

**PALESTINIAN POLITICAL FACTIONS:  
AN EVERYDAY PERSPECTIVE**

Submitted by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an ethnography of Palestinian political factions in Lebanon through an immersion in the daily life of homes. It explores the nature of factions and faction membership from the vantage point of those who form their very basis. It asks how did Palestinian political factions, which are clearly made of people, come to be seen as autonomous bodies that are studied as a whole and spoken of in the singular ('Fatah did this' and ' Hamas declared that'). Through a detailed account of the everyday practices of Palestinian refugees I problematise the underlying conceptualization of factions in the academic literature as bounded structures defined by their respective ideologies.

I explore how factions appear in the daily life of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon; how Palestinians join factions; how their relationship evolves over time; how they demand, and at times obtain, aid; how and whether they participate in events organized by factions; and how factionalism affects their understandings of what factions are. This ethnographic approach reveals that what binds Palestinian refugees to factions is not the ideology or regional or international alliances of the factions. For example, young Palestinians do not join a faction based on whether it is Islamic, Marxist, or nationalist; rather they do so based on where they have friends or family, and sometimes depending on which faction has the closest youth centre to their home. In fact, it is those personal relationships, including those developed with other faction members that keep Palestinians affiliated to factions. Factions appear as a loose network of people held together by different degrees of trust and cohesion. Yet my work does not dismiss the fact that factions also appear as structures, as coherent entities. On the contrary, in the second part of this thesis, I trace another set of practices, that of aid distribution, criticism, physical representation, and factionalism, to show how factions

metamorphose from loose networks based on interpersonal relations into impersonal structures defined by ideology.

An examination of the everyday practices and representations of Palestinian political factions reveals how those structures come into being, how that operation creates and maintains a certain configuration of power in Palestinian society, and how factions remain the center of political life in the face of widespread condemnation.

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## NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

I adopt the system of Arabic transliteration from the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.

# 1. 'EMPTY BUILDINGS'

## INTRODUCTION

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Boy in wheelbarrow, Nahr el-Bared camp. (Photograph: Ali Alouch)

After the departure of the PLO [in 1982] factions became empty buildings.  
Abdul-Rahman, Shatila camp, 12 October 2011

There was someone in the camp, he was a Fatah veteran, he told me this once: if there was a building that was a charitable organization and used to help people a lot, or if it was for a good man, and this person died, or if he was made to leave this building and this building became a big brothel, this doesn't mean that the building was still good, because there was a good man in it or good people in it. So yes. This was how he explained it.

Faris, Beirut, 10 Oct 2011

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon often referred to Palestinian political factions as buildings. For example, Palestinians talked of 'entering a faction' (*dakhalit tanzīm*) as if they were entering an edifice. Palestinians also referred to

factionalized Palestinians as having a 'back' (*ḍahir*). This expression was meant to indicate that factions provided a sort of protection to its members. This image of having something behind you, protecting you, was reminiscent of the walls of a building. Finally, they talked of a 'political ceiling' (*sa'af siyāsī*) to indicate the hierarchy, or the vertical limitations within the factions. The notion of 'entering,' of a 'back,' and a 'ceiling' clearly pointed to an imagination where factions appeared as edifices. Visualizing factions as building-like structures is indeed appealing: it draws boundaries that separate faction members from non-members; it represents the hierarchy inside factions, with the rank and file at the bottom and the leadership at the top; it demarcates the faction from other factions, other buildings; and it helps explain how the faction exists even when the people 'inside' change. In other words, the metaphor of a building-like structure illustrates how factions seem to exist separately from the people 'inside' it.

This image of the faction as an entity with a life of its own is also evident in the academic literature on Palestinian politics. As the first part of this chapter will show, factions are mostly viewed as autonomous bodies that are studied as a whole and spoken of in the singular ('Fatah did this' or ' Hamas declared that'). Factions are mostly examined through an analysis of party literature, the writings of party founders, and interviews with the leadership; as such, the literature implies that it is possible to study factions without examining the practices of those who form their very core. With the exception of the leadership, studies of factions rarely examine the lives, ideas, actions, and desires of faction members; instead, they study factions as if they were shells, existing separately and independently from the people they are supposed to encompass. As such, research on Palestinian political factions has failed to illuminate the quotidian practices of Palestinian refugees that tell us about the production and reproduction of factions in everyday life. Indeed, very little ethnographic evidence documents how the abstract notion of factions takes concrete shape in the daily lives of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, how Palestinians encounter factions, and whether factions retain their unitary appearance or disintegrate.

