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Jordan and the Palestinians

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Jordan and the Palestinians

Jalal Al Hussein
p. 230-245

Exodus of the Palestinian Refugees

The first Arab–Israeli conflict of 1948 permanently transformed the territory and the demographics of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The conflict had started in May 1948 after the proclamation of the State of Israel, and ended in the victory of Israeli forces and the exodus of the Arab population of Palestine living within that State. According to the Economic Survey Mission, the body appointed by the UN General Assembly to find durable solutions for the issue of Palestinian refugees and displaced persons, in September 1949 their population was approximately 774,000, (i.e. more than 80% of the population that had been living in the territories now under Israeli control), 48,000 of whom (31,000 Arabs and 17,000 Jews) still live in Israel (Economic Survey Mission 1949) (fig. V.11).

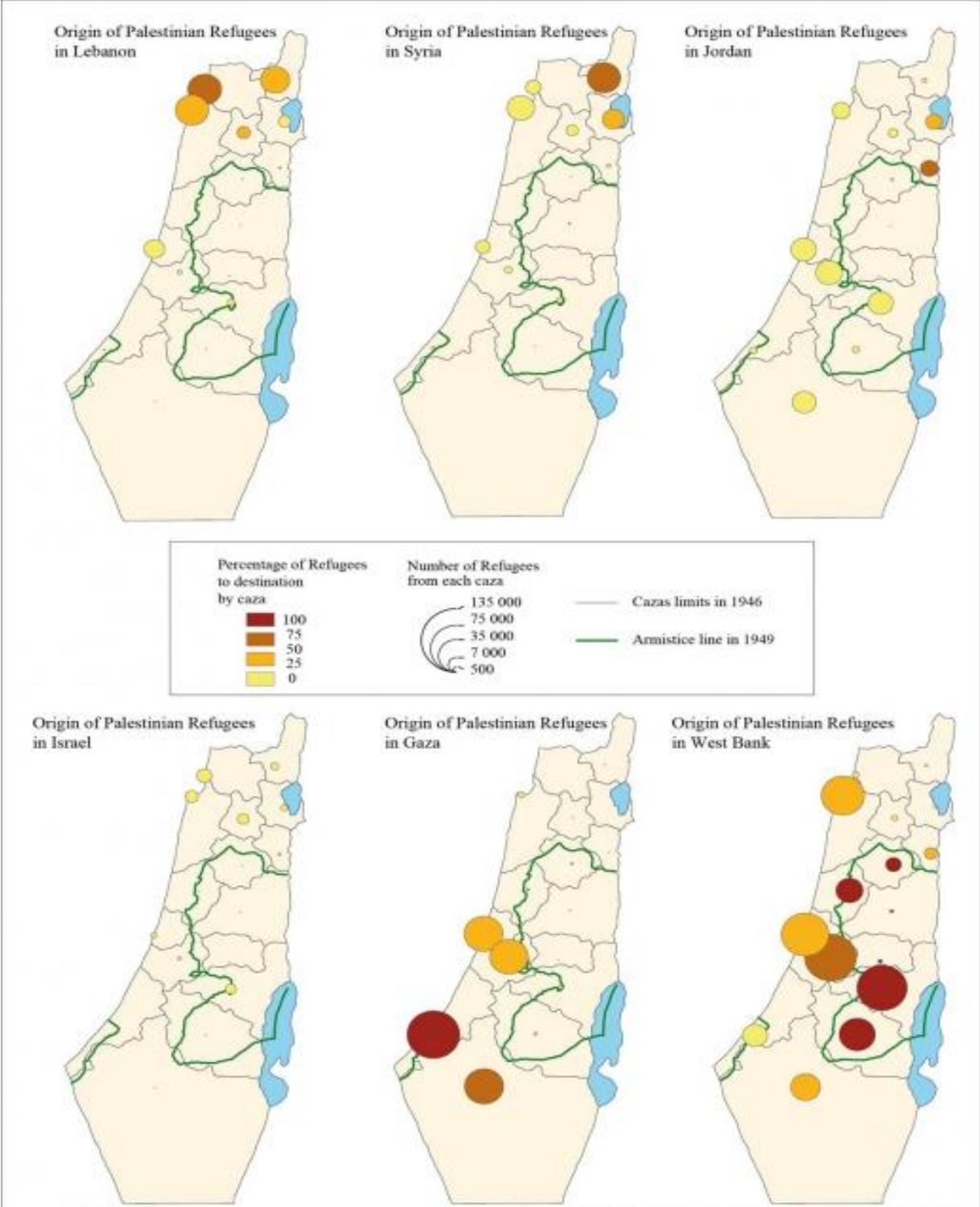
Figure V.11 — The exodus of the Palestinian Refugees in 1948



Of the 726,000 refugees outside Israel, a tenth (70,000) fled to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, whose territory was still east of the Jordan River (fig. V.13). With 280,000 refugees, the Palestinian

territories to the west of the Jordan River, later annexed to the Kingdom as the “West Bank”, comprised the largest host region. The other main host regions were the Gaza Strip (200,000), Syria (75,000), Lebanon (97,000) and Iraq (4,000) (ESM 1949) (fig. V.12).

