that was built by and for camp dwellers coming from Safa) and Masjed Ubai Ibn Kaab. The latter has only existed for five years, and although it is Hamas-affiliated it is not exclusively for Hamas members. One of the sheikhs of this mosque estimates the number of attendants to be between 50-200 people, and estimates about one third to be under the age of 18. One of the Sheikhs of the Old Mosque estimates the number of people visiting the mosque on Fridays to be around 1200, and during weekdays around 50-150 depending on the time (he says about one quarter of the attendants are under 18 years old, depending on the summer activities being offered by other institutions).

All of the above-recorded organisations have formed schools and other institutions that work with children and young adults.

Institutions and their Ideologies

Schools are listed in column three of the Appendix, and other institutions are listed in column four. The UNRWA school is the most important educational institution in the camp. It offers primary, secondary and high school education. There are three other primary and secondary schools of minor importance in the camp: Jabila, Sarafan and Falastin. The main problem of UNRWA education is the overcrowding in the classrooms – an environment that is not at all conducive to individual learning. A large number of students depend on either private tuition or tuition offered by the various institutions set up by other organisations in order to keep up with the class. Even though many of the children I interviewed said that they feared physical and verbal violence at school, the survey of over 245 children gave a positive picture overall, and the vast majority of the
children did not state a fear of going to school. However, reports of children suffering severe bodily harm at the hands of teachers are quite alarming. 20% of children and young people stated that they were beaten at school, and 38% said that they were afraid to go to school. There was an indication that boys were beaten more often than girls.

Keeping our focus briefly on the religious organizations, I found that all of them have established, in one way or the other, centres of reading and learning the Qur’an. These centres are referred to as Qur’an schools even though the reader should not imagine them as formal institutions. These lessons do not only include teaching the Qur’an; they have had to adapt to the needs of the population in order to increase their membership. Therefore, religious institutions also offer tuition, distribute food coupons or take the children for activities outside the camp. These activities are essential for the religious institutions in order to compete with other, more secular institutions working with children in the camp. In fact, with an increasing emphasis placed on Islamic values in society, religious institutions have been quite successful in recruiting children. At the mosques, the children are taught an Islamic nationalist ideology. As Rougier (2007) points out, other religious groupings such as the Salafists try to link the children’s identities to a pan-Islamic rather than a nationalist identity, and therefore they are teaching children and young people an Islamist ideology.

Being political parties and religious groups, Islamic Jihad and Hamas teach children a nationalist, Islamist and sometimes jihadist ideology. Unlike Hamas, Islamic Jihad has not established formal institutions that work with children. Hamas, however, has set up a kindergarten, a scout group, a football club and a student office. These institutions appear to be independent from Hamas but they are clearly sites of recruitment and indoctrination. Hamas is very critical towards other child welfare institutions for teaching the children “anti-Islamic” values, and for not respecting gender segregation. In order to establish a power base in Burj al-Shamali, the Democratic Front supports the NGO Najdeh, which is very active in all the refugee camps. In Burj al-Shamali, Najdeh runs only a kindergarten, which has been operating for 33 years and educates about 90 children. Those responsible for the Najdeh nursery school proudly announced that the education in their institution was purely patriotic. The Democratic Front supports two other institutions that offer the children psychological assistance, tuition and summer activities, which have been operating in the camp for 12 years. Fatah has set up by far the most formal institutions in the camp, which are: a kindergarten, two scout groups, an institution that offers support lessons, summer and after school activities and a student office. Except for the kindergarten, Fatah institutions were only set up 10-15 years ago. Fatah, like the Democratic Front, teaches the children secular nationalist ideologies. Yet there is a tendency to include religious lessons as well, if we recall the above quoted former leader of a Fatah scout programme.

