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A case study on child participation

at the Child and Youth Centre in Shatila
- a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon.

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Abstract

My thesis is about child participation at a Child and Youth Centre (CYC) in a Palestinian refugee camp, Shatila, in Lebanon.

The objective of my study is to highlight the contradiction between the right of the children to participate and influence at the CYC, Shatila, and the lack of the same for the same children in their lives outside the CYC.

The method I am using is to conduct a case study based on a field trip to the refugee camp Shatila. My material is mainly interviews with teenagers and young adults and my own observations while staying in the camp.

My main results are that the CYC has a big impact on the children. They say themselves that they want to go to the CYC as they feel respected and taken seriously there. They also tell that what they value most that they learnt at the CYC is to make their own judgements and have their own opinions. I also can see that the children are aware of their own situation, and that they object to the way they sometimes are treated at home and at school. They might not have the possibility to speak up or if they do they may not be listened to outside the CYC.

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1. Introduction

In the Palestinian refugee camp of Shatila in West Beirut, Lebanon, children are growing up to a life with few possibilities. It's an environment where many of the rights of both children and adults have been violated, for a long time. There is little hope for a change in this situation in the immediate future.

In Shatila, there's a Child and Youth Centre (CYC) built on three pillars: the Convention on the Rights of the Child; child to child method; and child participation. I find a paradox in this as the children have the right to participate at the Child and Youth Centre, but when they become adults they do not have political rights. Also, as children, they have limited rights to participate outside the CYC.

1.1 Between legality and reality

Today, we have the legal framework for protecting human rights. But how do we get human rights implemented in reality? And what are the necessary tools. In this thesis I will focus on the rights of the child. One of the four main principles¹ of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (also referred to as the Children's Convention) is article 12 on child participation. This is also the most violated of all the articles in the children's Convention around the world. Child participation is not only an end but also a means, as it can empower children to demand their rights. Could it be a tool for implementation of the Children's Convention? To answer this question is too pretentious a task for a master's thesis, and it is not my aim to do so here. But I still want to raise the question for you to carry with you.

The Palestinian refugees living in Shatila, have been living there since 1948. The current inhabitants are the third or even fourth generation of refugees living there. I asked myself what it could be like growing up with history constantly present, under deteriorating social and economic conditions, and with most possibilities in life barred. Is it possible to gain self confidence, believe that you can make a difference and have hopes for the future?

I went to Shatila to try to get some answers to my questions, and I found myself in a place with much hopelessness, apathy and with high rates of depression. In Shatila, unemployment

¹ The four main principles in the Convention on the Rights of the Child are article 2, 3, 6 and 12 of the Convention.

is over 40 percent; infant mortality is 239 per 1000; the drop-out rate from school is high with about 50 percent leaving school by the age of 16; and the illiteracy rate is on the increase. The incentive and opportunity to study is going down, and violence in the family is common.

In the camp, the municipality system has collapsed. Also, donations to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are decreasing at the same time as the population is on a steady rise. The Palestinian refugee's political, civil, economic and social rights are severely restricted and also violated. For the Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon discrimination is a rule, and not an exception.

This is how these people lead their lives: in a vacuum, dependent on the international community for support, and world politics to resolve their situation. With the young generation wishing for a better life, longing for education, job opportunities and not to be discriminated against; a wish to be respected and feel part of society. This is a part of the reality of the Palestinian children growing up in Shatila. But of course you also find children's laughter, teenagers giggling about who they fancy, and both young and old who still dare to believe that a positive change is possible.

Between the harsh reality of the legal, political and socio-economic situation of the Palestinian refugee population living in Shatila and the idealistic human rights legal framework, you find the Child and Youth Centre (CYC). It is balancing between reality and idealism more than in most settings. Its aim is not only to teach about the rights of the child and try to implement them within the CYC, but also to try to reach out to society outside the CYC. The children attending the CYC are all well aware of what a rights violation means.

In my thesis I want to discuss child participation in this setting by talking to the youths and the young adults about how they view their own situation; what they think of the rights of the child; what they think of child participation at the CYC; what they think they have learnt that they value at the CYC; and if they believe they can use what they've learnt at the CYC outside the Centre.

1.2 Objective and questions

The objective of my study is to highlight the contradiction between the right of the children to participate and influence at the CYC in Shatila, and the lack of such a right for the same children in their lives outside the CYC.

The questions I will answer in section four are:

1. How do the youths and young adults that attend/have attended the CYC perceive their own situation?
2. Why do/did they attend the CYC?
3. What do they think of their own rights?
4. What do they think of child participation?
5. What do they think is the most important thing they've learnt from the CYC?
6. Can they use what they've learnt at the CYC in other parts of the society?

1.3 Method and material

When choosing my thesis topic, I started from observations from reality and not from theory. This has a big impact on the outline and content of my study, as I find the background information as important as the analytical framework.

While researching child participation, I found out that not much academic literature has been written within the area. I mainly found information on child participation in report form from different organisations around the world, especially from Save the Children and UNICEF. What seemed to be most well documented on child participation is the issue of involving children in research and of children in the labour market.

Therefore my thesis ends up being more explorative. The focus of my study is not mainly to answer a lot of questions, but rather to raise new questions which hopefully can be answered by new research. The topic of my research, with its emphasis on contradiction, also indicates a goal of asking rather than answering questions.

One could argue that the setting I chose was not the simplest setting to choose. But I find that the tension in the contradiction is emphasised by the very particular setting of the Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon.

As my topic is based on a certain setting I found that a case study was the best method to use. Therefore I went to Shatila for two weeks in May 2004. The first week I lived in a hotel outside the camp, and the second week I stayed in a guest house inside Shatila refugee camp. To stay inside the camp gave a good understanding of the situation as I spent all my time together with the children and young adults.

My material is mainly based on respondent interviews, some informal talks and my own observations when staying in the camp.

As I am talking about child participation and the importance of listening seriously to children, I chose to interview the children themselves, and listen to what they had to say. As I also wanted to know about how they think and how they use what they've learnt at the CYC having turned eighteen years old, I also included a few young adults in my interviews.

I did not find that I had the skills to interview younger children properly and decided to interview only children of thirteen years of age and above.

The interview subjects were selected randomly, on the basis of who had time and happened to be around. I only specified to some of the young adults working as volunteers at the centre the age group and that I wanted to talk to both boys and girls. Then they asked the children who happened to be around at that particular moment.

The children I interviewed were between thirteen and sixteen years old. I interviewed five children, four girls and one boy. They all spent a lot of time at the Centre, going there almost every day.

The young adults I interviewed were between twenty-one and twenty-five years old. I interviewed five, two women and three men. They had attended the CYC regularly when they were teenagers, and even today the Centre seemed to be very important for them. They all worked as volunteers at the Centre on a regular basis and still spent a lot of time there.

I conducted one group interview with the children and one group interview with three of the young adults. I also held individual interviews with two of the young adults, as they were not able to attend the group interview.

I found that the children and the young adults were very open and spoke freely about their lives and situation. I used an open interview guide as I partly adapted my questions depending on how much time the children and young adults had to spare and I also sometimes skipped questions if I'd already got the answer from a previous question.

To make the interview subjects feel relaxed and able to speak freely, I promised them that their contributions would be anonymous. Therefore no names are given in this thesis. This means that you will not find any references in section four. To indicate who I am talking to I will mention when I find it relevant if it is a boy or a girl and also if it is a child or a young adult.

The interviews were respondent interviews with the personal perspective in focus. My interpretation of what they said can differ from what they meant, even if my aim is to show the outcome from the interviews as accurate as possible in section four. There can also be some misunderstandings because of both myself and the interviewees were not speaking in our mother tongues. But my feeling when conducting the interviews was that we had little problem in understanding each other.