Figure V.12 — Palestinian Refugees displaced from rural and urban areas in 1948

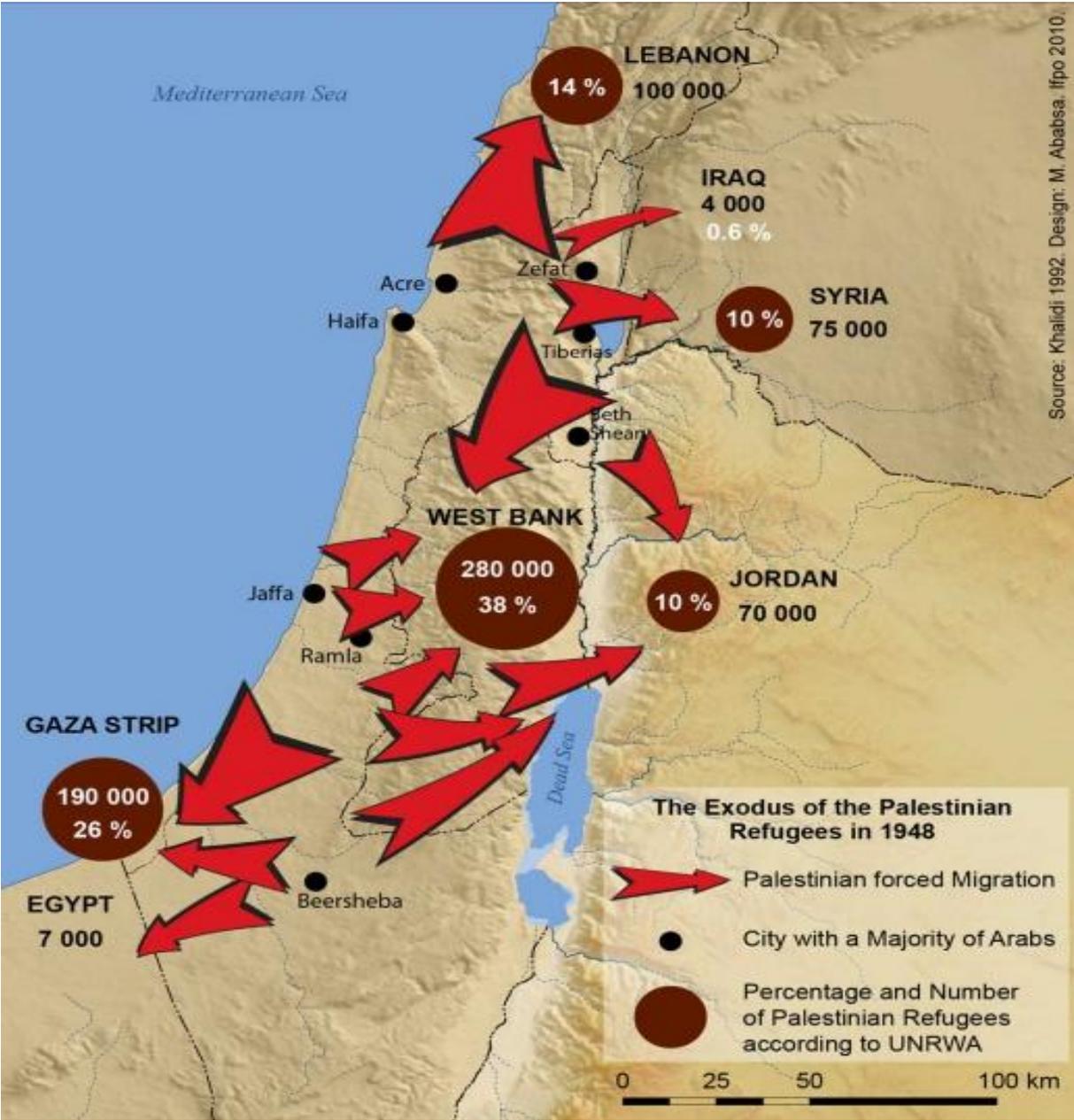


Source : UNRWA, 1951.

Design : Eric Verdeil, with Philcarto : <http://perso.club-internet.fr/philcarto>



Figure V.13 — Palestinian Refugees displaced in 1948



3According to the first census carried out by the Red Cross, the main relief agency in Transjordan until 1950, the first waves of refugees into Transjordan mainly came from the Palestinian towns of Jerusalem (around 25%), Jaffa (15%), Bisan (14%) and the twin towns of Lydda and Ramleh. The Red Cross also reports that 99.5% of the refugees were of Palestinian “nationality” and 84%

Muslims. Nearly half of those able to work were farmers and tenant farmers (47%), but there were also employees (9%) and traders (9%).

Settlement of the Refugees

4Most of the refugees settled in the main Jordanian towns (Amman, Irbid, Zarqa and Salt) and in the Jordan Valley. Despite the difficulties involved in living in exile, most of those refugees who received assistance managed to find relatively stable living quarters, while others, who had until then been forced to sleep outdoors, in caves or in various public places, were gathered together to be housed in temporary refugee camps managed jointly by the Red Cross and the Jordanian authorities to relieve the suffering of the most vulnerable homeless refugees.

5Between 1949 and May 1950, the Kingdom of Jordan was home to five of these camps; two in urban areas (Irbid and Zarqa) and three in rural areas (Sukhna, Shuna and Karama) (**fig. V.14**). The residents of these camps made up approximately 19% of the refugees registered with the Red Cross on humanitarian grounds; this proportion is similar to that of the residents living in the ten official refugee camps in Jordan today: 17%.