In addition to all of these institutions linked to organisations that are in a constant struggle over supremacy in the camp, there are also a few institutions working with children that are not affiliated to any political or religious actor. One should not however be blinded by this fact, and must consider that the leading figures in these institutions are just as much a part of the struggle over influence and representation as the others. There is the Palestinian NGO Beit Atfal Assomoud, which runs a kindergarten, a scout programme, vocational training, tuition and summer activities, as well as musical and theatre groups, and medical services in the camp. Beit Atfal Assomoud has a clear nationalist ideology and is very keen to impose it on the children.
At the Beit Atfal Assomoud Kindergarten all the children gather to sing the national anthem every morning, this is the only time when there is absolute silence in the playground. The curriculum of the kindergarten includes one hour of lessons about Palestine every day. Not paying attention during classes about Palestine is sanctioned with verbal punishment and humiliation. Once a child was giggling when the teacher lectured about Palestine’s fauna, and the teacher said, “You are giggling while I tell you about Palestine? This means you do not love Palestine,” and she took the boy and presented him in all the other classrooms as a child who did not love Palestine. Also, the children are taken for protest marches whenever Israel launches operations against the West Bank or Gaza, then they carry black and Palestinian flags while chanting, “With our soul, with our blood, we will return to Palestine!” and walk through the camp.

Working quite closely together with Beit Atfal Assomoud is the Association al-Hola. Even though its programme is mainly for grown-ups, they provide a library for children, drama classes and summer activities. Interestingly, even though the two organisations work closely together, children’s attendance there is mutually exclusive. We also find the Association of the Palestinian People, which is however, according to a former member of the Popular Committee, barely operational. There is also the Association of the Light (Jami’at al-Nur), which helps the children with tuition. And there is the Palestinian Red Crescent, which was set up by the PLO as a hospital but is no longer operational. Nowadays, the building provides space for summer activities. As far as non-formal institutions are concerned, we can find four football clubs. Also working with children is the Swiss NGO Terre des Hommes, which is mainly concerned with child abuse and child labour in the camp.

6.4.2. Practices: Recruitment and Identification

The number of children and young people below the age of 18 in Burj al-Shamali is estimated to be around 3000 by the Head of Beit Atfal Assomoud Burj al-Shamali. Based on my survey, about 43% of them attend social institutions other than UNRWA schools and kindergartens. All of these institutions – except the UNRWA school, which has a much higher attendance, and the Qur’an schools, which usually have smaller student numbers – work with between 50-250 children each. The power struggle between different organisations is played out among the various institutions working with children. This struggle becomes evident on various levels.

What happens here if a child wants to study. They [Hamas] say, ‘Come, we will help you. But first you will have to study religion with us.’ I don’t say it is wrong to teach religion, we are all Muslim here and I fear God. But this is not how the children should be motivated to study. Religion should be a choice not a condition. Fatah is just the same. The students have to attend certain activities so that in the end they get 80 000 LL (around 60 USD) per month. So of course the children will take on their ideology. The problem is that the popular community is not doing anything to support the students – they are too far from us. So everyone tries to catch the child. I mean, there is something like the rights of the child, isn’t there? This is the same thing with the institutions that they have set up. They gather the children, and each wants the majority. So once they grow up the children will be one of them… First it is only the activities you attend, then you will have to bring more children and so on… now there are also the Salafists doing just the same thing. It is scary! The Salafists are followers of Osama Bin Laden. Now they do
not want anything of the child as yet. But they watch them, they gather them and this is how they will suddenly become stronger. They teach them a lot about jihad and about Islam and about religion. And in the end our children will follow people like Osama Bin Laden... all of these religious movements and parties they give religious lessons to the adults, and there they give them presents, or money or food, etc. The Salafists are from Saudi Arabia and they take a lot of money from Saudi Arabia. And Ahbash – for them, everything is haram. They also do the same thing as all the others with the children. In this camp there are not many institutions of Hamas – they are all in the camp al-Bas – but our children can go there as well. The biggest problem is that when one institution ‘has’ a child, the other one wants it as well and tries to convince the child to change. Also they forbid the child from going to another institution. Hamas walks in the street and talks to women who are not veiled. They will tell them, ‘If you will decide to wear the veil, come to us and we will reward you’. Salafists teach the children too much jihad. (Female, mid-thirties, mother of six children)

First, as the Appendix shows, a great number of the institutions that work with children are part of a bigger organization - such as a political party or a religious group - that aims at taking over power in the camp. Therefore, participation in an institution often requires exclusive loyalty to the organisation it is affiliated to, or indeed part of. As focus group discussions and in-depth interviews have shown, most institutions working with children are exclusive. This means that attending the activities of one institution would prevent the child from attending the activities of another.