This thesis is an ethnographic study of Palestinian political factions through an immersion in the daily life of homes carried out in Nahr el-Bared camp in the north of Lebanon. Through an examination of factions at the micro-level - the daily, mundane practices of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon - this study asks how Palestinian political factions, which are clearly made of people, came to be imagined both in the academic literature and in everyday speech as containers existing separately from the very people and practices they contain. In other words, this study asks how people coming together (through forming a political faction) appear to create an entity with a life of its own. I focus not on the heated and intense moments of collective political action or contestation, but on the mundane and seemingly trivial practices of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon to explore how daily life alters the way in which the factions are imagined. Examining factions through the slow pace of everyday life does not suggest that Palestinians have failed to rise up, repeatedly and collectively, against the harsh oppressive system of alienation they are subjected to, but posits that daily life provides a crucial window through which to understand the forms of political organization that Palestinians adopt during everyday routines between contentious political episodes.

In this chapter, I review the literature on Palestinian political factions and substantiate my claim that it relies on an imagination of factions as building-like structures that encompass their members inside its walls. I then relate evidence from preliminary fieldwork that contradicts this claim. I show how the line that is supposed to exist between faction members and independents was difficult to locate empirically. This allows me to outline the research question that the thesis seeks to answer. I then review the literature on state and society and show how the difficulty in studying Palestinian factions resembles the difficulty in studying the state and its assumed boundary with society. Finally, I end by providing an outline of this thesis.

## **Rethinking Palestinian political factions**

The literature on Palestinian political factions generally clusters around three main themes: (i) the history and evolution of factions; (ii) the relations between factions and Palestinian civil society institutions; and (iii) support for factions among the Palestinian refugee population. In reviewing these three strands, I identify three main assumptions that underlie much of this work. The first assumption is that a faction's defining characteristic is its ideology. The second is that factions are bounded entities and that faction members and faction work can be differentiated from non-members and grassroots activities. The third is that factions are goal-orientated bodies that exist separately from the people within them.

The first, and most common, theme in the literature is an examination of the history and evolution of the factions. These studies adopt a top-down analysis of factions as they rely on the examination of party literature, the writings of party founders, and interviews with the leadership (e.g. Abu-Amr 1994; Broning 2013; Y. Sayigh 1997). In other words, they focus on the intentions, actions and words of the leadership. These studies chart the founding, histories, ideologies and evolution of the factions throughout the years (Brynen 1990b; Cobban 1984; Cubert 1997; Gunning 2008; Hroub 2006; R. Khalidi 2006; Milton-Edwards and Farrell 2010; Y. Sayigh 1997). They examine the local, regional, and international context in explaining the formation of new political groups, and emphasize the importance of the lives, ideas, and writings of faction founders and the historical circumstances in which they emerged. These notable leaders include such figures as Yasir Arafat, George Habash, Nayif Hawatma, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, and Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi (Abu-Amr 1994; Broning 2013; Nofal 2006). Key historical moments are analysed and their repercussion on the Palestinian political scene explained, (such as for example, the Arab defeat of 1967, the rise of Abdel Nasser in Egypt, Black September in Jordan, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, et cetera). Analyses also examine the factions'