I do not have a control group not attending the CYC to see if they would have given a different perspective of their situation. Also, the younger interview group was not totally even in terms of gender and there was not a very even age distribution.

I found it more difficult to get the opportunity to talk to the girls outside the interview situation. Not because they were less open, but because they both had to help a lot at home and because their freedom was more restricted than the boys'. Therefore I spent more time talking to the boys and listening to what they think and what their life situation is like, but I hope this will be evened out a little by having six girls and only four boys as interview subjects.

I also just want to mention that I in this thesis chose to in shorter words call the Convention on the Rights of the Child the Children's Convention instead of using the short word CRC. This I do as I find it otherwise very easy to mix it up with the CYC, which is the short word for the Child and Youth Centre in Shatila.

1.4 About this thesis

I will now briefly give you an outline of the following sections.

In the second section of this thesis I will give you some of the factual background of the Palestinian refugees: the history, their legal and social position and more specific information about Shatila refugee camp and the Child and Youth Centre.

In the third section you'll find the theoretical framework, which is based on the idea of child participation as described in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The fourth section will take you through the results of the interviews I did in Shatila and my own observations, trying to answer the questions I pose under my objectives. And in the fifth section, you'll find the analysis and the conclusions.

2. Factual background

2.1 Historical background

I do not intend to go into details of the history of the Palestine conflict or the conflicts in Lebanon. But I will try to give a brief overview of some of the most important events. I am asking you when you read the historical facts to consider what all this would mean to an individual, and not only read it as facts and figures.

The historical setting from the 1948-49 war and onwards is of importance for understanding the setting the children in Shatila are living in. As for their parents and grandparents there have been very few possibilities in life, as they have lived all or most of their lives as refugees. The only hope of a normal life is if the possibility of returning to Palestine becomes reality. The history and what has happened is very much alive in the community, maybe more alive than the hopes for the future.

In the beginning of 1947 the United Kingdom handed over to the United Nations (UN) the decision on what should happen to the British mandate Palestine from 14 May 1948 onwards, as the United Kingdom had decided to withdraw their troops from Palestine on that date.

The 29 November 1947 resolution 181(II), Partition Plan for Palestine, was passed by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). This resolution made a recommendation to end the British mandate and divide it into a Palestinian and a Jewish state, with Jerusalem under UN administration. The three parts were supposed to be united through an economic union.

The Jewish Agency accepted resolution 181(II) even though it found the suggested restriction of Jewish immigration and territorial limitations unsatisfactory. The Arab population of Palestine and the Arab states did not agree to the resolution, as they viewed it as being against the Charter of the United Nations on the grounds that a people has the right to decide its own destiny.

Directly after the adoption of resolution 181(II), violence broke out in Palestine. And when the United Kingdom withdrew its last troops on 14 May 1948, a number of neighbouring Arab states joined the conflict on the 15 May. The violence escalated into full-scale war which lasted until spring 1949. On 14 May 1948 the Jewish Agency proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel, and on 11 May 1949 Israel became a member of the United Nations.

During this first Arab-Israeli war the large scale Palestinian refugee situation was created and the refugee situation still persists today. When people fled the war in 1948-49, many left only to avoid the violence, thinking they would return very shortly. So they locked their homes as you normally do when going out. Still today they keep the key to their home, and the key has become a symbol for their hope to return one day.

The official Israeli position was that the Palestinian population left voluntarily, and the Israeli state made the decision to bar the return of the Palestinian refugees, which still is the political position of Israel today. At present there is an increasing recognition that Israel has a shared responsibility for the flight of the Palestinian population. Count Bernadotte, United Nations Mediator for Palestine explained the exodus as follows: "The Exodus of Palestinian Arabs resulted from panic created by fighting in their communities, by rumours concerning real or alleged acts of terrorism, or expulsion." (Takkenberg, 1998, p. 14)

The General Assembly resolution 194(III) of 11 December 1948 states in paragraph 11 that: "the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours 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 which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments authorities responsible”.

After the 1948-49 war, according to UNRWA figures there were 914,000 registered refugees, which today amounts to over four million. The 1967 war, when Israel occupied the entire former British Mandate of Palestine, created a new wave of Palestinian refugees and also a reshuffling of them.

As I will write about the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and those in Shatila especially, I will now turn to Lebanon and Shatila. In 1969 and 1972 there was fighting between Palestinian forces and the Lebanese army. The Palestinian liberation Organisation (PLO) had its headquarter in Lebanon in the 1970s but they were forced to leave in 1982. The civil war in Lebanon started in 1975 and did not end until 1990, with a *de facto* cease fire from July 1981 until May 1982. Israel invaded parts of Lebanon in 1978 and in 1982. In 1985 Israel withdrew from most of Lebanon, creating a buffer zone which Israel withdrew from totally in 2000.

Throughout the years there have been attacks, massacres and destruction perpetrated on several Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, by both Israel and Lebanese militia. During the Israeli aggression in 1972 the Nabatiyeh camp was totally destroyed. In 1975/76, during the Lebanese civil war two of the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, Tal El-Zaatar and Jisr El-Basha, were targets of both massacre and destruction.

On 17 September 1982 about 800 Palestinian and Lebanese men, women and children were massacred in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila in West Beirut by Lebanese Christian militias that had entered West Beirut with the Israeli forces.

I will not mention the different peace agreements, accords and roadmaps to peace applying to the Palestinian population in my thesis, but of course all these and the situation in the Palestine Occupied Territories have a big influence on the Palestinians living in Shatila. As I was told by a woman in Shatila “it is difficult as the children know through the internet what is happening on the West Bank and in Gaza”.

What should also be mentioned is that the Lebanese state and its government are very weak as it is a compromise between several ethnicities and religions trying to balance the power between them. The government is not willing to naturalize or assimilate the Palestinian refugees.

2.2 Definition of a Palestinian refugee

There is no definition of a Palestine refugee for legal purposes. In the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution 302 (IV), establishing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for the Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), there is no definition on who is a Palestinian refugee, neither in any resolutions later on. This is in contrast to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) where there is a definition included in the establishing resolution. It's worth bearing in mind is that UNRWA was established by the UNGA only five days after UNHCR was established. (Takkenberg, 1998)

Because of the lack of a definition for legal purposes, UNRWA had to shape its own definition of what is meant by a Palestinian refugee. Also worth bearing in mind is that UNRWA was under constant pressure from its main donors to reduce the number of relief recipients. (ibid)

The working definition shaped by UNRWA is narrow and excludes some people that also became refugees in 1948. Refugees from the 1967 war have been de facto included under the mandate of UNRWA, but only on an emergency basis and as a temporary measure. (ibid)

The UNRWA working definition of a Palestinian refugee since 1993 is: "[Palestine 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." (Takkenberg, 1998, p. 77)

There is also the issue of how the refugee status is passed from generation to generation in UNRWA's Consolidated Registration Instructions. The refugee status is only passed to descendants of fathers of Palestinian refugees and is therefore highly gender discriminatory, according to the provisions in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). (Takkenberg, 1998)

2.3 Legal status of the Palestinian refugees

As I have based most of the information below on the research of L. Takkenberg in his book “The status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law”, I would like to stress that there might be other views on the legal status of Palestinian refugees than his. My understanding from what Takkenberg is saying is that there is no total agreement between countries and scholars on the status of Palestinian refugees, and that there is little legal research done on that issue.

In the legal literature there seems to have been a primary focus on the question of self-determination when discussing the Palestinian question - that is on collective rights. While much less focus has been given to the refugee issue - that is on individual rights.