Figure V.14 — The Territory of Jordan in 1949 on both banks of the Jordan River



6Despite being a minority in Jordan and throughout the Middle East (one third of registered refugees), the refugees living in the camps were the most visible symbol of the humanitarian problems

endured following their exodus and of their claim of a right to return to their homes. This claim is supported by resolution 194 (III) of the UN General Assembly of December 1948 which resolves *“that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property”*.

7As of May 1950, following the annexation of the West Bank (see below), the new Kingdom of Jordan had 36 refugee camps, managed with a UN humanitarian organization created exclusively to provide assistance to Palestinian refugees in need: the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (table V.2).

Table V.2 – Jordan : The Palestine Refugees’ Main Host Country.

UNRWA Relief Claimants and Rations provided (31 August 1951)		
Country	Number of claimants	Number of rations provided
Lebanon	128 000	120 000
Syria	82 500	80 000
Jordan	485 500	430 000
Israel	27 000	30 000
Gaza	199 500	200 000
Total	922 500	860 000

Source UNRWA Director Report, 1951

Figures V.15 and V.16 show the distribution of Palestinian refugees settled within and outside the camps in the West Bank and Jordan over a fifty year period. These figures are based on the results of a comprehensive census of the refugee population registered with UNRWA in 1954, and a survey carried out by UNWRA in collaboration with the University of Geneva (Switzerland) and the University of Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium) in 2005, based on a representative sample of 2,000 refugees registered with the agency in the West Bank and 2,000 in Jordan.

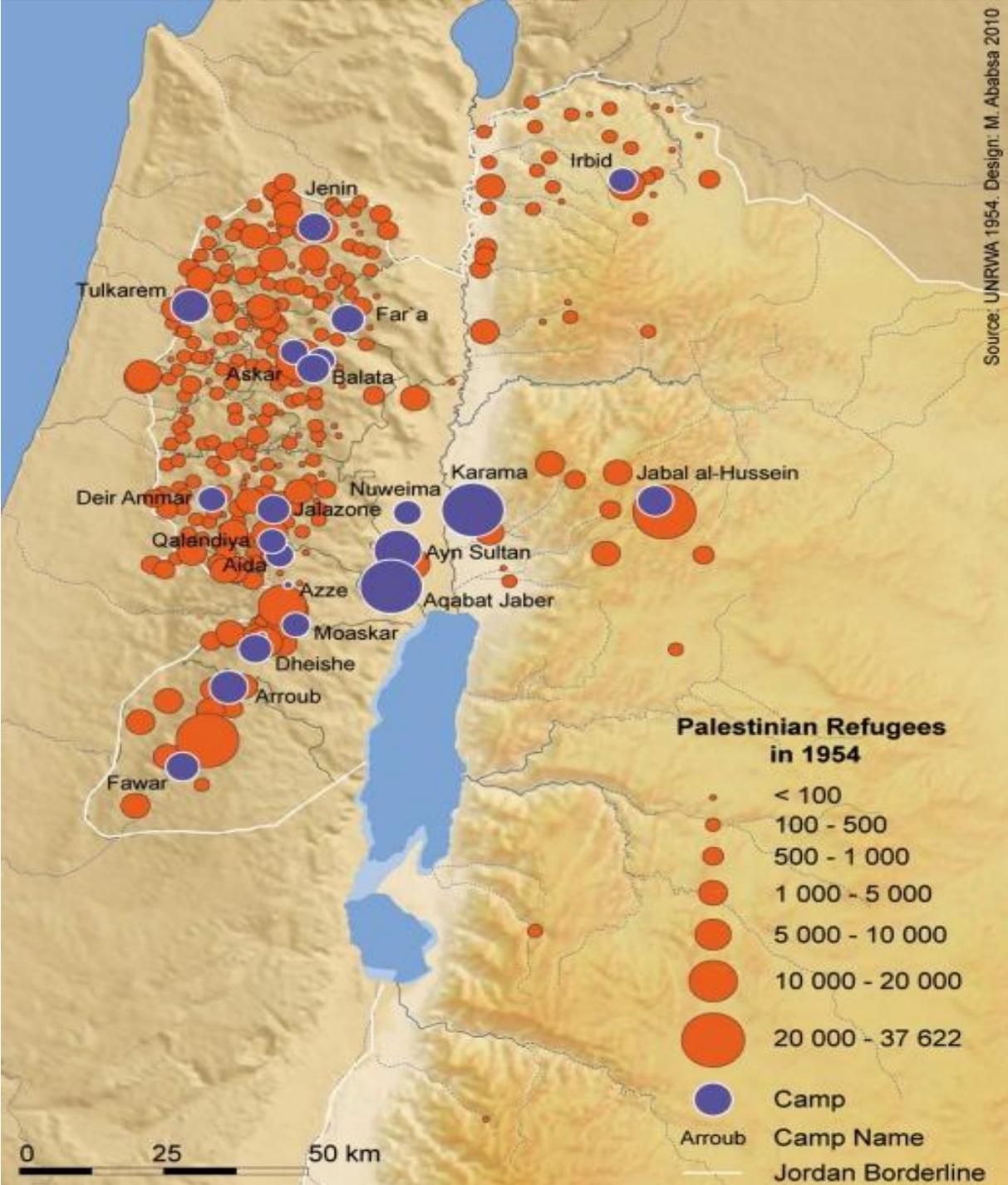
These maps highlight two major phenomena: the first being the high proportion of refugees living outside camps: 65% in the West Bank and 75% in (Trans)Jordan in 1954. This proportion increased further after 1967, and in 2010, 74.6% of the refugee population was living outside camps in the West Bank and 82.8% in Jordan, according to UNRWA figures.

