



# **Popular Committees in Lebanon and their Role in the Revolutionary Transformation of Society and the Palestinian National Struggle**

Rawya Moussa | Farah Khattab





## ABOUT KNOWWAR

The research project KnowWar (Knowledge Production in Times of Flight and War – Developing Common Grounds for Research in/on Syria) is a cooperative project between the Syrian Center for Policy Research, the Department of Development Studies at the University of Vienna, the NGO Mousawat, the Centre for Development Studies at Birzeit University, and the Centre for Peace Research and Peace Education at the Alps-Adriatic University of Klagenfurt.



Based on reconfiguring solidarities in conflict and war zones, KnowWar rests on the following pillars:

- to research solidarities in and between marginalised Syrian, Palestinian, and Lebanese communities in Lebanon,
- to work out a concept of solidarity economy under conditions of armed conflict in Syria and colonial occupation in Palestine, and
- to conceptualise epistemologies for transformative research strategies.

KnowWar is funded by the Austrian Development Agency. For further information, please visit <https://www.know-war.net/>.

## DISCLAIMER

Vienna, 2022 © KnowWar, All Rights Reserved

KnowWar Publication Series

The views expressed herein are solely those of the author(s).

**COVER PHOTO:** Rawya Moussa

**DESIGN:** Anas Abedrabo

**EDITOR:** Keri Jones



---

## Popular Committees in Lebanon and their Role in the Revolutionary Transformation of Society and the Palestinian National Struggle

Rawya Moussa<sup>a</sup> und Farah Khattab<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Researcher at Mousawat, Beirut; <sup>b</sup>Research assistant at Mousawat, Beirut<sup>1</sup>

### Summary

This research paper, “Popular Committees in Lebanon and their Role in the Revolutionary Transformation of Society and the Palestinian National Struggle”, aims to analyse the reality of the Popular Committees, their socio-political and national role during the seventies and eighties period, their role under the current circumstances and challenges (Syrian asylum in the Palestinian camps, economic collapse, Covid-19), the mechanism used by the Popular Committees to establish social solidarity networks in the light of challenges and difficulties, their role in changing the concept of solidarity and Palestinian National Struggle, the shortcomings in the mechanism of work and performance of the Popular Committees, and the factors that play a negative role in influencing the Popular Committees and their national role. This research paper also includes a set of recommendations that were put forward during the discussions with secretaries, members of Popular Committees, and activists in the Palestinian camps to highlight and realise their role.

This working paper is based on qualitative research that was initially based on an exploratory phase, where literature related to Popular Committees was reviewed. It was composed of two field research stages, with the first stage carried out through individual interviews in the seven camps (AL Baddawi\Al Jaleel\Dbayeh\ Burj Al Barajni\ Mar Elias\ Ain Al Hilwe\ Burj Al Shamali). The interviews were with secretaries, PLO members, and the coalition forces' Popular Committees, they were men between the ages of 40 and 70. All interviews were carried out between May and June 2021. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, written, and analyzed accordingly.

The second stage was carried out by interviewing 24 activists living in different camps (virtual interview). They were males and females from different educational level ranges between 20 and 60 years old. This was done by taking into consideration the criterion of non-affiliation to the

---

<sup>1</sup> **Contact** Rawya Moussa ✉ [rawyamusu079@hotmail.com](mailto:rawyamusu079@hotmail.com), Farah Kattab ✉ [farahkhattab06@gmail.com](mailto:farahkhattab06@gmail.com)

Popular Committees (in terms of neutrality) to ensure accurate and objective answers. It was a one-time virtual interview. The questions were about the relation between the committees and the public, the extent of trust in Popular Committees, the commitment to the decisions of the Popular Committees, the extent of participation in the activities carried out by the Popular Committees and the recommendations to activate Popular Committees' role. They were conducted between March and April 2022. Subsequently, they were transcribed, written up and compared to the interviewee answers before they were analysed.

