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# Jordan's refugees long to return

By Paul Moss

The World Tonight, BBC News

**The 1967 Middle East war left the West Bank occupied by Israel, and prompted tens of thousands of Palestinians to flee the West Bank for what was left of neighbouring Jordan. Forty years on, many are still there:**

There is an odd sense of exuberance at the Baqaa refugee camp. Arab pop music blares from music shops, and from the windows of peoples' homes.



Baqaa is Jordan's biggest Palestinian refugee camp

The market is as bustling as any you would find in a small Middle Eastern town but then that is what this camp has become.

Forty years on, the Camp is a permanent fixture, a rather tumble-down residential area like any other on the outskirts of the Jordanian capital, Amman.

But any suggestion that Baqaa might become their permanent home is fiercely rejected by its occupants.

## 'Still foreigners here'

"Every day, I pray to God that I will return to Jerusalem," a shopkeeper told me.

"I come from there, my family is there - it is my city."

Another was equally adamant:

"I am a foreigner in this country. Even if I stay here another 40 years, I will still try to return to the West Bank. And if I do not go there, my children will do so."

This defiant optimism may be impressive. Yet at the same time, it undoubtedly takes a psychological toll.

Rula Qawwas is a volunteer who has been working with refugees here.

"They dream about their homes," she says, "they dream about their gardens. But this means they do not live in the present."

She worries that because of the conviction that their stay in

**“ There are some who go crazy dreaming of Palestine. If you go the mental hospitals, you can see them ”**

Rula Qawwas  
Baqaa volunteer worker

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Jordan is only temporary, many refugees refuse to put down roots, or develop their lives.

"At its worst, there are some who go crazy dreaming of Palestine. If you go to the mental hospitals, you can see them."

### Nice but not home

And yet even those Palestinian refugees who have made a good life for themselves in Jordan express this same insistence that they will return to their homeland.

Samia Zaru fled Ramallah after the Israeli occupation made life difficult for her and her husband.

Now she lives in a huge house, with a garden filled with the sculptures she produced while living in exile.

These have earned Ms Zaru an international reputation in the art world and, it would seem, a fair amount of money as well.

But she rejects any suggestion that she might want to continue this life forever.

"I like Jordan," she says, "and I have many friends here. But home is different. It feels different, it smells different - it's home."

### Faith in return

Assad Abdul Rahman understands this sentiment all too well.

One of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation representatives in Amman, he says that waiting to return is not merely what a Palestinian refugee does.

It has become, he says, part of the very nature of what it means to be a Palestinian.

"The whole psychology is built on the idea of return," he argues.

"To stop believing this is impossible. It's like negating oneself."

But Mr Rahman's insight is not tempered by any sense that such a wait might be unrealistic.

Showing off his familiarity with Western culture, he insists:

"We are not waiting for Godot. Return to Palestine is legal, it is practical, it is a sacred duty. It is something that will happen - one day."

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“ I like Jordan... but home is different ”

Samia Zaru  
Palestinian sculptor

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