It also should be stressed that the absence of state protection has a double implication: that of being both stateless and a refugee at the same time. This has been the fate for many generations, with no possibility of return and no possibility of integration.

The Palestinian refugees, in contrast to all other refugees in the world, are not under the UNHCR protection, but instead are assisted by UNRWA. UNRWA does not provide any legal protection to the refugees.

The stateless and refugee status has been passed down several generations. This could be claimed as a violation of the Children’s Convention, as all children born have the right to a citizenship, according to article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

According to the “UNHCR Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status” (1979), the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 28 July 1951 (the 1951 Convention) is not applicable to Palestinian refugees falling under the mandate of UNRWA, not taking into consideration whether that person is or ever has been receiving assistance from UNRWA. If the UNRWA assistance is not available for one reason or another, and the Palestinian refugee is in a country that has ratified the 1951 Convention, that person would fall under the protection of the 1951 Convention. The Lebanese government has not ratified the 1951 Convention.

Palestinians who have not acquired the nationality of a third state are stateless. But this has not been formally acknowledged, which means that individual Palestinians may not benefit from the protection under relevant instruments of international law, like the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

According to Takkenberg's "The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law" (1998) the Fourth Geneva Convention is applicable to refugees and stateless persons, which would include the Palestinian refugees.

2.3.1 The legal status of Palestinians in Lebanon

The Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are deprived of a number of civil and political rights, including: the right to own property; freedom of movement; and the right to vote or be elected. (Norwegian Peoples Aid, Lebanon)

The Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are deprived of the right of employment as well as other economic, social and cultural rights. In Lebanon there are 72 professions which the Palestinians are prohibited from working in by the Lebanese government. (Norwegian Peoples Aid, Lebanon)

The health services which UNRWA offers are inadequate and the Palestinian refugees are not able to benefit from the Lebanese public health system. Private medical treatment is expensive. (Norwegian Peoples Aid, Lebanon)

UNRWA only provides elementary and preparatory education, which means approximately 10 years of education. The lack of resources makes the quality of the education questionable. Pre-school education and secondary education is not included in the mandate of UNRWA. But a few pre-schools and secondary schools have been opened in Lebanon because of the worsening socio-economic conditions of the Palestinian refugees and due to pressure from the local community. University education is not offered by UNRWA. The public education system in Lebanon gives priority to the Lebanese citizens, and private education has become too costly for the Palestinian refugees. (Norwegian Peoples Aid, Lebanon)

2.4 UNRWA - mandate and funding

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) by resolution 302 (IV) on 8 December 1949. UNRWA began its field operations on 1 May 1950. It was supposed to be an organisation set up only temporarily until the problem with the Palestinian refugees had been solved. Its mandate is still being renewed every few years.

UNRWA is working in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. All together it is responsible for 4,136,449 Palestinian refugees as of December 2003, both refugees living in the 59 refugee camps spread out over the region as well as refugees living in the local communities. In Lebanon there are 12 official refugee camps, and 394,532 registered Palestinian refugees, of which 223,956 lives in the camps. This means that approximately 11.5 percent of the Lebanese population consists of Palestinian refugees. (UNRWA statistics, 31 December 2003)

All Palestinians are not registered at UNRWA, even if they fall under the UNRWA mandate, this is due to different reasons. Some refugees are registered with both UNRWA and the Lebanese authorities and some are only registered by the Lebanese authorities. This means that the UNRWA figures cannot count as demographic data, and no one knows the exact number of Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon. It should also be said that some registered Palestinians have acquired Lebanese nationality. (Norwegian Peoples Aid, Lebanon)

UNRWA's mandate covers elementary and preparatory education (approximately until 15 years of age), health care, social services and emergency aid. It has not any legal or administrative mandate.

One of the main problems UNRWA is facing is that it is based on funding by voluntary contributions and it has for many years had to little funding. This means that the standard of the schools, the health care and support to families in need is not of an adequate level. This means for instance that children are not provided with art classes or sports at school, as there is not enough money to pay the teachers. It also means that children have to go to school in shifts as there is not enough room in the school (which means that a 13 year old boy or girl only goes to school for 4-4.5 hours per day).

Also the camps are overcrowded as UNRWA is leasing the land from the host government or private land owners. The Lebanese state does not agree to give more land to the refugee camps, which means that what started as a tent camp in 1948 today consists of 7-8 storey buildings with minimal space between, allowing no sunlight to reach the narrow alleys.

To be remarked upon is that the UNRWA schools do not have teaching of the Children's Convention on their curricula. Who is responsible for monitoring the work of the UNRWA schools under the Convention on the Rights of the Child?

Almost all of the UNRWA staff, including health professionals, teachers, social workers and administrators are Palestinian refugees themselves. This creates job opportunities, and also means that there in a way is a UNRWA class, with better salaries and work conditions, and also the possibility to work within areas otherwise closed to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

2.5 About Shatila²

Shatila refugee camp is situated in one of the suburbs of West Beirut, Lebanon. The only way to distinguish it from the surrounding quarters is that you suddenly find yourself in narrow, winding alleys with houses of up to eight storeys in very poor condition. Shatila is built without any town planning.

Approximately 17,500 persons live in Shatila camp, of which 12,235 are registered refugees by UNRWA (31 December 2003). The inhabitants of Shatila camp are mixed. Today you do not only find Palestinians living there, but also Lebanese, Syrians etc.

You can easily walk around the whole camp in 15 minutes, as the Shatila camp is no more than 2 sq km. There are many people living in each flat; units of 60 square metres must be shared by at least 9 people and some house as many as 15 or even 20. If there are only two of you, you might have a flat of six square meters.

The poorest families live on the ground floor, as there is very little light coming into the flats and no sunlight at all. Also in the winter the camp is flooded which means that there is standing water inside the houses on the ground floor.

² Based on my own observations and interviews made in Shatila 17 May – 31 May 2004.

The electricity supply is very poor in the camp and there are many power-cuts every day, lasting from a few minutes up to several hours. You never know when they will strike or how long they will last. There is also a lot of garbage in the narrow streets. Around the camp there are garbage heaps where goats eat, children play and other people try to find something to sell.

Inside Shatila camp you have some small shops mostly selling food, you have some internet cafés (working and cheap, albeit with very slow connections), and some shops selling stamps or Palestinian souvenirs.

There is only one open space in the whole camp, and it is situated outside the Child and Youth Centre, and there the children can play. Many children also play in the narrow streets and outside the camp on the garbage heaps and bombed ruins.

The unemployment rate is very high, approximately 40 percent. This creates tensions in the family leading to high rates of domestic violence. There's increasing depression and apathy and problems with early marriage and high birth rates. More children are dropping out of school and illiteracy is rising. There's a growing interest in religion

2.6 About the Child and Youth Centre (CYC) in Shatila³

The Child and Youth Centre (hereafter named the CYC or the Centre) in Shatila camp was established in 1996/97 by the initiative of a local social worker, Abu Moujahed, in collaboration with a working group under a local branch of Save the Children, Sweden. Most of the funding to the CYC comes from Save the Children, Sweden and UNICEF, but also from other organisations and private donations.

The CYC is built on three pillars: the Convention on the Rights of the Child; child to child method; and child participation. The Centre has four employees: a manager, an assistant, a librarian and a handyman. Much of the work is possible through voluntary work, mostly performed by those attending the centre.

³ The information under 2.5 are based on reports and other documentation from the internal work of the CYC, interviews I made and my own observations from 17 May – 31 May 2004.

The Centre is for children between 6 and 18 years of age. In total there are approximately 200 children and youth signed up at the Centre. Some only attend every now and then, but for many it is a daily routine to go to the Centre - except Sundays when it is closed and unless they have a special activity arranged like going swimming.