regional and international alliances – and associated funding sources – as well as their alterations throughout the years (Baumgarten 2005; Knudsen 2005; Y. Sayigh 1997; Strindberg 2000; Suleiman 1999). Finally, these studies examine the factions' ideologies. They point out that Fatah is secular nationalist, the PFLP and DFLP are Marxist, while Hamas and Islamic Jihad are Islamic. In turn, the difference between the PFLP and the DFLP is also explained as emanating from ideological differences, most notably from a different approach to militarism. The DFLP is seen as questioning the efficacy of an armed struggle, which is the PFLP's strategy, and preferring to concentrate on a popular struggle and diplomacy (Broning 2013: 173; Cobban 1984: 154; Hasso 2005: 10-12; Y. Sayigh 1997: 232-34). Similarly, the difference between Hamas and Islamic Jihad is also understood as an ideological distinction, particularly pertaining to the question of *Jihad*. The Islamic Jihad maintains that first *Jihad* needs to be waged to liberate Palestine and then attention can be diverted to establish 'proper Islam' in society, while Hamas reverses that order, arguing that the creation of 'sound Muslims' needs to be prioritized and then *Jihad* can be waged against Israel (Abu-Amr 1994; D. K. Gupta and Mundra 2005; Milton-Edwards 1992). Studies also argue that party ideology should not be understood as a rigid and unchanging system of belief and that it should not be examined in isolation, rather the local, regional and international context needs to be accounted for in tracing ideological transformations (AbuKhalil 1987; Brown and Hamzawy 2010: 161-80; Gresh 1988; Hasso 2005; Hroub 2006, 2010).

The second theme of the literature is an examination of civil society institutions. While many studies highlight the important role of civil society in increasing the popularity of factions, especially in the context of Hamas (Baumgarten 2005; Hroub 2006; Milton-Edwards and Farrell 2010; Usher 2006), their analyses do not investigate these institutions in depth, but merely assert that the popularity of Hamas stems from the large network of social services they provide. Two notable exceptions to this trend are ethnographic studies by Roy (2011) and Jensen (2009), which focus specifically on Islamic social institutions

(ISIs) in Gaza and their relations with Hamas. These two studies are particularly interested in arguing against the literature that views ISIs as covert institutions dedicated to supporting 'terrorism' (e.g. Levitt 2007). Jensen focuses his study on a Hamas football club as well as the Islamic University in Gaza in a desire to understand how followers "respond to and absorb" the leadership's ideology, this, he contends, will provide an idea of "what Hamas is all about" (8). In looking at the Hamas football club, Jensen's main question is whether it is "a hotbed of indoctrination" (68). He reveals through participant observation and interviews that the club's football players joined it for non-ideological reasons. Players were drawn to the club due to its geographical proximity to their homes, as well as to satisfy their own sporting ambitions. Notably, these pertinent observations do not alter Jensen's view of the role and importance of ideology. Having been unable to identify ideology in the field, Jensen concludes that ideological conversion must happen elsewhere, such as Israeli prisons (71-77). When examining the Islamic University of Gaza, he reveals that many of the students were drawn to the movement because they had personal relations with people involved in the movement, had witnessed their work over the years and trusted them. Yet again, Jensen disregards these personal ties and concludes that the students have to a large degree absorbed the administration's discourse on Islamism (137-38). Jensen's rich ethnographic material highlights the importance of non-ideological factors in determining a faction's appeal to young Palestinians, yet Jensen's focus on Hamas' ideology 'at the grassroots' leads him to miss out on this point.

Roy's (2011) approach, on the other hand, is different. She does not base her investigation on a particular ISI, but visited several institutions, some for days and weeks and others for hours (100). As such she does not focus her research on the service recipients but rather on the providers. She questions the idea that ISIs are covert 'terrorist' institutions working for Hamas by making two points. Firstly, she argues that most of Hamas' support is non-ideological and that its popularity is driven by a professional delivery of services (92-93). Secondly, she investigates whether a direct link can be found between ISIs and Hamas. Her



empirical material reveals the complexity of that relationship, as she explains that the ISIs were self funded, but that some of their leaders were Hamas supporter and that they shared Hamas' philosophical outlook (139-64). She concludes that she was never able to determine with absolute certainty whether a link existed or not, but that "if Hamas did play a role, it was not obstructive or manipulative" but rather it was a positive contribution and that what is important is not "whether Hamas controlled ISIs" but the quality of the work performed by these organizations (164). In short, Roy seeks to emphasize the nature and quality of the ISIs' work and their contribution to Palestinians in Gaza.