The second major phenomenon is the urbanization of the West Bank and Jordan and the reduction of the number of refugees in rural areas on both banks of the Jordan River. Although rural depopulation was slower in the West Bank because Palestinian villagers remained for as long as possible on their land to defend it against Israel's colonisation policy.

The map of the West Bank is shown for comparison with that of 1954, although since 1967 the West Bank has been occupied by Israel and officially detached from Jordan, following the royal decree of 31 July 1988 that severed administrative ties between the two banks. However, close family ties between Palestinian families living on both banks of the Jordan River led to relatively large migratory flows. In this regard the Jordanian authorities have repeatedly expressed fears that the Israeli occupation of the West Bank could lead to another, possibly permanent, exodus of West Bankers to Jordan.

Myriam Ababsa

Figure V.15 — Palestine Refugees Spatial Distribution in 1954 in Jordan according to UNRWA Survey



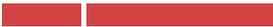
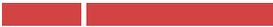
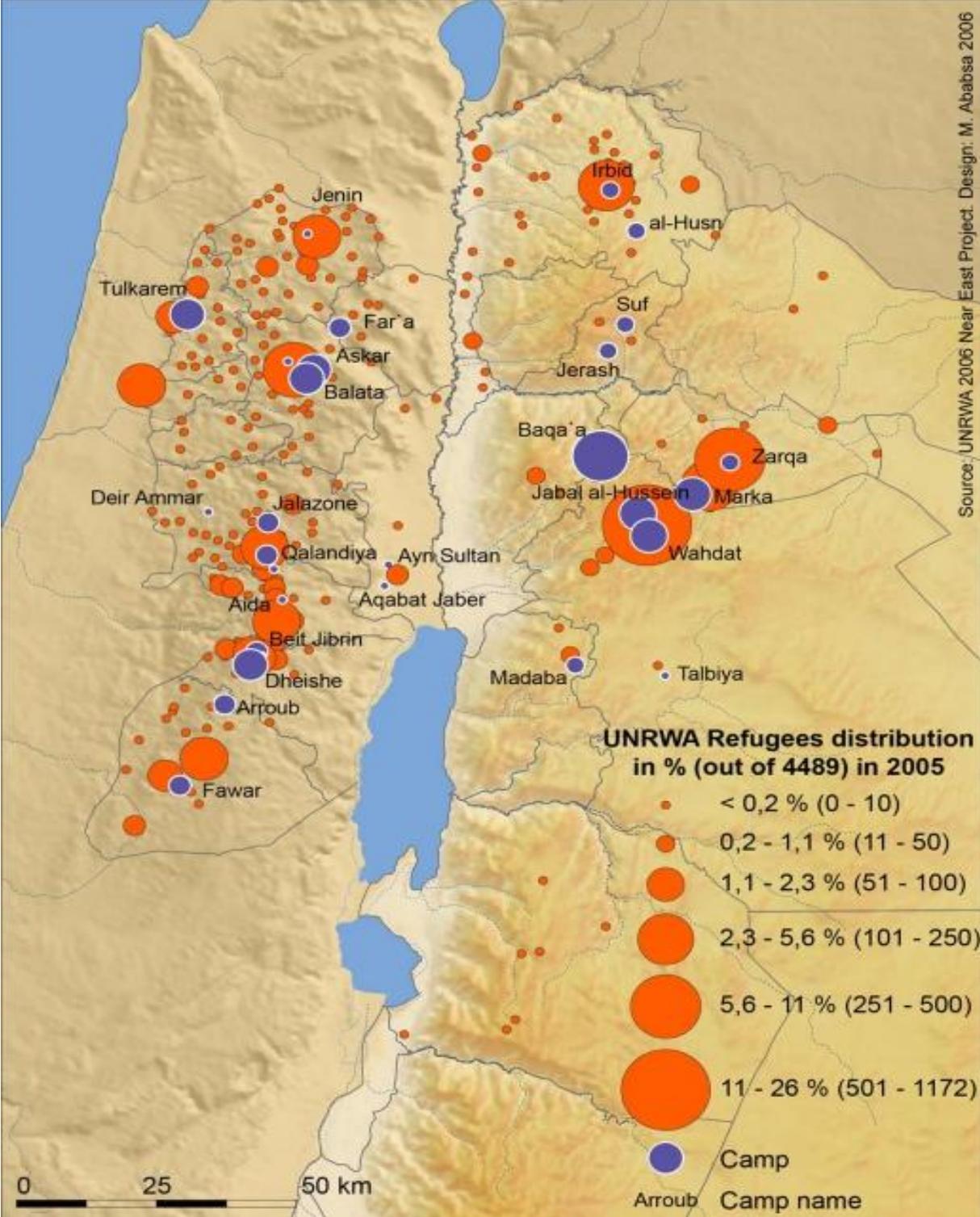


Figure V.16 — Palestine Refugees Spatial Distribution in 2005 in Jordan and the West Bank according to UNRWA 2005 Survey on 4489 refugees



8During subsequent years, the number of camps varied; those located in areas close to Israel were dismantled because of the prevailing tension and Israeli raids caused by the incessant infiltration attempts of camp inhabitants trying to return to their original homes. The appearance and organization of the camps also evolved: the tents originally used to house refugees and for camp services (schools, clinics and social services) were replaced by concrete-block dwellings. Furthermore, in the 1960s, municipal services were extended to supply the camps.