Second, political parties, religious and secular organisations have created institutions that work with children in order to “implant” certain ideologies as a basis for recruitment. Even though they may not teach the children politics explicitly, the children gradually take on the organisation’s political philosophy. While the children’s first identification will be with the institution whose activities they attend, as they grow older the identification shifts to the organization that is behind the institution. The issue of institutions as a source of identification will be discussed in a later paragraph.

Third, organisations and institutions try to increase the number of children attending their activities by using economic rewards such as food coupons, clothes, etc. or particularly spectacular activities. If one institution offers three days camping, the other will offer five days camping. As a social worker of Beit Atfal Assomoud pointed out, this practice has led to poor families sending their children “institution-shopping” – they send their children to various institutions in order to maximise their benefit. This cannot be avoided because there is an almost categorical absence of communication between the caregivers. Focus group discussions with parents have shown that for the children it is extremely confusing to be exposed to the imposition of various different ideologies. The lack of coordination between the organisations becomes especially clear during Ramadan. Then, all organisations distribute food packages to the most disadvantaged families. Often, as a political official of Hamas pointed out, the same family receives these benefits from several different organisations due to the lack of communication.

Fourth, most organisations take advantage of the refugee’s hunger for education and either set up their own educational institutions – Hamas and Fatah, for instance, have their own kindergartens – or they offer tuition or stipendia for students. This again is a very exclusive practice. Only a child that commits to Fatah will receive aid from the Fatah Student Office. This is the same for the Hamas Student Office. Moreover, accepting such funds obliges the students to join the Student Office’s activities. The student funds appear
to be very efficient sources of recruitment. Student Offices pay students 70,000LL (ca. 50 USD) per month and demand loyalty in return. Considering the extremely bad socio-economic conditions, this sum of money is strikingly high, and often a vital source of income for students coming from poor families.

Fifth, promoting exclusivity, the organisations provide the children with symbols of identification through rituals, uniforms, songs and in some cases flags. Such practices contribute to the formation of new collective identities. The children are very quick in taking on the attitudes of their new collective and identify as a we group – a feeling which is intensified through the collective experiences the children share when attending the activities of an institution. Scout programmes are especially important for the formation of an “institutional identification”. Its corresponding uniforms and rules of conduct help to form a “mini nation”. As discussed above, growing up without future prospects and a general lack of direction, the clear, almost military structure of the scout groups gives the young Palestinians a clear position in a group, a clear goal and clear rules. It creates a very strong sense of collectivity, and is often defined as opposed to the collectivity of other scout groups – Us and They. Like most collective groups, the institutions colour such collective experiences and memories with heroic nationalist tales to which members of their institution have contributed, and the members take pride in such stories from a very young age. As can be seen from the abstract of my field notes about the “branded martyred”, the organizations are eager to show off their martyred – young men who belonged to the organisation and died whilst claiming “their right of return” – on the camp walls. I have observed children walking through the camp with me, pointing at pictures of a martyr and proudly saying, “He was one of us,” meaning their social institution.

To conclude, children identify with the institution they attend. At this age they do not link their identity to the greater organization the institution is linked to just yet: a child identifies with the Isra’ scout group and not with Hamas. But when they grow to become young adults, collective identification is carried to the political level and the young Palestinians start to identify with the institution whose organisation they attended throughout their childhood. Hence, what starts in early childhood at the level of institutions is carried on to the more political level when it comes to teenagers and young adults; then it is not scout flags anymore, but the flags of the party that are billowing on the rooftop. Nowadays, traditional loyalties based on kinship have often been substituted by loyalty to a certain party or religious group, and have subsequently split up entire families. As some interviewees stated, “Sometimes even brothers close the door into each other’s faces now” (Female, age 35).