Finally, the third theme in the scholarship is an examination of the refugees' opinions towards their political structures (Allan 2014; Kortam 2011; Nabulsi 2006; Peteet 1995; R. Sayigh 2011, 2012). These analyses examine factions from below. They rely on a bottom-up approach as they base their investigations on participant observation, interviews, and focus groups with Palestinian refugees. These studies have vastly increased since the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords.<sup>1</sup> They highlight that as a result of this agreement the refugees felt betrayed and abandoned by their leadership when they had formed the backbone of the Palestinian resistance movement. "They took our milk and blood and left us here!" (Peteet 1995) is a common sentiment reflected in these studies and they highlight that the popularity of Palestinian political factions in Lebanon decreased as a result. The sidelining of the refugees, in spite of their sacrifices, has left a deep scar: they have even been called the 'refugees of the revolution' (Allan 2014). Additionally, Davis (2011) and Khalili (2004, 2007) describe how refugees criticize their leadership's abandonment of the right of return through the emergence of commemorative practices in the refugee camps of Lebanon, such as the writing of village books, the display of keys and images from Palestine.

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<sup>1</sup> The agreement signed between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel created the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) as an authority over the West Bank and Gaza and had no official ties to the Palestinians in the Diaspora. See Chapter 3 p 76.

In addition to highlighting the feelings of abandonment and betrayal, these studies also focus on different initiatives in the camp that attempt to counter this political disenfranchisement (Abou-Zaki 2012, 2013; Allan 2014; Kortam 2011; R. Sayigh 2011). Sayigh (2011: 59) documents the example of a 'refugee poll' in Burj Shemali camp in the south of Lebanon in 2002, when what Sayigh calls a "social activist" launched a campaign to have a refugee poll to demonstrate that the refugees would not accept the political leadership's renunciation of the right of return. Sayigh calls this an "independent grass-roots action" and adds that it did not materialize "partly because of non-support from political forces" (2011: 59). An election in Shatila camp in 2005 received even more scholarly attention (Abou-Zaki 2012, 2013; Allan 2014; Kortam 2011; R. Sayigh 2011). These studies trace the conditions that fostered this unique experience in direct democracy, which created a new governing body in Shatila camp. This episode is portrayed in the literature as an attempt to redress the failures of the 'Popular Committee' (the incumbent governing body composed of representatives of different Palestinian political factions). While I return to this initiative in the next section, what is important to highlight now is that this action is portrayed by the scholarship as being independent of and in opposition to the factions. Additionally, the literature explains that the elected committee, although successful in improving the living conditions in the camp, did not remain active for a long time: six of its members resigned following threats and pressure from the factions (Abou-Zaki 2013: 188-89; Allan 2014: 133; Kortam 2011: 203; R. Sayigh 2011: 59).

Despite the wide range of research on Palestinian political factions, there are three main assumptions that scholars share. The first assumption is that factions are defined by their respective ideologies. Ideology is seen to be the factions' defining characteristic; it is what differentiates them from each other. This characterization of factions is clearest in the first group of studies surveyed. Indeed, they devote considerable amount of energy to highlighting the ideological differences between the parties, and the evolution of those ideologies over time.

Even studies that stress the importance of civil society still rely on ideology as an important characteristic of factions. For example, although Jensen's (2009) own empirical evidence suggested that football players had chosen the Hamas club for non-ideological reasons, his prior assumptions about the role of ideology nevertheless prompted him to assert that ideological conversion must happen elsewhere, such as Israeli prisons.

The second underlying assumption of the literature is that factions are bounded entities where faction members and independents can easily be discerned. This point is clearest in studies that look at popular criticism of the factions and at grassroots initiatives. These studies are based on the idea that those engaged in either criticism or in grassroots actions against the factions are themselves outside of and in opposition to factions. We have seen how the Shatila 2005 election and the Burj Shemali 'refugee poll' were both portrayed as being independent actions, which sought to redress the failures of factions. Factions are imagined as having boundaries, lines which separate them from the rest of society. This is again apparent in other studies. For example the PA's cabinet members are often introduced as being either independent or politically affiliated (e.g. Brynen 1995a: 39). Roy (2011) also attempts to separate Hamas ISIs from non-Hamas ISIs, assuming that such a line could be drawn. Although her empirical material does not provide her a clear answer, she does not question this assumption, rather she evades the problem by concluding that what is important is not whether "Hamas controlled ISIs" but the quality of the services offered by the ISIs.