The Creation of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Unification of the Two Banks

9Despite the burden initially imposed on the local economy and administration by the influx of Palestinian refugees, their integration into the Kingdom's population of between 375,000 and 400,000 inhabitants was helped by the policy of active assimilation implemented by the Transjordanian government, which was the first step towards the integration of the "Arabs of Palestine" from Transjordan and the West Bank into one kingdom. In December 1948, the Jericho Conference brought together the Transjordanian authorities and Palestinian notables and proclaimed the Unification of Transjordan and Palestine. A series of legal measures ensued to institutionalize the union.

10In February 1949, the Kingdom took the unprecedented decision to naturalize all "Arabs of Palestine" through an amendment to the Passport Act, stipulating that "every Palestinian Arab with Palestinian nationality may obtain a passport". In April 1949, King Abdullah I took on the title of King of the "Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan." Finally, in December 1949, whereas a royal decree brought the social elites from the West Bank of the Jordan

River under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior, a new law confirmed the right of the “Arabs of Palestine” to acquire Jordanian nationality. It also allowed refugees from both banks to vote in the parliamentary elections of April 1950, and it set out the rights and duties of all Jordanian citizens. By 1949, members of the West Bank intelligentsia were regularly appointed to ministerial posts and other important positions in the Jordanian government. This naturalization of Palestinian refugees was intended to be a temporary measure, until the Arab armies regained the lost land and guaranteed the return of refugees to their homes, if they so wished.

¹¹Following the parliamentary elections of April 11, 1950, a parliament was created, comprising 40 seats: 20 seats were assigned to elected deputies from the East Bank of the Jordan River (formerly Transjordan) and 20 seats were allocated to elected deputies from the West Bank, now called “Diffa Gharbia” West Bank under a royal decree dated 1 March 1950. The Upper House comprised 20 members selected by the King: twelve Jordanians from the East Bank and eight from the West Bank. On 24 April 1950, parliament officially declared the Unification of the Two Banks and in September of the same year the *dinar* was proclaimed the sole official currency in the country.

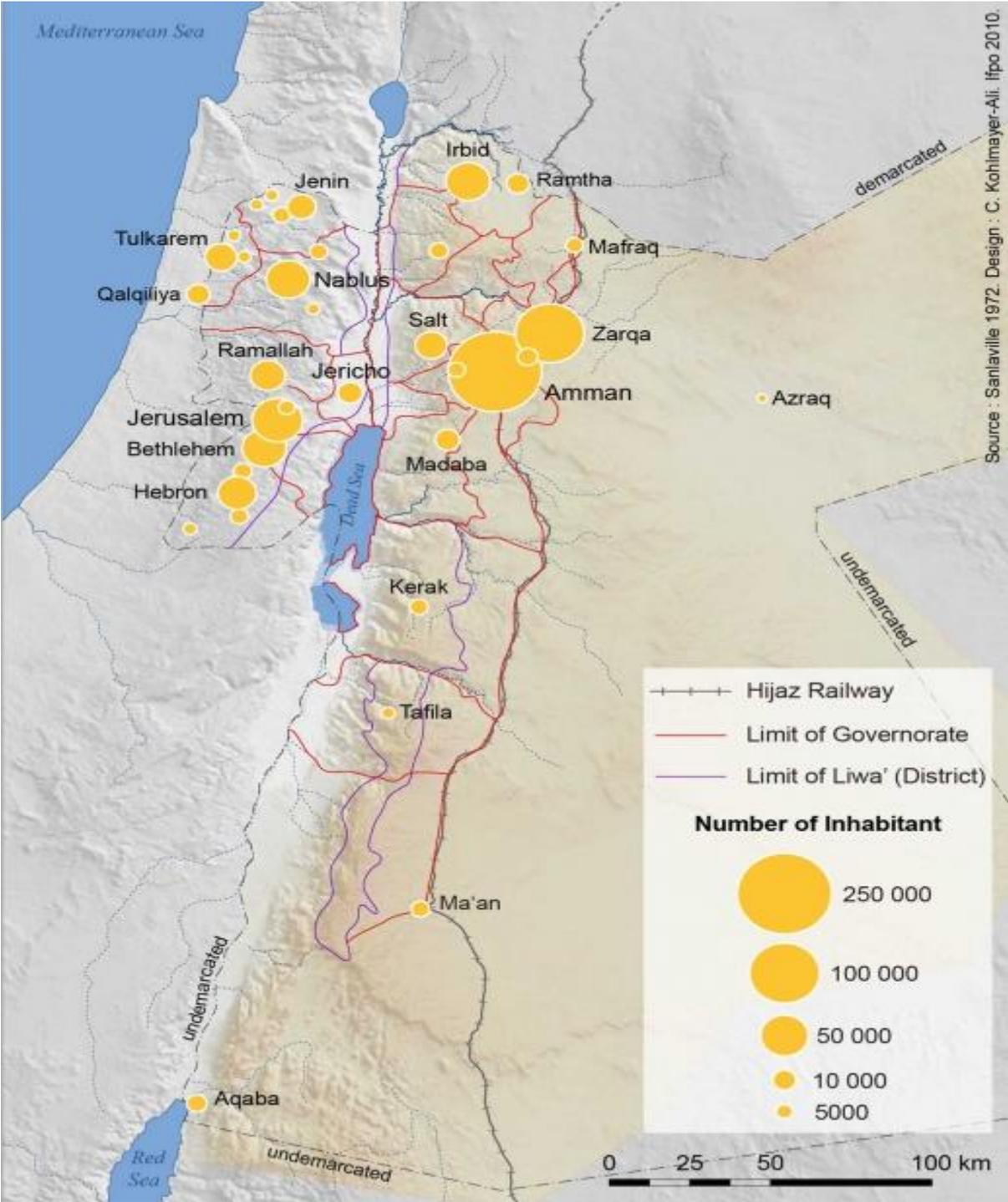
¹²In February 1954, Jordanian law finalised regularizing the status of Palestinians living in Jordan: Paragraph 2 of Article 3 of the Nationality Act states that any person of Palestinian nationality prior to 15 May 1948, with the exception of Jews, residing in the Kingdom between 20 December 1949 and 16 February 1954 shall be considered a Jordanian national. A number of additional institutional measures were implemented to ensure the integration of Palestinian refugees. The Jordanian parliament enacted a new constitution in December 1952, promoting the