All of the above shows a very aggressive environment of recruitment and a struggle over power and representation. It reveals that the young Palestinians are nothing but pawns in this game. Although the exclusive practices, the methods of implanting ideologies and the power struggles between the different actors are criticised here, it must be acknowledged that the social institutions are absolutely essential for the children and young people of Burj al-Shamali. As one interviewee pointed out to me: “If the institutions would not take care of the children, the camp would fall apart” (Male, age 28). The institutions offer a place to go after school or during the long summer breaks, and give the children an alternative to staying at home in overcrowded rooms or playing in the streets. Many institutions are the only possibility the children have to leave the camp once in a while – to go swimming, camping, visiting Beirut or the mountains. Most children stated that
they never leave the refugee camp except when they attend the activities of an institution. From the narratives of children, it can only be concluded that attending the activities of various institutions is much appreciated, and an absolutely essential part of their lives.

6.5. The Distance between the Former and the Fourth Generations: An Uneasy Relationship

Of the Angel of History, Walter Benjamin wrote that: “His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken to dear, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pole of debris before him grow skyward. This storm is what we call progress.”

- Walter Benjamin quoted in Anderson, 2006: 162

I used to learn about Palestine from my grandparents, now I learn about it from the TV.

- Maryam, age 11

Farah (2005) wrote that the young Palestinians’ creative reshaping of ideologies, ideas and social practices is not always observed with approval by the older generations, and that they tend to hold the young Palestinians on an even tighter leash. I made very similar observations in Burj al-Shamali, where changing patterns of social identification and a trend towards individualism and modernism are making older generations uneasy. When talking to the older generations of Burj al-Shamali, I found that they are observing the young with a watchful and worried eye. Statements such as “The society has changed from the good to the bad” (female, ca. age 50) have dominated the discourses of the first three refugee generations. Young Palestinians are coming under heavy criticism for not respecting their elders’ and society’s norms and values. Moreover, young Palestinians are criticised for having loose morals, for dropping out of school early, and for spending most of their time on the streets, where they consume drugs and alcohol and get into fights all too easily. The young are also criticised for their materialism and consumerism – especially when it comes to Western fashion products. The older generations like to compare the young Palestinians’ childhood to their own, which was dominated by fear and deprivation because of the war. Therefore, they see today’s children and young people as spoiled. They like to present their own childhood as an upbringing of high morals and deprivation, while the young generation is spoiled by outside influences and consumerism, therefore ruining camp society.

I remember that when I was a child, we used to go to bed early and take a rest. Today, children are awake all night and watch TV, or they even go out. The children are provided with all kinds of toys, Lego, cars, bicycle, dresses...
The parents buy so many toys for their children, and when the kids get used to it they only want more! In my days, we used to get presents only on the day of Eid (Muslim feast).” (Female, age 51)

Before, we played very simple games. Now the children have everything in front of them. It is bad for them, they are spoiled. We used to sit a lot together and talk, so there was love between the people. We had a simple life. There was a lot of space and there were many trees. But there was love. Now there is not love between people anymore, only distrust. (Women from the sports class)

The older generations like to stress that the camp used to be a very safe place where you could trust everyone. Now, the camp is described as an increasingly unsafe place because of the behaviour of the young Palestinians. The older generations disapprovingly observe that individualism has become a common trend among the young Palestinians, threatening group cohesion. In every conversation with older camp dwellers, I heard that children and young people had no respect any more, that they were badly influenced by foreign movies where they learned violent behaviour and loose morals, as well as foreign fashion.

