

Book Reading and Discussion Guide for Students

Peteet, Julie Marie

2005 Landscape of hope and despair: Palestinian refugee camps. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

In this book, Peteet argues that while identities (in their social, cultural and political incarnations) are always formed “within larger frameworks of spatial, institutional and discursive forms of power” (2005: xiii), individuals and social groups “exercise remarkable creativity in improvising and carving out meaningful lives which then effect a transformation in those forces” (2005: 2). Specifically, she argues that Palestinians living in refugees camps in Lebanon have produced an association between territory and identity which challenges some of the core ideals of the modern nation-state system. Peteet concludes that a broad historical perspective reveals that identities shape and divert social movements even when they are themselves products of structural and disciplinary forces (2005:220-201)

This guide will help you focus your reading and discussion to understand Peteet’s analysis, and to allow you to consider the persuasiveness of her arguments.

Chapter 1

Why are Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon a special kind of social world? Why does a study of the social world of Palestinian refugees camps reveal important aspects of the relationship between place and identity in modern political systems?

Why are Palestinian refugees living in camps in Lebanon over 50 years after they experienced displacement? In what ways are refugees’ experiences of violence not limited to the events which led to their displacement from their homes? Why is the refugee camp a special (maybe unusual) kind of social world vis-a-vis global society? How did the author study this place and its social world?

Chapter 2-3

How was the Palestinian refugee as a category produced by colonial and post-colonial state formation? How was the Palestinian refugee as a category produced by bureaucratic practices and administrative regimes?

What cultural representations of ‘Palestinians’ as a social group were established by Israeli settler-colonialism? How did Palestinians come to live in camps in Lebanon? Why is the refugee camp a special (maybe unusual) kind of social world vis-a-vis global society? How did agencies as diverse as NER, UNRWA, and AFSC contribute to establishing a single coherent aid regime in for Palestinian refugees? What were the central concerns of the biopolitical aid regime? In which way did the aid regime forge ‘modern’ political subjects in refugee camps, and how did its subjects subvert or invert its intended outcomes?

Chapter 4

Why were place and territory so important to social identity formation among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon?

What practices and representations of difference and exclusion ordered the experiences of everyday life in refugee camps? In what ways were refugee camps either unusual or familiar kinds of social world vis-a-vis Palistan pre-refuge village society? Why are there measurable differences between what the camp organizers intended in their camp management policies and the new social realities that refugees created in the camps?

Chapter 5

How do changes in the spatial organization of the refugee camps indicate changes in the status of Palestinians in Lebanon? Why did militant forms of identification become socially important in refugee camps in Lebanon in the 1960s?

What kinds of social changes were brought about by greater mobility within and between refugee camps? Why did a shift towards a 'modern' militant identity for refugees transform the gender relations of refugee communities? Why did Palestinian refugees go from being seen as 'guests' to being seen as 'terrorists' in the Lebanese national imaginary? How were the borders between refugees camps and urban neighborhoods re-configured between 1985-1987? How were the differences between social identities made politically significant between 1984-1987?

Chapter 6

After the 'war of the camps' in Lebanon, how were political differences re-imagined as cultural differences in Palestinian refugee camps? Why did Palestinian refugees become both critics of nationalism and ardent supporters of an independent Palestine in the 1990s?

Why did the 'demilitarization' of the refugee camps make them more violent and less secure social spaces? How were gendered social relations re-configured again after Palestinians lost control of the refuge camps in Lebanon? How were past experiences of loss or of suffering reintegrated into post-conflict daily life? How did religious symbols of Islam come to replace nationalist symbols of Palestine in the 1990's?

Chapter 7

How does the violence of 'permanent crisis' express itself in military as well as legal form?

Why don't Palestinian refugees consider nationality and citizenship isomorphic?

Preface:

Why and under what conditions should a socio-culturally oriented social science engage in advocacy?

What does it mean to be an 'intermediary' as a scholar? What does it mean to humanize suffering? How does one respond to 'emergency' or 'crisis' when emergency and crisis are permanent conditions?