equality of all Jordanians before the law (with equal opportunities), regardless of their race, language or religion. This constitution, still in force today, liberalized the Jordanian political system by making the government and its ministers accountable to parliament.

The Challenges of Integration

¹³Following the Unification of the Two Banks, the Kingdom of Jordan and its capital Amman grew in size with the addition of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem: a territory 16 times smaller (5,640 km²) than Transjordan (89,342 km²) but with nearly twice the population: in 1949, the West Bank had approximately 740,000 inhabitants, including some 460,000 original West Bankers and 280,000 refugees, compared to about 470,000 inhabitants on the east bank, including 70,000 refugees. In 1949–1950, the Kingdom was home to over 1.2 million inhabitants; three times more than the population of Transjordan before the 1948 conflict, two thirds of whom were of Palestinian origin (fig. V.14 and V.17).

Figure V.17 — Jordan Main Cities in 1961



14 With the Unification of the Two Banks came many challenges for the kingdom. At the administrative level, two quite different legal systems had to be integrated: one a legacy of the Ottoman system (Transjordan) and one inherited from the British system (the West Bank). The political challenge concerned guaranteeing the allegiance to the Hashemite crown of the population of Palestinian origin, be they West Bankers or Palestinian refugees. This was of particular concern regarding refugees who had become Jordanian citizens but for whom the Jordanian authorities continued to support their claims of a 'right of return' to their original homes, in what had become Israel.

15 From an economic point of view, the influx of refugees increased demographic pressure on agricultural land: the population density per unit of cultivated land rose from 80 to 107 in the East Bank and from 200 to 580 in the West Bank (UNRWA 1951, p. 12).

16 The annexation of the West Bank and the naturalization of its inhabitants as well as of Palestinian refugees was a vehicle for political liberalization. It also accelerated the Kingdom's economic development.

17 Public investment favoured the East Bank, whose transportation system, agriculture, industry and services underwent significant development between 1950 and 1960, when a great many people migrated from the West Bank to the East Bank, thus reversing the demographic balance between the two banks. At the time of the unification of the two banks, the West Bank comprised about 60% of the Kingdom's population. However, the 1961 census indicated that the East Bank had become home to 53% of the total population. The capital, Amman, received most of this wave of migration and became the heart of Jordan's booming economy. From a population of 60,000 persons in May 1948, the city

experienced annual growth rates of up to 14.4% in the 1970s, reaching 330,000 in May 1967, then 624,000 in 1979 and 2,3 million in 2009 (GAM 2010).

UNRWA and its Socio-Economic Impact

¹⁸The work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Refugees from Palestine in the Near East (UNRWA) has been crucial to the socio-economic integration of refugees. UNRWA replaced the Red Cross organizations in May 1950. In cooperation with local authorities (in particular the Jordanian Ministry of Refugee Affairs) it was mandated to promote the socio-economic integration of refugees in need (about 85% of refugees) and their descendants ('the refugees of Palestine'). The Agency provides for their basic needs in the fields of compulsory pre-secondary education, vocational training, health care, relief and social services, both within the camps and elsewhere. Although UNWRA's economic reintegration projects (especially in the Jordan Valley and Wadi Zarka) consistently failed from the mid-1950s, partly because of opposition from refugees who considered these projects as a way to discourage them from claiming their "right of return", its services proved essential to the survival of the first generation of refugees and to the socio-economic empowerment of subsequent generations.