The previous generation was more respectful; when we used to play with others, we used to always respect the people who are older than us. Today’s generation is less respectful! They are proud and don’t respect others. For example, when I used to see my schoolteacher I used to run away because I respect him. Today when the teacher talks to the children, they don’t listen well as if they didn’t care. (Four young men, late 20s)

When we were small, we were very respectful and we were grateful for little things. This has changed. People used to be happy... (Female, age 31)

In fact, outside influences are seen as the source of almost all the problems in the camp. The women of the sports group for instance explained to me that:

Before, boys and girls could play together – it was normal (‘adil). Now this is impossible because they watch TV and they use the Internet, so they know everything about married life and we have to fear for our daughters. So we don’t let boys and girls play together anymore. (Female, age 35)

Others observed that:

Violence comes from TV and from pressure - the pressure between people! The area of the camp is only one square kilometre and there are twenty three thousand people living here, taking into consideration that twelve years ago there were only thirteen thousand people living on the same area. So it gets very crowded on the street and there is no space for children to play. That is where the pressure comes from. (Male, late 30s)

The children see all these foreign things on TV. This is dangerous for our society because these things are anti-Islamic. Technology is like a virus for our society. (Sheikh Abu Hamza)

Earlier, a child would study, go to school, play and study again. Nowadays it has changed. Children smoke already at a very young age, these changes are because wrong values are imported through TV, mainly through Turkish and through Mexican soaps, and the internet. (Male, age 61)

Satellite television has changed the thoughts of the people in the camp. Since we have these technologies, the violence in the camp has increased. (Former member of the Popular Commitee)
The older generations see new technologies as a problem that destroys society and the morals of young people. Yet young Palestinians do not make this connection at all, and see satellite TV and new technologies as positive, and as a “normal” part of their lives:

The internet and TV have changed a lot in the way the young think. This is a good thing, it opens their horizon. (Male, age 23)

There is nothing bad about the internet and TV. It is good for the children. They learn English, for example. This is important for them in order to have a better life than their parents. (Male, age 19)

Of course there have been different changes like internet and better technology which improved our lives, also our life changed through communicating and interacting with people living outside the camp or outside Lebanon, and listening to their ambitions. (Four young men, early 20s)

What is more, even though young Palestinians do acknowledge the problems in the camp, they trace the increasing violence and insecurity back to Lebanon’s restrictive policies and their fate of having a very insecure future, rather than on the fact that their lifestyle has changed compared to the older generations. They don’t see themselves as a spoiled generation, but as a deprived generation, because they do not compare their lives to the lives of their parents, but to the lives of their Lebanese neighbours. Looking at their situation from this perspective, one certainly has to acknowledge that their lifestyle is rather modest. For young Palestinians, picking up new fashion trends and having “modern” aspirations does not mean that they do not respect their parents’ values, but that they go with the zeitgeist of the contemporary world. Young Palestinians often talked about their desire for individualism and modernism; to wear whatever they wanted, to talk to whomever they wanted, and to make their own decisions. Yet this is impossible because their parents and grandparents impose heavy restrictions on them in the name of tradition.

Throughout all my discussions with members of the older generations, the fear was manifested of foreign influences penetrating society, and resistance to such influences is increasing. For them, resistance means to going back to a more religious and traditional way of life, and the rejection of outside – mainly Western – influences. Therefore, social institutions that teach children to dance to Western music, for instance, or parents who let their daughters wear Western clothes are often heavily criticised by society. The young Palestinians’ reinterpretation of their Palestianness definitely alarms the older generations, and enhances their fears of losing Palestinian culture, and in turn the Palestinian identity. In their opinion, this would lead to the society’s most dreaded fear – tawtiin (resettlement and naturalisation in Lebanon). Therefore, the older generations and institutions in the camp desperately try to preserve the “proper” Palestinian identity and to impose it on young Palestinians.