Finally, the literature portrays factions as structures with an existence separate from the lives of the people in the factions. This is not to imply that these studies deny that factions are made of people. But the literature nonetheless considers the faction to be a coherent goal-oriented body that acts in accord with its intentions: 'the faction' can be spoken of in the singular. In assuming that the faction is a single entity, the literature typically neglects what

occurs 'inside' that body. Emphasizing the ideology, the alliances and the history of the founders, or looking at the lack of popular support for Palestinian political factions in Lebanon, allows the scholarship to treat factions as distinct bodies that can be studied as coherent entities. Everyday practices - such as 'joining' or 'leaving' the factions and demanding help from the factions - are rarely mentioned in these studies. This supports the assumption that factions exist outside of those practices and can therefore be studied as 'things' through an analysis of party literature, by speaking with the leadership, or by surveying public opinion. Even studies that highlight the importance of civil society institutions continue to perceive factions as entities with a life of their own that "penetrate" (Jensen 2009: 8) or "change" society (Baumgarten 2005: 37), as opposed to being *part* of society. This can be illustrated through Roy's (2011) work which was the closest to questioning this assumption but did not. Her empirical material pointed to the difficulty in determining any direct link between ISIs and Hamas. Yet this complexity did not lead her to problematise the premise of her own question. By searching for a link between ISIs and Hamas she assumed that they were both entities and that links could be found between the entities and not between the people that constitute the entities. When Roy explained that some of the ISI leaders were Hamas supporters she added that an individual had the right to be politically affiliated, it did imply that the institution itself was (142). This distinction between the 'person' and the 'institution' again pointed to where Hamas was seen as an entity that existed separately from the people within it.

In short, the literature pictures factions as entities with a life of their own, that encompass their members, and that differentiate themselves from other factions through their respective ideologies. They appear as shells, as building-like structures, similar to how Palestinian refugees refer to them in everyday speech. However preliminary evidence from my fieldwork questioned the conceptual assumptions embodied in the literature. In the next section, I relate how an initial investigation of the 2005 Shatila election provided a different

picture of what factions were. As mentioned earlier, this initiative was portrayed in the literature as a grassroots effort that was directed against the factions who ultimately brought its demise. I first convey the context in which this election occurred and then demonstrate through a preliminary investigation that the line that was assumed to exist between independents and factions was difficult to draw in practice. This will reveal the research question this work seeks to answer.

### The 2005 Shatila election



News clipping from al-Safir newspaper, 23 May 2005: 80% participated in 'wedding-like' elections in Shatila. (Photograph: Perla Issa)

In 2004 one of Shatila's main generators exploded and the camp went without electricity for over nine months.<sup>2</sup> The Popular Committee, the official governing body comprised of representatives of factions was unable to remedy the situation.<sup>3</sup> It was criticized as being inefficient and corrupt; and some residents even accused it of sabotage. In May 2005 as the electricity blackout was still ongoing, two Palestinian factions clashed in the alleys of Shatila and a man was killed by a stray bullet. Factions were not only seen as being unable to deal with the electricity crisis but were also seen as being a cause of insecurity in

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<sup>2</sup> I relate the story of the election by piecing it together from the different articles and presentations about it. See Hala Abou-Zaki, 'Rapports À L'espace Et Au Politique En Mutation Chez Les Réfugiés Palestiniens Des Camps, Dans Le Liban D'après-Guerre (1990-...): Le Cas Du Camps De Chatila', *Conference: Palestine – National et Subjectivités : Interrogations sur le Cas Palestinien* (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), Paris, France, 2012), Hala Abou-Zaki, 'Revisiting Politics in Spaces 'Beyond the Center': The Shatila Palestinian Refugee Camp in Lebanon', in Malika Bouziane, Cilja Harders, and Anja Hoffmann (eds.), *Local Politics and Contemporary Transformations in the Arab World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 178-95, Diana Allan, *Refugees of the Revolution: Experiences of Palestinian Exile* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), Manal Kortam, 'Politics, Patronage and Popular Committees in the Shatila Refugee Camp, Lebanon', in Are Knudsen and Sari Hanafi (ed.), *Palestinian Refugees: Identity, Space and Place in the Levant* (London: Routledge, 2011), 193-204, Rosemary Sayigh, 'Palestinian Camp Refugee Identifications: A New Look at the 'Local' and the 'National'', in Are Knudsen and Sari Hanafi (ed.), *Palestinian Refugees: Identity, Space and Place in the Levant* (London: Routledge, 2011), 50-64.