¹⁹UNRWA's role also proved crucial during two humanitarian crises that struck Jordan. The first one was following the Six Day War of 1967, when some 440,000 people from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip took refuge in Jordan: about 240,000 were displaced for the first time and about 190,000 were refugees who had already been displaced in 1948. Under Recommendation

2252 (ES-V) of 4 July 1967, in coordination with the Jordanian authorities, UNRWA also assisted 240,000 non-refugee displaced persons who were not registered on its lists. Nine new temporary camps, called “emergency camps” were set up on Jordanian territory to house the poorest of the displaced refugees from 1948 and the other refugees. Seven of the emergency camps were managed jointly by UNRWA and the government. These new camps were in addition to those established in the 1950s. The second crisis was during the first Gulf conflict of 1990–1991, when some 250,000 Jordanians of Palestinian origin, many of whom had lived in Kuwait for several decades, were expelled to Jordan in retaliation for the PLO’s policy in support of Iraq during its invasion of Kuwait in 1989. For these new arrivals, the chance of obtaining Jordanian citizenship and the aid provided by UNRWA to those most vulnerable, were invaluable for their social and economic rehabilitation (fig. V.18, tables V.3 and V.4).

Table V.3 – Demographic growth of Palestinian Refugees in Host Countries, according to UNRWA.

	1950	1970	1990	2000	2009
Jordan	506,200	506,038	799,724	1,288,197	1,983,733 (341,494 in the 10 official camps)
Lebanon	127,600	175,958	302,049	376,472	425,640 (226,533 in the 10 official camps)
Syria	82,194	158,717	280,731	383,199	472,109 (127,8310 in the 10 official camps)
West Bank (1)	-	272,692	414,298	583,009	778,993 (197,763 in the 10 official camps)
Gaza Strip	198,227	311,814	496,339	824,622	1,106,195 (502,747 in the 10 official camps)
TOTAL	914,221 (2)	1,425,219	2,422,514	3,737,494	4,766,670 (1,396,368 in the 10 official camps)

(1) Until 1967, the West Bank was part of Unrwa operational zone in Jordan.

(2) This figure excludes the 45,800 persons who received relief in Israel until June 1952.

Source : UNRWA Director Report (1950) and yearly Commissioner General Report, several years.

Table V.4 – Camps of Jordan, main characteristics according to UNRWA sources.1

CAMP	POPULATION (2007)*	INITIAL POP.*	AREA (dunums) */**	DENSITIES*
<i>1940s-1950s</i>				
Zarqa (1949)	18,528	8,000	180 190/183	103
Irbid (1950)	24,833	4,000	244 219/234	102
Jabal al-Hussein (Amman-1952)	29,529	8,000	421 338/445	70
Amman New Camp (“Wihdat”, Amman - 1955)	50,061	5,000	488 477/479	103
<i>1960’s emergency camp</i>				
Souf (Jerash - 1967)	21,900 (20,530 registered with UNRWA (reg.))	?	500 596/535	44
Al-Talbieh * (Amman - 1968)	9,000 (6,107 reg.)	5,000	130 133/133	69
Baqaa (Balqa -1968)	90,953	26,000	1400 1896/1435	65
Husn (“Azm-Al-Mufti”, Irbid - 1968)	26,965 (20,988 reg.)	12,500	774 758/758	34
Jerash (“Gaza” – Jerash - 1968)	27,600 (22,000 reg.)	11,500	750 507/531	37
Marka (“Hitteen”, Zarqa - 1968)	62,379 (44,879 reg.)	15,000	917 894/894	68

Source: * <http://www.un.org/unrwa/refugees/jordan.html> (figures as of 31 March 2007).

Source : ** <http://www.dpa.gov.jo/menucamps.htm/> DPA (2004).

The Severance of Administrative Ties to the West Bank and its Implications (1988)

20 Following the defeat of the Arab armies by Israel during the Six Day War in June 1967, the Kingdom of Jordan lost full sovereignty over the West Bank. The area under Jordan's jurisdiction was now limited to the east bank of the Jordan River, thus reverting to its pre-1948 boundaries. However, Jordan's legal, political and administrative ties with the West Bank were not severed. Israel opted for a policy of normalization with its neighbour, and concentrated on handling issues of internal security and border security, leaving Jordan responsible for civil administrative affairs, as well as trade between the two banks (this policy was called "open bridges"). West Bankers were still considered full citizens of the Jordanian State and retained the right to vote in the general and municipal elections of 1972 and 1978. Half the seats in the Jordanian Parliament were still held by deputies from the West Bank.

21 The last founding act of modern Jordan was not so much the 1967 occupation, as the decision to sever the legal and administrative ties between Jordan and the West Bank. This decision, decreed by King Hussein in his speech of 31 July 1988, was based on the recognition of the legitimacy of the project of a Palestinian State in the West Bank.

22 The Hashemite Kingdom was thus formally reduced to roughly its 1948 boundaries. Its population was reduced to the inhabitants of the East Bank, including those of Palestinian origin. The 760,000 West Bankers (20% of the Jordanian population), were dispossessed of their Jordanian citizenship and were issued with temporary 'passes', called 'green cards', that were valid for

two years (since 1995 they are valid for five years). The Jordanian parliament was dissolved the day before the royal address, and no longer includes representatives from the West Bank. Jordanian involvement in the affairs of the West Bank ceased completely, from its management of civil affairs to the funding of development programmes. In June 1991, a conference attended by 2,000 delegates from across the country agreed on a “national charter” that stressed the importance of Palestinian and Jordanian Arab identities coexisting while retaining their individual identities. The charter also declared that Jordan and Palestine were two sides of the same coin with a common struggle against the Zionist expansionist programme and the conspiracy of an alternative homeland. However, reiterating the position taken by the royal speech of July 31, 1988, the Charter reaffirmed that the severance of ties with the West Bank did not undermine the rights of citizenship for Jordanians of Palestinian origin who on that date were living on the east bank of the Jordan River.