The CYC's premises were built in 1999, sponsored by several organisations and private donations. I will take you on a short guided tour of the CYC. As I mentioned before, there is an open space (the only open space inside Shatila camp) in front of the CYC where the children can play. On the ground floor of the Centre you find a room which can be used for activities such as dancing (the children learn traditional dances like the 'dapke'). On the first floor you find an office, a room for handicraft, the computer room, a tiny kitchen and two toilets. On the second floor you have the library, which is also used for a lot of other activities, like workshops, meetings and different children's activities.

There are different activities which take place at the Centre each week. Every day you can get help with your homework in the library. Weekly activities are: children's activities (like playing games, singing with some educational aim included (for instance singing songs about the importance of brushing your teeth); sports (there is a football team, previously they also had a basketball team); arts, such as dancing; and handicrafts. They also have computer classes as well as English, French and Arabic classes on an irregular basis.

Since 2003 the youths have run a guest house for the many visitors to the CYC from overseas. As there always are visitors or volunteers from abroad coming to the CYC they decided to open a guest house. The idea is to generate an income for the CYC and also give the youths the chance to learn how to run a business and take responsibility for it. It also creates opportunity for the visitors to live inside the camp.

The CYC is run as follows. Each year the CYC Council is elected by the children and youths who wish to take part in the election. To be nominated you have to have attended the CYC for at least one year. You are also asked to consider if you have enough time to fulfil your duties as a Council member before accepting a nomination. The children are asked to consider equality between boys and girls when nominating and electing members. In 2004 the assembly meeting electing the CYC Council was attended by 56 children and youths.

The CYC Council consists of 21 children and youths, 14 boys and 7 girls in 2004, and it meets every three months. The CYC Council then elects an Administrative Committee which looks after all the CYC's work. The Committee consists of 9 members, 5 boys and 4 girls in 2004. The children and youths on the Administrative Committee each have to join a working group responsible for one of the activities at the CYC. Each of the different activities which were mentioned above, like arts, including the guest house is run by a working group consisting of approximately five children. The working groups, as well as the Administrative Committee, have weekly meetings, and they report to the CYC Council every three months. There is also every six month a discussion among all the children evaluating and developing the activities at the Centre.

Each Saturday there is a meeting open for all children attending the Centre, where they discuss the last week's events and the forth-coming week's activities. These meetings are also a forum for discussions on: subjects from the children's daily life; special Palestinian occasions; and political, educational and social issues. The children can also raise any issue for discussion or simply express their feelings.

Each year the Centre arranges summer camps for the children and youths somewhere in Lebanon outside Shatila for one or two weeks. They also facilitate their own workshops for the children and youths at the centre, with the young grown ups who have attended the centre before as the leaders/facilitators of the workshops. They also send the children and youths to workshops facilitated by other organisations both within Lebanon and abroad.

3. Child participation – an analytical framework

The focus of this study is on child participation in a certain setting, Shatila refugee camp. In my analytical framework I will examine what the Children's Convention says about child participation, and I will also describe how children's rights are being taught / implemented at the CYC in Shatila. I will also discuss children as social actors with the focus on listening to them and taking their views seriously. The last thing I will discuss in this section is the limitation in space of child participation for the children attending the CYC in Shatila.

At the end of this section I will also make an attempt to create some categories in response to the following question: How do the children experience the contradiction of having the right to participate at the CYC and not the right to participate outside the CYC.

3.1 Child participation in the Children's Convention

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Children's Convention) was adopted by the General Assembly on 20 November 1989, and entered into force on 2 September 1990. In my thesis I am using the term child as defined in the Children's Convention, article 1, "... a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years...". The participants at the Child and Youth Centre in Shatila are between six and eighteen years old.

The Children's Convention includes both civil and political rights for children as well as economic, social and cultural rights. It is monitored by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. State parties should report to the Committee every five years, on progress and problems they are facing.

Lebanon ratified the Children's Convention in 1991 without any reservations, but has not ratified any of the Optional Protocols to the Children's Convention. The Lebanese state has hardly included any data on the Palestinian children in their reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. But NGO reports have been submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the situation of the Palestinian children living in Lebanon. The Committee on the Rights of the Child is continuing to ask the Lebanese Government to include more information and take actions on levelling out the differences in treatment between Lebanese and Palestinian children. (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2002)

3.1.1 The four main principles and "the three p's" of the Children's Convention

In the Children's Convention the Committee on the Rights of the Child talks about four main principles, article 2, 3, 6 and 12. Article 2 is about non-discrimination; article 3 about the best interest of the child; article 6 about the right to life, which also includes the right to development not only the right to survival; and article 12 is about the right of the child to express his or her opinion and to be able to influence his or her situation, in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.



Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is the article usually referred to as the main article on child participation.

(1) States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

(2) For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of the national law. (Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 12)

The idea behind talking about the four main principles was to form a child perspective that should be used to deepen the analysis when scrutinizing the situation of children. These four provisions should be used as tools when looking at the implementation of all of the articles in the Children's Convention.

Little progress has thus far been made on child participation according to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. No state has been able to show a substantial reform based on article 12 in the Children's Convention. (Hammarberg, 2000) This is not surprising when considering what is said in the World Youth Report, 2003: "Respecting the right of this younger group to be heard represents an enormous challenge to traditional attitudes in most societies." (World Youth Report, 2003, p. 271)

In the Children's Convention you also find the so called "three p's". They do not only include protection, against violence etc, but also protection of the child's right to participation, as well as the positive obligation of the state of provision, adequate standard of living etc. (Nowak, 2003)

3.1.2 Articles giving the right to participation

In the Children's Convention there is not an explicit definition of the right of the child to participation, except for disabled children in article 23.



States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community. (Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 23(1))

The main article usually being referred to when talking about the right of the child to participate, also being one of the four principles guiding the Committee on the Rights of the Child in their work, is article 12 of the Children's Convention. This article contains elements of the right of the child to participation and to influence. (Hammarberg, 2000)

But to get the full right to participate from the Children's Convention there are several articles which have to be combined. According to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) the following articles of the Children's Convention has to be interpreted together to form the right of the child to participate: 5, 9(2), 12, 13(1), 14(1), 15(1), 16, 17, 21, 22(1), 23 (1), and 29(1).

These articles include: the right to express one's opinion freely; the right to seek, receive and impart information; access to information; the freedom of expression; the freedom of thought, conscience and religion; the freedom of association and peaceful assembly; the right to privacy; the parents role in guiding the child but at the same time respect the child to make its own decisions and express their own views according to the evolving capacity of the child; and some articles are on more specific issues, such as expressing their own views in the justice system. Save the Children have a similar categorisation. There seems to be different views on which articles that together formulate the right to participate in the children's Convention by legal and other commentators. (Ennew,)

I am including the articles from the Children's Convention for clarification for those interested, but it is not necessary for the understanding of the thesis to read the articles below, and those who wants can instead go to page 21.

Article 5: State Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention.

Article 9(2): In any proceedings pursuant to paragraph 1 of the present article, all interested parties shall be given an opportunity to participate in the proceedings and make their view known.

Article 12: (1) States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

(2) For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of the national law.

Article 13(1): The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

Article 14: (1) States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

(2) States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide directions to the child on the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacity of the child.

Article 15(1): States parties recognize the rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly.

Article 16: (1) No child shall be subject to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful interference with his or her honour and reputation.

(2) The child has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 17: States Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, and especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health....