<sup>3</sup> Palestinian refugee camps have what is called a 'Popular Committee.' The Popular Committees were first set up in 1969 following the signing of the Cairo Accords between Yasir Arafat and the Lebanese army commander (see Chapter 3 p 74). Popular Committee members were appointed by Palestinian political factions rather than elected by camp residents. They operated as quasi-official bodies that were supposed to function as municipalities dealing with the day to day affairs of the camps from maintaining services such as garbage collection, water, electricity and sewage, to resolving conflicts between inhabitants of the camp. See Julie Peteet, 'Socio-Political Integration and Conflict Resolution in the Palestinian Camps in Lebanon', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 16/2 (1987), 29-44, Rosemary Sayigh, *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Books, 2007) at 179. While camps residents were mostly satisfied with their functioning prior to the withdrawal of the PLO from Lebanon they were more recently the subject of a lot of criticism. See Maria Holt, "'A World of Movement': Memory and Reality for Palestinian Women in the Camps of Lebanon', in Are Knudsen and Sari Hanafi (ed.), *Palestinian Refugees: Identity, Space and Place in the Levant* (London: Routledge, 2011), 180-92 at 184, Laleh Khalili, 'A Landscape of Uncertainty: Palestinians in Lebanon', *Middle East Report*, 236 (Fall 2005 2005), 34-39 at 38, Karma Nabulsi, 'Palestinians Register: Laying Foundations and Setting Directions', (Oxford: Nuffield College, University of Oxford 2006), Julie Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair: Palestinian Refugee Camps* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005) at 198-99, Sayigh, 'Palestinian Camp Refugee Identifications: A New Look at the 'Local' and the 'National'', at 59, Jaber Suleiman, 'The Current Political, Organizational, and Security Situation in the Palestinian Refugee Camps of Lebanon', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 29/1 (1999), 66-80 at 75-76.

Shatila camp.<sup>4</sup> Following this incident protests erupted in the camp that led to a public meeting in the camp's mosque attended by over 200 people. The attendees then took a decision to hold an election for a new eleven-member committee that was to be called the Civic Committee (*Lajnat ahālī al-mukhayyam*). The Civic Committee was to be a new committee in Shatila that was to exist in addition to the Popular Committee. To be eligible to run as a candidate in the election, contestants needed to be unaffiliated with any Palestinian political faction (Abou-Zaki 2013; Kortam 2011: 201; R. Sayigh 2011: 59). The elected committee's mandate was to remedy the Popular Committee's failures in dealing with the electricity blackout in the camp, as well as other infrastructural problems such as the lack of potable water. Kortam (2011: 202) explained that "the Palestinian population were fed up with their illegitimate leaders and needed a radical change" and Sayigh (2011: 59) added that the elected committee "would represent the camp's residents rather than the Resistance groups."<sup>5</sup> These statements clearly show that this new elected committee was considered to be in opposition to the faction-appointed Popular Committee.

On 22 May 2005 approximately 800 people voted in Shatila's first election. According to Kortam this represented 30% of eligible voters (202), Abou-Zaki put it at 53% (2012) and al-Safir newspaper put it at 80% (Alouwa 2005). Kortam mentioned that the day was marked with "joy, hope, [and] enthusiasm" (202). "It's a wedding!" declared one of the organizers in Shatila camp (Alouwa 2005), emphasizing that the election was a great celebration. An elderly woman was

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<sup>4</sup> The Palestinian political factions that were present at that time in Shatila camp were part of what was called the 'Alliance' (*Tahāluf*) see Anders Strindberg, 'The Damascus-Based Alliance of Palestinian Forces: A Primer', *ibid.*/3 (2000), 60-76. Those factions were seen as being pro-Syrian which had a military presence in Lebanon at that time. In 2005 the Syrian military left Lebanon following the assassination of then Prime-Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, which was followed by a massive demonstrations demanding the departure of Syria from Lebanon. It is in that context that the Shatila elections were held. The Syrian military, which was seen as backing the *Tahāluf* factions, had just left and the PLO factions had not yet had time to establish themselves in the camp.