6.5.1 Social Surveillance: Reimposition of a “Proper” Palestinian Identity

“There used to be a me,” Peter Sellers, the English actor said in a famous interview, “but I had it surgically removed. That removal is challenging enough, but no less radical is the surgical
implantations of a “real me” by others who are
determined to make us different from what we
think we are.”
- Sen, 2008: 8

The fear that young Palestinians would lose their Palestinianness, their culture and their
dedication to the Palestinian cause, as well as the fear of tawtiin, have motivated the older
refugee generations of Burj al-Shamali to impose very strict rules and norms on the
young Palestinians, whose own creative interpretation of a Palestinian identity does not
comply with the prison-like Palestinian and Islamic identity the older generations would
like to impose on them. As pointed out above, putting a new emphasis on religion is seen
as one major tool for preserving the community’s Palestinianness and high morals. The
new trend of linking Islamic values directly to Palestinian values and traditions is a
source of double constraint imposed upon the young Palestinians. Moreover, Islamic and
nationalist education is seen as an important tool for preserving Palestinianness, and in
order to work against the modern tendencies of young Palestinians, it is pushed on an
institutionalised level. In fact, parents expect schools and social institutions to teach their
children Islamic and Palestinian values.

On a social level, the young Palestinians, particularly young women, are under strict
observation, which leaves very little space for individualism. Children and young people
often said that they felt almost suffocated by the tight restrictions and the watchful eyes
of society. This statement was made by young men and young women alike. Children’s
lives are dominated by three words mamnu’ (forbidden), ‘eip (shame) and haram
(forbidden by the Qur’an) a fact that does not change much once they become young
adults. Gossip and surveillance are the sources of the young people’s lack of freedom, and
lead to severe self-censorship. The following collection of quotes illustrate this point:

One day the young women of the sports class arrived very upset, and when I
inquired about the matter they said, “People heard that you play foreign
music in the sport classes. And they started talking about what sort of dances
you might teach us. They also say that we dance in our pajamas and that this
is wrong.” Why? We are only girls... “Yes, but maybe someone will talk about
the sports class at home and a man might overhear what we are doing here
and what we wear. This might give him wrong thoughts. So everyone talks
about the sports class and asks us about it.” ... “Some of the women were
even forbidden to come here, their husbands didn’t like the idea that other
men talk about their wives.” So if we played other music, refrained from
dancing and you wore long sleeves, would that solve the problem? – They
laugh, “Of course not, people here talk because they have to talk, they have
nothing else to do. They will always find something wrong; something to
spoil your happiness.”

“People talk. When I was a small girl, I always went up and down the street
with my bicycle. I had fun. But then people started talking and asked my
father: “Why is your daughter outside all the time?” My father was ashamed
and since then I was not allowed to play in the street with my bicycle
anymore. They take away the air you breathe. (Female, age 27)

“As long as I study I rely on my parents. I don’t have any freedom I don’t
have a life. I have to do what they want, I have to ask them for money if I
want to buy clothes or if I want to go out with my friends. My friends have
left school early, now they drive cars and come and go as they please, but I
can’t because my parents insist that I go university.” (Male, age 21)
“The camp is very close and the people talk a lot. Freedom is very restricted here... Society does not give us a lot of freedom. You cannot wear what you want, or walk with whom you want, especially if he is a boy.” (Females, ages 13 and 16)

“There is too much control in this society. We do not have any freedom or privacy.” (Female, age 11)

Are you free? “No, not a lot. In fact, not at all. There is some freedom, but very little for girls. We cannot go where we want or do what we want. It’s an Arab thing but it is even worse in the camp. The people talk too much for us to be free. We may not even talk to boys. We sit all day at home. You go to school, you clean... this is our life. I can go outside the camp sometimes but I may never be late. There is no freedom because they [the family] are scared of people talking. The problem is the society not religion. The whole camp talks about you...the boys here are free. They can do whatever they want. For instance they can go to Sur, meet girls and so on, it’s normal. They are free, free, free.... Being in love here is like dying. You are not allowed to go out, or even to talk to each other. You cannot tell anyone. When I told my brother, I was not allowed to leave the house for two full years. But this summer the one I loved came up to my father and asked for my hand in marriage.” (Females, ages 17 and 18)

“You say the girls are not free, but are we? Can I marry who ever I want? No, my family will say whom I have to marry. Can I go out without my parents knowing? No, there will always be someone reporting back to them. Can I work wherever I want to? No, Lebanon will forbid it.” (Very angry young man, age 22)