Article 21: States Parties that recognize and/or permit the system of adoption shall ensure that the best interest of the child shall be the paramount consideration and they shall:

(a) Ensure that the adoption of a child is authorized only by competent authorities who determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures and on the basis of all pertinent and reliable

information, that the adoption is permissible in view of the child's status concerning parents, relatives and legal guardians and that, if required, the person concerned has given their informed consent to the adoption on the basis of such counselling as may be necessary;

Article 22(1): States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee in accordance with applicable international or domestic law and procedures shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set forth in the present Convention and in other international human rights or humanitarian instruments to which the said States are Parties.

Article 23(1): States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community.

Article 29(1): States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

- (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;*
- (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;*
- (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for the civilizations different from his or her own;*
- (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;*
- (e) The development of respect for the natural environment.*

(Convention on the Rights of the Child)

3.1.3 Article 12 not only an end but also a means

Article 12 is both a substantive right and a procedural right. It is substantive as it gives every child the right to express his or her opinion and have their opinions taken seriously. But as a democratic right it is also a means through which it is possible to influence your own and other's situation. (World Youth Report, 2003)

It was stated by the “World Programme of Action for Youth the Year 2000 and Beyond” that the active involvement of children themselves is a requirement for a successful implementation of the Programme. This statement gives recognition of the children themselves as agents and part of the solution of the problems they are facing, and that their own situation is not only a problem to be solved by others. (World Youth Report, 2003)

3.1.4 Child rights at the CYC

At the Child and Youth Centre in Shatila they try to implement the Children’s Convention in full. This mean for instance that no one is allowed to hit / smack a child, the children should always be met with respect and listened to seriously. It is the children themselves who make the decisions at the Centre, guided by a few adults.

The children are being taught about their rights continuously at the CYC, for instance through workshops, at the different meetings they hold, and by peers at the Centre:

The way the CYC is being run was described under section 2.6, page 14-16 above. You also find what the children think of their rights, what they think of child participation, and why they attend the CYC under section 4.2-4.4.

3.2 Children as social actors

The Committee on the rights of the child has interpreted article 12 of the CRC as a “general principle of fundamental importance (along with article 2, 6 and 4). The key to the Committee’s interpretation is the idea that children are active subjects of rights, which is aligned with current social orthodoxy that children are competent social actors”. (Ennew, p.2)

There are comparisons being made between mainly women as a group, whose voices have not been heard throughout most of history, and children as a group. There are voices who claim that children can and should transform the society. Others claim that it puts too much pressure on the children, it could also lead to blaming children if their situation is not good. Judith Ennew argues for instance that children’s political participation often is trivialised or limited to local level participation. (Ennew) This could be connected to “the age and maturity of the

child” and “the evolving capacity of the child” in the Children’s Convention, where you find the tension between protection and participation.

The emphasis on the protective needs of children instead of on the participation needs of children has been subject to an academic debate in the recent years. There seems to be some form of agreement that children are competent social actors.

In the Children’s Convention it is not stated that children have the right to make decisions, but to express their opinion, and that this opinion shall be taken into account according to the age and the maturity of the child. But in many situations it is relevant that the child makes its own decisions and learn to also face up to the responsibility which also is included in decision-making. Children make decisions all the time, even if we do not think of it as decisions. They decide what to play, who to play with, what they like and what they dislike. (Modig, 2003)

We also have to provide the children with the appropriate tools to be able to change their lives, to know their rights, to know of alternative ways of living. As children have a greater need for protection and are more dependent than adults they need the adults to help them in their participation. How adults can help providing children with meaningful participation is in most senses just in its experimental stage. (Modig, 2003)

As the newly established Save the Children Youth Organisation, Sweden said to Save the Children, Sweden at their yearly summit 2004: “Thanks for your support, thanks for your advice, and thanks for letting us make our own mistakes.” (Ronneby, Sweden, 4-6 June 2004)

3.2.1 The capacity of the child

Studies show that even very young children can express their opinion; if given the opportunity, and being listened to in the correct way. You could even claim that children do this from the day they are born. Young adults’ belief in themselves and their ability to express their own opinion and respect others’ opinions is based on having been met with respect and having been listened to from a young age. (Modig, 2003) It must also be mentioned that age and maturity both biological and socially constructed. (Ennew)

It is important to remember that every child has its own perspective and its own experiences. But children as a group have some features in common: being dependent on the grown up

society, being vulnerable due to a lack of experience compared to grown ups', being in the process of a psychological and physical development; being in a situation where you constantly have to re-evaluate and cross new boundaries. (Modig, 2003)

The Children's Convention is about the rights of the child and not about the rights of children. But children have the right of association. As with grown ups it is not always that the best of the collective is the best for each individual - the best interest of the child. (Modig, 2003)

3.2.3 All matters affecting the child - what does that mean?

In the Children's Convention, article 12, it is stated that the child has the right to freely express its opinions "in all matters affecting the child". Issues concerning children are in the broad sense almost all issues, even if it can be easier to start with the ones closest to the children, like the family, the immediate environment and school. (Modig, 2003)

3.3 A limited experience of child participation

A distinguished feature in the case of the CYC in Shatila is that the implementation of the right to participate, as well as other rights in the Children's Convention, has happened in one major area (or space) of the children's lives, but not in others.

They have the right to participate at the CYC. The CYC is one space, attended by many children, but of course, not by all. The two other main spaces in the children's lives ought to be the home and school.

In this thesis the focus will be on the Child and Youth Centre, the home of the children and the school they go to. I acknowledge that there might be other spaces important to the children which I do not mention here.

3.4 Where does this lead?

I will here try to pull together what has been discussed and examined above. We have the simplicity of the Convention and the complexity of the reality. As I said in the introduction I see it as the CYC is balancing between these two. It is located in a setting where many of the children's rights are not protected and are sometimes violated, and where the children do not have participatory rights either in the family or at school. At the same time the work of the

CYC is based on both the Children's Convention, teaching the children about their rights, and child participation.

If I start looking at the contradiction I have on one side the CYC and on the other side I have the rest of the society the children are living in. At the CYC the Children's Convention is being implemented to a high degree and the children have the right to participate. In the other two spaces, in the family and at school, there tend to be many violations of the children's rights, and they do not have serious participatory rights.

If we go back to the CYC you can claim that the children are accepted as social actors, for instance through the fact that they are in charge of the agenda at the CYC. At home and at school again you can claim that they are not accepted as social actors as they do not seem to have direct influence at school, and at home they tell themselves that they are not in a position of making their own judgements and take their own decisions, even as young adults.

3.4.1 Categories

My question is then as I said at the beginning of this chapter, how the children experience the contradiction of having the right to participate at the CYC and not the right to participate outside the CYC. The children attending the CYC are living in two different worlds where totally different rules apply. Does this make the children dissatisfied with their lives as they see that much of their rights are violated? Or does it make the children feel inspired to make a change?

I will not be able to answer that question here in my study, but I would like to make a categorisation based on children as social actors and the limitation in space of their right to participate. That will create the table below.

	Accepted as social actor	Not accepted as social actor
CYC		
Home		
School		

The “CYC”, “Home” and “School” categories are taken from the discussion on the limitation in space (above). And “Accepted as social actor” and “Not accepted as social actor” come from the discussion on children as social actors (above).

This table would make it easy to get a good overview of the situation of child participation in a setting. First you would have to determine what spaces are important for the children. Then you would have to decide a definition for what you mean by child participation, before you get out into reality to get the facts you need.



4. Results

In this section I will mostly use material from my interviews that are relevant to answer the questions I have posed under my objective. But I will also include my own observations during my stay in Shatila and informal talks I have had with people that sometimes give a very good understanding of some issues. The children and young adults that I have interviewed below are living either inside Shatila camp or directly outside the camp. Most of them have many brothers and sisters.