<sup>5</sup> Palestinian political factions are often referred to as the 'Resistance groups' or as the 'Organizations.'

quoted as saying: “I got out of bed in spite of my sickness [to vote], maybe now we will have representatives in the committees and we will have services and the corruption will end” (Alouwa 2005). However, the elected committee did not remain active for very long. Despite resolving the electricity crisis in the camp, “six of the committee members withdrew their membership because they could no longer ignore the threats directed against them” (Kortam 2011: 203), however Kortam does not explain further what was the nature of these threats. Similarly, Sayigh and Allan also mentioned that “political pressures” (R. Sayigh 2011: 59) and “threats by pro-Syrian factions” (Allan 2014: 133) forced six members to resign. However, neither Sayigh nor Allan provide us with further explanations.<sup>6</sup> For that reason, I approached three former members of the elected Civic Committee – Abu Ali, Abu Steif, and Hajj Ismael – for more information.<sup>7</sup>

My first interviewee, Abu Ali, confirmed that the election was a happy, even joyous occasion. His wife and son, who were also present during our meeting, told me that it was the ‘good times’ and that they had ‘good memories.’ They were especially proud that it was like ‘an official Lebanese election’ with election monitors; the Palestinian Human Rights Organization (PHRO) had overseen the process.<sup>8</sup> The son was proud of the electoral machinery, which consisted of him going around telling people to vote for his father. They told me that eleven ‘independent candidates’ were elected and that Abu Ali had received the most votes. However the euphoria seemed to have ended quite swiftly: the son told me that ‘the factions got into it,’ that ‘they divided the people and destroyed it.’ The mother told me that the other members of the elected committee wanted the ‘*sulta*,’ the authority and the chair. As the discussion proceeded, Um Ali told me that Abu Ali was ‘close to the PFLP.’<sup>9</sup> This statement

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<sup>6</sup> Allan devotes eight pages to relate the circumstances of the election and one paragraph to its demise. See Allan, *Refugees of the Revolution: Experiences of Palestinian Exile* at 126-33.

<sup>7</sup> All names have been altered to protect the anonymity of my interlocutors.

<sup>8</sup> Kortam mentioned that the PHRO had just finished a training on election monitoring and were happy to practice their newly learned skills, see Kortam, 'Politics, Patronage and Popular Committees in the Shatila Refugee Camp, Lebanon', at 201.

<sup>9</sup> The PFLP is a Palestinian faction. The acronym stands for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.



surprised me as earlier she had said that ‘eleven independent people’ were elected.

Abu Ali, on the other hand, explained that it was personal disputes that led him to resign, not faction intervention. In particular, he had heard that another elected member, Hajj Ismael, had gone to meet with Electricité Du Liban (EDL), the public Lebanese electricity company, with his brother, who happened to be the head of the Popular Committee. This assertion shocked me. It was bewildering that one of the elected members of the Civic Committee – supposedly opposed to the factions - was the brother of the head of the faction-appointed Popular Committee. My surprise at the closeness of the two supposedly rival committees was compounded when Abu Ali went on to explain that Fatah had donated to them large garbage bins that they would use on Sundays to clean the alleys, while Hamas had given them water pipes twice for the wells. I was also surprised to hear that factions had helped the elected committee, which had been portrayed as working against the Popular Committee and, by extension, against the factions that supported it.<sup>10</sup> It seemed that the line between the elected ‘independent’ committee and the factions was blurred, rather than clear-cut. When I asked Abu Ali about his ties to the PFLP, he explained that in actuality he had been a member of the DFLP but had left them.<sup>11</sup> When I inquired into his reasons, he laughed and said, “it’s a long story, a film.” I then asked him if he was ‘independent’ as the criteria for candidacy for the election required. Abu Ali answered that he was a ‘friend of the PFLP’ but followed that assertion with a strong criticism of the factions.

My meeting with Abu Steif proved to be similar. The owner of a grocery store in the camp, he was also elected to the Civic Committee. When I first

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<sup>10</sup> At the time of the election Fatah did not have a representative in the Popular Committee as Fatah could not operate openly in Shatila camp due to the presence of Syria forces (see note 4). Its contribution to the Civic Committee could be seen as an attempt to work against its rivals in the Popular Committee by strengthening the Civic Committee. However Hamas had a representative in the Popular Committee and still aided the Civic Committee.