²³Ties were not completely severed however: Jordan retained its status as Guardian of Holy Sites, this was further confirmed several years later by the Israeli–Palestinian ‘Wadi Araba’ Peace Treaty in 1994. Jordan also granted, along with the Israeli occupying authorities, special status of free passage to the West Bank for Jordanians of Palestinian origin with identity papers issued by the Palestinian Authority (and Israel) (200,000 to 300,000 people).

²⁴This extra–territorial authority Jordan had in the West Bank also brought about a situation whereby the border with the West Bank has, as well as the two official border crossings of Aqaba (in the south) and the Sheikh Hussein Bridge (in the north), a simple ‘crossing point’ at the King Hussein Bridge (formerly the Allenby

Bridge). The passports of travellers crossing at this point are not stamped by the Jordanian authorities.

Figure V.18 — UNRWA Camps and Distribution of Palestinian Refugees in the Middle East in 2010

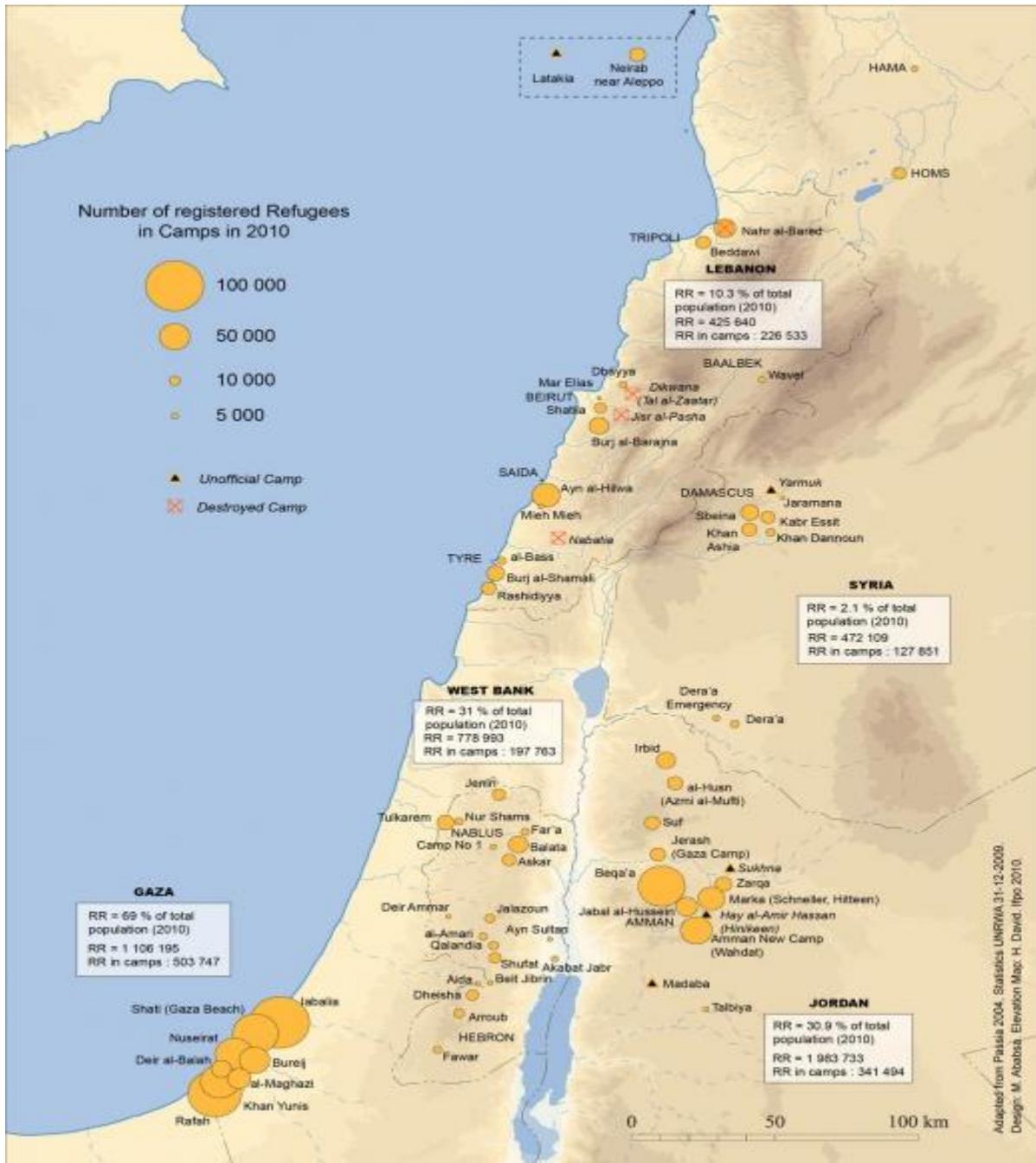


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