Another thing to mention is that Shatila is geographically a very small place where most people know each other, which means that the social control is very strong. One thing that the children mentioned to me several times is that many in their society find it a bad thing that they are both boys and girls attending the Centre. One young girl told me that in the beginning when she went to the CYC she thought that it was a bad thing according to Islam to talk to a boy.

4.1 How do the youth and young adults that attend/have attended the CYC perceive their own situation?

First of all the youths and young adults tell me that they laugh a lot, because it keeps you young, and because it is the best way to cope with the conditions they live under. They tell me that if you want to joke about Shatila you call it Shatila ditch, as it is flooded each winter. When it is flooded the people themselves have to put out things to walk on or you just get wet when walking out of the camp.

Other practical problems in the camp are first of all the electricity supply as I understand it from the children. But also the infrastructure of the electricity cables is very poor. Another problem the children tell me about is the garbage that not only is ugly to look at but also smells and brings rats. The overall infrastructure in the camp is poor the children say.

Most of the children also say that they find the neighbours are noisy. One boy also brought up that there are sometimes fights in the camp with knives and that he himself has experienced how he and his peers have different opinions that create fights.

I asked what they felt when they saw the rich areas just around the corner. And I got the reply that they do not think of it. And I got the impression that they looked down on the rich people, only wanting to show off and getting richer, as they put it. I also understood it as if they were proud of who they are and did not wish to get corrupted in that way. And I heard from others that they could not understand these people going for a coffee in the posh areas, where a coffee cost a fortune - they could only see that as stupidity and a wish to show off. But I also got the comment from one of the boys that he did not really care about clothes, but felt pressured by his peers to care about it.

Also as opposed to what was said above about being proud of who you are, one of the boys claimed that as a Palestinian in Lebanon you feel like you are not wanted anywhere in the society. Another boy confirmed this feeling by telling me about when he started in a Lebanese school (not an UNRWA school) that he first felt very insecure there as a Palestinian. He also said to me that he finds it embarrassing to say that he is from the camp – and as he put it – “that hurts”.

They tell me about other moments when they have felt that they were treated differently. For instance when they have been going to workshops abroad they need to go through interviews to get the visas. One of the boys expressed a tiredness that everything is about politics. He said that he does not want to watch the news, as that only makes him sad, and he does not want to get extreme. He says that he wants to live like any other young person in the world. He says that they gave him the nickname refugee, and that nickname he wants to get rid of but he still wants to keep his Palestinian nationality.

4.1.1 They feel bored

To me there seems to be a lot of tiredness, boredom, and other sorts of frustration underneath, but that at least at the Centre they can share closeness and understanding of each other's situation and a deep care for each other.

When I first arrived in Shatila the CYC had visitors from a school in Sweden. The young adults facilitated workshops and other activities for the guests and all at the Centre took part in the activities. When the guests had left the young adults told me they felt this empty feeling of not having a big project to plan, or put into action. Now they went back to their normal life of doing nothing.

And it is true that there is not so much for them to do and especially with the unemployment situation and not much money to spend. The girls have a different situation as their freedom is very much restricted and therefore they spend most of their time at home. Most of the girls seem to have limited possibilities to spend time outside the home with friends. I was for instance told that when there was not so much to do at the workplace a girl was working at, they used to get Saturdays off. I said that that must be nice. The reply was that, well I will probably only get bored.

As there are a lot of visitors to the Centre from abroad the children at the CYC get to know a lot of people. As one of them said "I have more friends abroad than Lebanese friends". As they said, they meet and play with a lot of people from other places, and then these people leave and go home. But they themselves cannot go home and their opportunity to travel is restricted.

4.1.2 Dreams for the future

The young people in Shatila that I met all had dreams about studying or in other ways trying to improve their situation. Many of them had dreams of being able to go abroad to study or to work among the boys. The girls never mentioned this even as a dream. I do not know if it is because of the issue never coming up when I spoke to them or because they did not see it at all as an option for them as they have less freedom than the boys. Instead they told me about the wish to continue studying in Lebanon, but that it both was too expensive, or/and because it is not possible to get a job as a Palestinian refugee in Lebanon within the area they wanted to study. This means that even if they manage to get an education they will not be allowed to work in Lebanon anyway.

From one of the young adults I was told that he wanted to study abroad, but he also told me that he was afraid of the future. Another of the young adults told me that she believed that she had possibilities in life to get another job if she could not continue where she was working. At the same time she mentioned that at her present job she had had problems in convincing her family that it was a proper place for a woman to work as there were more men than women. And that it was part of her job to sometimes go on conferences and that she had to stay overnight. She now said that her family had accepted it, but if she gets married she thinks she will have to face the same problem again of being questioned.

The young adult women I interviewed both had jobs, while none of the young men had a job. One of the men was going to school at the moment. The young men told me about their problems in finding a job. And that their families were constantly nagging them that they needed to find a job, so they rather stayed away from home. Both the young men and women said that their parents found it more acceptable that they worked as volunteers at the CYC when they had a job. But when they did not have a job they constantly heard that they should not spend time at the Centre.

4.1.3 Lack of freedom and lack of making own decisions

Almost all of the children told about problems they had at home in their families, either with their parents or with their sisters and brothers. Many of them said that their fathers had “difficult minds”, especially the girls brought this up, but also some of the boys. This they said in combination of telling about their lack of freedom, and about being beaten at home. Sometimes it seemed that it is not only the father that has a “difficult mind”, it can also be the older brother or the uncles and others that might be even stricter and they also seemed to have a say in what both the boys and the girls were allowed to do, this including both sexes of the young adults as well.

One of the boys says that at least he can say no at the CYC, even if he cannot do that at home. He continues saying that at home he cannot say no and he cannot discuss with his parents, he says that even as a boy you need your parents’ permission.

I was told that it is especially hard in the camp for the girls, especially the one’s living in families with difficult thinking. One of the teenage girls told me that she has no freedom, and that she is not allowed to go anywhere other than to the CYC. Her mother even comes to check every now and then that she really is at the CYC. Another of the teenage girls said that she does not have any freedom at home, and that her parents do not listen to her, and that her father is the one making the decisions in the family. A third girl told me that she would like to change things so that she is listened to, as her father has a difficult way of thinking.

One of the boys says he thinks that the culture they live in forces them to become aggressive and not to take girls into consideration. He continues by saying that the basic principle is non-

discrimination, and he also tells me that if it is not a mix of both boys and girls in an activity at the CYC they normally cancel the activity.

Many of them tell me that at the Centre they have got used to talking to both boys and girls, but before they went to the CYC they had never really spoken to the opposite sex. The young adults tell me of when they just had started at the CYC and two of the boys met one of the girls together with her mother in the street, and they did not dare to say hi to the girl. And the girl told her mother that she thought that the boys wanted to say hi to her, but that they did not dare as her mother was with her. The girl's mother then replied: Did they think I would eat them? The same girl tells me that she was not allowed to have boys visiting her at home, but one day the manager of the Centre came to visit and he brought two of the boys with him, then her father could not say no.

Both the teenagers and the young adults seem to think it is an important part of the CYC that they get to know, understand and to discuss and be friends with the opposite sex.

4.1.4 The reputation of the CYC

The young adults say that many people do not understand the centre and what they are doing. Because of that there is a lot of talk in the camp about the CYC. For instance when they had a campaign against all the garbage in the camp and the children were cleaning in the camp – they had to explain to people that the CYC taught the children to take responsibility. But mostly the talking about the CYC seems to be the mix of boys and girls.

4.1.5 The situation at school

What the children told me in the interviews about school was that they had problems with the teachers as they hit them and said many bad words about them.

As the children did not tell me so much more about their situation at school in the interviews, I will instead write down some of the information as well as impressions I got when I visited an UNRWA school just outside Shatila camp. I both spoke to the headmaster as well as attended a French class for thirteen year old girls.