While the older generations tend to portray the social situation among the young generation as disastrous, the young Palestinians paint a much more positive picture. For them, the social changes they have experienced are not as shocking as the changes are for their parents and grandparents. They include their environment in the process of giving meaning to their Palestinianness and in fact, for them, their identification with their national identity and their various individual identities are by no means in conflict with Palestinianness as the older generations see it. For the young Palestinians, the challenge lies in the task of making their interpretation of a Palestinian identity meet with their parents’ interpretation of a Palestinian identity. This mission turns out to be terribly difficult, considering the tight social grid and narrow cultural understanding of the older generations. Indeed, the task is hardly ever fulfilled. Their exposure to the older generations’ disapproval leads to frustration and discontent, as well as the desperate cry for recognition. The extent of the difficulty for a child to be recognised in camp society – where the Palestinian identity is considered an absolute “imperative status” (Barth, 1969) by the older generations – became evident in an interview with an eight-year-old Palestinian boy:

If you could travel anywhere, where would you go to? “Angola!” Really? Why Angola? “Hm, Angola or China?”China, because you want to become a Kung-Fu teacher?”“Yes that. But also in Angola and also in China, everyone looks the same. So if I went there I would look different and people would notice me, right?” (Male, age 8)

As Elbedour et at. (1997) wrote, in situations of conflict, no other achievements are appreciated by society than those related to the conflict. On a social level, no other identity but Palestinian identity, and no other achievement but the engagement in the national cause, finds recognition by the former generations of Burj al-Shamali’s society.
Many young men are convinced that the only way to really get attention and recognition from society is by heroic death as a martyr. Children and young people are reminded of this reality every day when they pass by pictures of their martyred peers in the streets. These posters of the martyred hang over their heads like the sword of Damocles. When I walked with Rayan, she always looked up to those pictures with longing and respect telling me that one day she would be one of them, and her family would be celebrated and honoured in the camp. The older generations’ nostalgia for Palestine and a traditional Palestinian identity is blocking social transformation in Burj al-Shamali, just as Seremetakis (1994) wrote: “Nostalgia […] freezes the past in such a manner as to preclude it from any capacity for social transformation in the present, preventing the present from establishing a dynamic and perceptual relationship to its history” (Seremetakis 1994: 4 quoted by Hirschkind 2006: 19). It either pushes the young Palestinians to conformity or to desperate opposition.

NOTES
1. Some of them still belong to the third refugee generation.
3. Islamic clothing worn by women that covers the whole body except the head.
4. In Burj al-Shamali wearing hijab means to cover the hair, wrists and ankles.
5. Conversation with six young men between 20 and 25 years of age, summer 2011.


7. Conclusion: Tired of being Refugees

We are tired of being refugees!
- Abdallah, age 14

“If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.”
- Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, The Leopard, quoted in Lacey, 2010: 223

The last question in the questionnaire answered by 245 children and young people was: “This is a study on the children of Burj al-Shamali, would you like to add anything?” Fourteen-year-old Abdallah wrote in huge letters “Yes, we are tired of being refugees.” Reading this, I felt that his words offer the perfect summary of the young Palestinians’ sentiments about their Palestinian refugee identity, and I can only imagine that Abdallah speaks for many other refugee children living in protracted refugee situations around the world.

This ePaper has given insight into processes of social identification on a local and on a theoretical level. On the local level, it has shown that after six decades of protracted refugeehood, patterns of social identification are changing among the young Palestinians of the fourth refugee generation, even though their identity as Palestinian refugees remains the same. The children and young people of Burj al-Shamali have reinterpreted what it means to be a Palestinian refugee, and how they have given new meanings to this imperative status identity; this process has been called identification.