Conducting interviews and working on this paper coincided with the closure due to the Corona Epidemic, which hindered and delayed the implementation of another six interviews. Problems with the internet and communication due to market limitations on diesel (oil), which made it difficult to provide electrical power to charge the laptops and the mobiles or to activate any other useful electronic devices were faced. So, it took us a long time to carry out the study, and to write and analyse on time.

A state of loss and instability was experienced in the Palestinian society where it took the committees more than three years to become established and began practising their role. The establishment of the committees coincided with the civil war; therefore, they were established quickly to remedy the bad conditions and reality faced by the Palestinian refugees in the camps, without elections to select the members. That is why they did not have a strong basis.

The conflict of the Palestinian parties was reflected in the work of the committees in 2000. The parties succeeded at the expense of the committees in increasing fragmentation and effectively dismantling the Palestinian ranks, and this affected the coordination between committees.

The absence of the spirit of volunteerism, amid these bad circumstances, and the fact that the refugees are caught in the whirlpool of Palestinian political divisions and factional affiliations, stand as obstacles to any change and reinforce the gap between the committees and the people they are supposed to represent.

Despite the collective actions and activities carried out by the Popular Committees regarding the following up on the national and political issues, such as the revival of national events, sit-ins against unequal civil rights, decisions for refugees, solidarity stops with the Palestinian people, and the interviews showed clearly that the role of the Popular Committees is ineffective. The

---

relationship with the committees is not good, and the existing members are unable to carry out their responsibilities. There is no change in the Palestinian reality through their activities.

The activists concluded that the Popular Committees' role is below the required level. The reason for this poor performance is that the work of the Committees is based on civil services, the absence of financial support, the ineffectiveness of some members, the negative role played by the media in imaging the camps as a terrorist outpost, as well as the absence of alternatives, the faction's control over the work of the Committees, and the duplication and division of the Committees in 2000. These factors affected negatively the coordination mechanism with the official authorities, and reflected negatively on the people's participation in the activities of the Popular Committee, such as commemorating anniversaries, national occasions, solidarity and protest vigils. This limited the Popular Committees' commitment towards the public, making the Popular Committees merely formal bodies.

This reflects the lack of awareness among people about the importance of participating in the revival of national events. One of the reasons for non-participation is the people's lack of confidence in the committees as a result of the ineffectiveness of their role. The lack of trust in the Popular Committees, the absence of credibility and transparency, lack of awareness among the people, chaos and discipline, as well as the dominance of the factional relationship and relations based on the interests of political affiliation, the absence of the democratic election process, and not holding accountability to those who are involved in corruption, as well as the dominance of the factional element, are all reasons that play a role in which the relationship between the committees and the people is weak at times and cut off at other times, which affects the commitment to the committees and their decisions.

The improvement in the performance of the Popular Committees and their impulsive way of working during the crises (2019- 2021), as well as the new patterns adopted by the committees to deal with the conditions imposed by this phase besides coordinating with the associations, led to a temporary trust based on a state of instant sympathy after people had lost their confidence in the committees, and to social solidarity that emerged through the solidarity of the expatriates with the people of the camps, but the role of the Popular Committees in forming and establishing solidarity networks was based on building good relations with the camps' neighborhood, intermarriage relations, dependence on family and neighbors, and dependence on the Palestinians who are owners of capital and expatriates, which means traditional solidarity networks.

There are a lot of suggestions and recommendations which were submitted by the Committees' secretaries, members and activists in the camps to empower them, which include the Lebanese state's recognition of the Popular Committees as an official body, correcting the Cairo Agreement to edit the nomenclature to preserve the political and national dimension of the committees, holding democratic elections to select the best member for the best place, coordinating with the other Committees in the different camps, and writing a standardised worksheet about the demands and needs of the camps, setting up accountability systems to eliminate any corruption and nepotism, enhancing the concept of volunteering through awareness workshops that raises the level of volunteerism and participation for everyone, and setting an annual agenda in order to activate and empower the role of the committees on the ground.

The complete contribution is available in Arabic and can be downloaded under the following link:  
<https://ar.know-war.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/01/KnowWar.Palestinian-National-Struggle.Mousawat.Arabic.Final .2022.pdf>