At the UNRWA school next to Shatila camp there are 500 students in the morning and 500 students in the afternoon, which means that the children's school days are 4.5 hours per day. They are no more than 36 students in each class.

The headmaster tells me that the children at the school have many problems at home, and therefore problems in concentrating both at school and on their homework. She also tells me that the biggest problem she is facing is that the parents show very little interest in their children's education.

The building looks like a well worn shoe box. The benches they are sitting on are not very comfortable I was told. The windows were wide open with a gutter and a lot of noise came in from outside. There were some papers on the walls with the most important things they had learnt. Outside the school there was an open space behind high walls - only concrete, nothing at all to play with. This space was for the youngest children. The older children spent the breaks on the roof of the building.

I visited a French lesson for 13 year old girls. I ended up in a class with eager children - not all classes are like this one the headmaster told me. They all wanted to get the teacher's attention and answer the questions - and all of them shouted miss, miss. The children seemed to like their teacher in this subject. It was a young woman just above 20, without any formal teacher education. According to the headmaster she was one of the best teachers at the school.

The headmaster I spoke to was very open and seemed happy to talk about the school. Her office was small and constantly filled with people. The UNRWA school curriculum does not include human rights education, but they have had a workshop on human rights at the school. At the moment the children have neither sports nor art, even if they are supposed to. This because of lack of funding, but the headmaster hoped it would get better to next year. Then she showed me some initiatives they had taken themselves at the school to inform and teach the children about what was outside the normal curriculum. She showed me photocopies on how do avoid getting worms and lice and how to get rid of them.

4.1.6 The situation at work

As I mentioned before the young adults have problems finding work. And even if they find a job it might only be temporary. One of the young adults who had a job told me that she

sometimes feels discriminated against at work. The young adults told me that sometimes they get less payment than the Lebanese. Sometimes they do get the same payment, but not the bonus that the Lebanese get.

An example of working hours one of the young adults told me about was nine hours per day Monday to Friday and five hours on Saturdays. There is no lunch break, instead they have to eat while working otherwise they need to work another 30 minutes. At this workplace I was told about they had three weeks paid holiday.

4.2 Why do/did they attend the CYC?

Most of the children and young adults tell me that their parents would not allow them or were not fond of them going to the CYC in the beginning.

The reason for this is that both boys and girls are going to the Centre and take part in the same activities. The children say that the CYC has had a bad reputation because of this. One boy tells me that at first his parents did not approve to him going to the centre, but then the parents heard through the headmaster at the school about the activities at the centre. And after that he was allowed to go there. Almost all of the children tell me a similar story.

Another of the boys tells me that from the beginning his parents were against that he went to the centre, as they thought that everybody in the camp (he lives just outside the camp) was part of a military organisation. But when his parents could see that he grew as a person when going to the centre, they in the end approved of it.

A girl tells me a similar story of her parents not being fond of her going to the CYC as there were mixed sexes. But her mother convinced her father that he should allow her to go there. It was a big step to let her go to the summer camps that the CYC arranges, as it meant her not sleeping at home.

Most of the children also tell that it has been first when the manager of the CYC has visited the parents and told them about the CYC that they have been convinced to let their children go to the CYC. With the guest house there have come new rumours about the CYC because both men and women can stay in the same flat, even though there are separate rooms and separate bathrooms.

The children and young adults tell me that they started to go to the CYC either because a friend told them about it, or because the manager of the CYC visited them at home, came to their school and told about the CYC or through sisters and brothers.

Many of the children tell me that they usually go to the CYC every day. The reason that they go to the Centre is that: they like the activities there; they feel that they are listened to; they like the way they are treated there; that they have freedom at the Centre; and because there is a mix of both boys and girls.

4.3 What do they think of their own rights?

They tell me that before they came to the CYC they did not know about their rights. But today they know the whole Children's Convention, and they say that everyone at the centre knows a lot both about children's rights and the lack of them.

They think there is a lot of talk about children's and human rights, but they think they see little of this in reality. But at the CYC they are trying to implement the rights, and they all agree that the good thing is to apply the rights. As they say, everything is possible, but you need to work and follow up, and you need continuity - everything needs its own time.

One of the young adults says that sure the Children's Convention is important, but it needs someone to implement it. He says that the state should take its responsibility, and that maybe you could have social workers working on implementing the rights, and at the schools they should be implemented.

Another of the young adults says that the Children's Convention is important as it tells you to respect children. It makes you not only inherit your parents' view and way of thinking and acting. He adds that he wants to treat his own children in a totally different way.

One of the young adults thinks child participation is important as it gives children self confidence to talk and to solve their own problems.

They do not seem to believe in an easy solution to their lack of rights. One of the young adults says that he wants citizenship, because that also means having rights, but he wants to keep his

Palestinian nationality. Another of them says that she cannot see that there is a future in Lebanon for the Palestinians, but tries to work for the right to return, and maybe they will get their rights there. One solution would be to change the government and make them implement the rights.

They say that as a Palestinian there are not many rights, but at the CYC the rights are very important. One of the young adults says that he is trying to talk to children a lot about their rights. He says that he is working on reclaiming his rights.

4.4 What do they think of child participation?

I got a very clear answer from one of the young adults to my question on the importance of being listened to. His reply was: "Is it important to you that we listen to your questions now?" and then he continued "Of course it is as important for us to be listened to as it is for you." (My comment: There the cultural relativism had to step aside from the universalism.)

They told me that they think it is good if children are asked, listened to and respected. They say that even if the adults say no to a child's idea at the Centre they make sure to explain to the child why they said no to his or her idea - for instance that we are not going to the sea today as it is raining. The children and young adults thought that the way of treating children will change with the generations.

At the Centre they have learnt to accept each other's opinions, so that they feel free to express their own thoughts and ideas there. They also feel that they can participate even if not on one of the committees or in one of the working groups at the CYC as they all work so close together ideas from the whole group are easily transferred to the committees and working groups.

4.5 What do they think is the most important thing they've learnt from the CYC?

One of the replies to the question on what they learnt from the CYC is that they have self confidence to take responsibility, and to build their own possibilities and own strength. And many more of them say exactly the same.

Many of them also say that the CYC is their first home and that they spend more time at the CYC than at home with their families. One of the young adults claims that he grew up at the CYC, and not in his family, and that he learnt most that he knows at the CYC.

But they also mention some practical skills they learnt at the CYC such as computer skills and how to run workshops. They mention social skills such as to meet new people and to take responsibilities.

But what most of them mention and also seem to value most is things like taking their own decisions, not being afraid of doing new things, taking initiatives. One of the boys says that the most important thing he learnt is to make his own judgements, and take make his own decisions.

Other things they say they learnt at the CYC: to participate, respect each other, to show feelings, to trust in oneself, to be straight forward, how to get one's rights, self esteem, have learnt to judge a person first after having got to know that person, to listen to others, to listen to children, and to play with the children.

One of the girls says that she learnt about her own situation as a Palestinian, about democracy and elections, and learned about her rights at the Centre. One of the boys says that today his family trusts more in him, he feels that he has more power to negotiate at home, and he can show that he is taking a lot of responsibility at the Centre.

4.6 Can they use what they learnt at the CYC in other parts of the society?

At the CYC they have different workshops on a rather regular basis. These workshops are conducted in a way that the children decide what topic to work with, and then they might invite people to come and talk to them about the topic. Then they try to analyse the situation and find out how they could change what they find is not working as it should. They had for instance a workshop on early marriage, where also some parents took part. In that workshop they decided on a policy at the CYC of not getting married before the age of eighteen.

Other activities they have made through the CYC are that they have planted some trees to improve the environment in the camp, they have had cleaning campaigns, meetings for the parents on the environment, social problems and discrimination.