Among young Palestinians in Burj al-Shamali, collective identification has changed because of the fourth generation’s shared experience of a life in Lebanon over the past two decades. Compared to older refugee generations, there is an important shift in the fourth generation’s relationship to the homeland. For young Palestinians, the return to Palestine still plays an important role in the construction of their identity, but their perception of the meaning of “return” has changed. For them, return has taken on an abstract meaning that implies a life with rights and a change in their status from being merely refugees to being human beings with rights and a nationality. Moreover, young Palestinians show a tendency to construct their Palestinian identity with rather than against the Lebanese in ethnic terms, but that they decidedly construct their religious Sunni identity as opposed to the Shi’a identity that is predominant in Southern Lebanon. Technology, globalisation and outside influences have impacted the young Palestinians’
interpretation of their identity, and they have creatively integrated such trends in their understanding of Palestinianness. In the absence of external threats, young Palestinians present themselves as less of a homogenous group than the former refugee generations, and individual identities have emerged that are no longer solely constructed around conflict. New collective identities have appeared among the young Palestinians because of the various organisations and institutions that operate in the camp. Finally, young Palestinians’ creolised interpretation of their Palestinian collective and individual identity has made the older generations uneasy. The latter try to preserve a “proper” Palestinian identity by linking Islamic values to Palestinian culture and traditions, and through strict observation and institutionalised indoctrination.

4 On a theoretical level, taking the example of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, it can be said that identity remains an indispensable concept in Social Anthropology and that we should not substitute it but supplement it with other concepts. Defining identity as unstable, multiple, contextual and situational in order to grasp its complex totality leads to confusion. Therefore, identity should be seen as a temporal condition that may be quite stable as a category but that can be interpreted in various individual ways. I have borrowed Brubaker and Cooper’s (2000) notion of identification to describe this process of giving meaning to identity. Identification should be considered as situational, contextual, relational and temporal, and in a constant state of negotiation and change - even though identity might remain the same. The case of the young Palestinians of the fourth refugee generation has illustrated this point. The young Palestinians’ identity as Palestinian refugees has remained, yet their interpretation of this identity and their identification with it have changed considerably, influenced by the specific “Umwelt” they grew up in.

5 Contrary to the fears of many Palestinians, the young Palestinians’ new interpretation of Palestinianness would not lead to a delusion of the Palestinian identity, but would in fact strengthen it. The same is true for the Lebanese who fear that granting the Palestinians civil rights in Lebanon would lead to cultural assimilation and consequently tawtiti. In fact, granting Palestinians civil rights in Lebanon would lead more to a solidification of the young Palestinians’ appreciation of their national identity than to its vanishing and assimilation into the Lebanese national identity. At this point in history, young Palestinians are just tired of being refugees, and they are tired of being rejected by their host country and their own society based on their identity or their interpretation of it. Living in a society where the Palestinian identity is imposed on children and young people by means of indoctrination and restriction, as well as living in a Lebanese host society that discriminates against them based on their identity, puts the young Palestinians in a situation where they are constantly fighting for recognition of their own understanding of their identity. Hence, to young people the Palestinian identity feels like a prison; it is seen as a source of constraints imposed upon them by Palestinians and Lebanese alike, and therefore it gradually takes on a negative connotation. Young Palestinians want to break out from this prison in order to live. This brings about a vicious cycle in which the young people’s rejection of the older generations’ interpretation of Palestinianness leads the latter to interpret what a “proper” Palestinian identity is ever more rigidly, and to force it upon the young people with even more determination. This is also true with regard to granting the Palestinians rights in Lebanon. If the Palestinian identity were the source of a certain set of rights and duties rather than discrimination, young Palestinians would gladly preserve their Palestinian identity from being
assimilated to the Lebanese. In the current state, however, the young Palestinians’ only chance of becoming “human”, using Butler’s (2004) terminology, is to become Lebanese.

Palestinian culture, and indeed any culture in the diaspora, can only survive when children and young people have a positive attitude towards it, and they see it as a virtue rather than as a hindrance. Remembering this is not only important for the Palestinians who are keen to maintain their identity in the diaspora, but also for the Lebanese who want to prevent resettlement and naturalisation. As Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa said: “If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change” (Quoted in Lacey, 2010: 223).
Bibliographie


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