They also tell me about other actions they have taken. For instance they protested at school to get time off from school to attend demonstrations for Palestine. One of the young adults tells that she discusses with her work mates about problems at work - but she finds it difficult to get a real response as she finds that these people do not think themselves.

One girl tells that she has experienced problems with the teachers, who hit them and say many bad words about them. It is impossible to talk to the teacher as the teacher is too nervous and angry. So instead she went to the headmaster, but the headmaster said that "that is the way things are".

One of the boys tells that he had problems with the headmaster at the school when he went to a Palestine demonstration without permission from the headmaster. He told the headmaster that he could not ask for permission as they would not have given him the permission. He also said that as a Palestinian he must demonstrate. The headmaster said that he was honest and had self confidence – and told his mother that he was a good boy.

They have held a strike at school because the teachers hit them and tell them bad words. They have had a cleaning campaign in the camp about not throwing the garbage on the ground. One of the boys said that he will try to change the Lebanese government.

But they do not feel they have real power to make a change in the camp as the Popular Committee (similar to a municipality) in the camp is not working. One of the children finds the people in the camp in general religious and greedy.

One of the young adults means that it depends on herself how she deals with the problems she is facing, and how to solve them in a good way. She wants to translate what she has learnt to her children and how to protect her family. She also says that every problem has its solution. If she has a problem she talks to her friends, or they work in a group to solve the problem.

The good thing is that they can have influence over the children attending the CYC. And they think it is possible to change things. And they also say it is their duty to do things - to make people think and try to change things. They cannot have more influence at the moment, but the vision is to have that.

I also ask them what they would like the CYC to do that it is not doing at the moment. One of the young adults says that a dream is if the CYC could help with work opportunities in some sort of way. But he adds that the voluntary work shall of course continue at the centre.

One of the young adults says that she would like the CYC to get the parents to know how to deal with the children, to know the children's possibilities and strength. At present the parents do not care about their children. The parents have to face their responsibilities instead of having coffee with the neighbours.

5. Analysis and conclusion

One can say that child participation is the most violated right in the CRC. What I have found in most research and reports on child participation are that to implement it you need a major change of attitudes in society as a whole, but starting with the individual. Do we dare to empower our children? If we empower them, they will question us. Are we prepared for that? Will the children bring a new dimension of thinking into our society.

The CYC is fighting the borders set up by society in several ways. The most obvious one that the children mention is to mix boys and girls at the same Centre and also in the same activities. That has obviously created upset feelings and attention.

The CYC is more directly working on changing attitudes by for instance holding a workshop on early marriage when they also included the parents and took a decision within the CYC on not marrying before the age of eighteen.

Several of the children also said that they wanted to raise their children in a totally different way from the way they themselves had been raised. Of course these statements does not indicate if that will be the case, but at least we can conclude that there is an awareness among the children and young grown ups in the camp on the issue.

Also one of the young grown ups said that she wanted the CYC to approach the parents more than they do today, to teach the parents of the strength and possibilities that can be found within the children. This shows not only an awareness of the problems, but also a will to change and some deeper thought of how it would be possible to change.

A question not possible to answer for me here, is if the CYC is empowering the children to not only wish for a change, but also to give them the appropriate tools to take action. Is it as one of the young adults think that child participation is important because it gives children self confidence to talk and to solve their own problems. Will the right to participate as children and knowing their rights make them try to gain their participatory rights as grown ups?

Also interesting to look into would be if the children at the CYC are, or at least are as young adults, able to see through the political rhetoric that they get from the rest of the society. With this I mean what the adults tell them, and they also here the adults discuss between each other, for instance the difficulty to get a job. Will they uncritically take on board what they here or will they question what they have been told since they were very young? One of the young adults mentioned that he found the Children's Convention very important as he thought the convention made you not accept the truth your parents provided you with, it made you think in your own way.

If looking at the different spaces the children lives in, and the contradiction between where they have the right to participate, and where they do not have the right to participate. The categorisation I made in section 3 is not possible to be filled in accurately by my interview material.

What my material shows that one of the main reasons for the children to attend the CYC is because they feel that they are respected and taken seriously there. As opposed to when they tell about their experiences both at home and at school. At home the main message from both boys and girls were that many of their fathers had what they called a difficult mind and did not give them any freedom, not listening to them or letting them make their own decisions, or even discuss with their parents. At school they say that some of the teachers hit them and call them very bad things. When they went to the headmaster to get help, the reply was "that is the way things are". This does not show a willingness to take the children's opinions seriously.

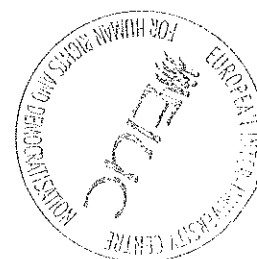
Questions to ask are if the contradiction I am talking about in this thesis create problem for the children. Does it make them feel dissatisfied when they realise what rights they are entitled to and what rights they do not have. Or is it a positive empowerment. Or do different children react differently.

Also with all the visitors, internet etc is impossible to have the children not knowing about what other people have and what they have not. Is it then better to have it this way with them fully aware, and able to discuss it both with grown ups at the Centre and with their peers?

It is also important to look at the complex situation in itself and ask how we implement human rights in this sort of setting? For instance I was surprised that a UN organ, UNRWA,

can be running schools without having included in the curricula to teach the children on the Children's Convention. This made me ask the question who is monitoring the work of the UNRWA schools under the Children's Convention.

My main conclusion is that the CYC has a big impact on the children. They say themselves that they want to go to the CYC as they feel respected and taken seriously there. They also tell that what they value most that they learnt at the CYC is to make their own judgements and have their own opinions. I can also see that the children are very aware of their own situation, and that they object to the way they sometimes are treated at home and at school. They might not have the possibility to speak up or if they do they may not be listened to.



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Interview guide

Child and Youth Centre (CYC), Shatila, Lebanon

17 May 2004 – 31 May 2004

1. What are you usually doing when you are at the CYC?
2. Why do you choose to go to the CYC? (Because you parents tell you to do so?
Because your friends are going?)
3. How often are you going to the CYC? How much time do you spend there each time
you are going there?
4. As a board member what are your special duties? *Ask board members only.*
5. What does a normal board meeting look like? Describe. *Ask board members only.*
6. Do you feel that your opinion is taken into account? Concrete examples of this.
7. Do you feel that you have an influence on what is happening at the CYC? Concrete
examples.
8. Do your parents think it is good / important that you go to the CYC? Do they approve?
Or not?
9. Do you have an example of when you and your friends have felt something is wrong
and done something to try to change that to the better?
10. What do you know about children's rights?
11. Do you agree to them?

12. Is there any right you do not find as important or is there any right you think is missing?
13. Do you think your rights can be useful? For you - now/in the future? Do you think it is possible to implement them? Have you any examples of when your rights have been implemented / violated.
14. What does the children's convention mean to you? Is it important or meaningless?
15. What do you think you have learnt from the CYC that will be important for you when you are grown up?
16. What about at school, in your family, in other areas of your life, do you feel that you are listened to there, and/or that you have influence in these spheres?
17. Do you think it is possible to get more influence for you in the above mentioned spheres?
18. Are there areas where you would like to have more influence?
19. Are there areas where you would like to have less influence/participation?
20. Areas where you would like to have less responsibility?
21. Do you think it would be good if children and youth had more say in other parts of your society? Where? What issues? Why?
22. Is it important for you to be listened to and able to influence? Why? Why not?
23. Do you think that there are more important things that the centre should work with than your participation?
24. Do you think that it is good that you as children and youth have a say at the CYC?