<sup>11</sup> The DFLP is a Palestinian political faction. Its acronym stands for the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

discussed the election with him, I saw him raise his eyebrows in excitement. Without saying another word, he went to his store desk, pulled from underneath it a plastic bag, and emptied its contents onto his desk. It contained newspaper clippings from the Lebanese *al-Safir* newspaper, several local Palestinian newsletters, and a number of unused electoral lists. Headlines from the newspaper read: “80% participated in the “wedding-like’ elections in Shatila,” and “The election of a popular committee in Shatila camp: a singular democratic experience that needs to be generalized.” Abu Steif was obviously proud and excited about their experiment in democracy; he had kept these documents easily accessible for six years.

When Abu Steif saw me looking at the two pictures of Yasir Arafat hanging on the wall by his desk, he explained that he was officially a member of Fatah but that unofficially he left them. His father had been an early member of Fatah before 1969 and as a child Abu Steif participated in the first training of the Fatah scouts (*Ashbāl*) in the early 70s.<sup>12</sup> However, he left Fatah in 2004 ‘for personal and not political reasons,’ but said ‘no matter where I go or come, for the last 20 years and for the next 20 years, people still tell me that I am Fatah.’ I attempted to obtain more information from Abu Steif about why he left Fatah, about the nature of the ‘personal reasons,’ but obtained only vague answers. I felt that he preferred not to elaborate further. I then moved on to discuss the demise of the elected committee and I was even more frustrated. Contrary to what the literature asserted about the initiative, Abu Steif said it was *not* the factions that had exerted pressure on him to quit. According to Abu Steif, the elected committee faced so many internal disputes on how to direct the work that several of its members resigned. When I asked him about these internal disputes, he told me that he preferred not ‘to turn things into a personal fight.’ It seemed from Abu Ali and Abu Steif’s discussions that it was personal politics rather than factional interference that had ended the Civic Committee’s experiment in governance.

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<sup>12</sup>A literal translation of *Ashbāl* is lion cubs. They were the youngest members of Palestinian political factions who took part in basic military training.

My third and final meeting with an elected official added yet another layer of complexity. Unlike Abu Ali and Abu Steif, Hajj Ismael explained that it was the factions that had destroyed the Civic Committee. He explained that the committee was preparing a dinner for a delegation of French solidarity activists who were visiting Shatila. The dinner was to be held in the *Majd al-Kurūm* hall in Shatila, but a member of the PFLP and a member of Fatah convinced some of the elected members to move the dinner to the People's Hall, which belonged to the PFLP. Hajj Ismael had refused. After he continued with the dinner in *Majd al-Kurūm*, the elected committee voted to freeze his membership: that was the end of his involvement. When I asked him about his brother who was the head of the Popular Committee, to which the Civic Committee stood in opposition, Hajj Ismael added that it was a source of constant pressure. He illustrated this point by saying that his brother would say that Shatila's wells were in good condition and did not need any rehabilitation, while Hajj Ismael would contradict him. He added that a lot of people used to criticize his brother in front of him, which was difficult for him. Hajj Ismael's predicament, that his own brother was part of the Popular Committee (and therefore part of a faction), underscored how the Popular Committee and factions were comprised of individuals with whom other individuals (including 'independents') may have personal and intimate relations. It stressed how hard it was to treat factions as entities in their own right. These factions were first and foremost people who were part of the community and not outside it. Hajj Ismael's difficulties as his own brother was part of the 'enemy' emphasized how factions could not be separated from the people inside them.

These three short meetings with former Civic Committee members seemed to question the assumptions held in the academic literature. Firstly, the empirical evidence suggested the difficulty of separating factionalized Palestinians from independents, and factions from independent and grassroots actions. Both Fatah and Hamas had donated equipment to the elected committee, indicating that there was no complete separation between the elected committee and the factions. Furthermore, both Abu Abli and Abu Steif seemed to have

relationships with factions that were difficult to define. They did not appear to be 'inside' factions, nor did they appear to be on the 'outside.' Abu Ali's characterization of his relationship with the DFLP as 'a long story, a film' and Abu Steif explanation that he left Fatah for 'personal and not political reasons' implied people's relations with factions were not confined to the political arena but veered into the personal. Secondly, factions began to lose their appearance of structures. The fact that one of the elected Civic Committee member's own brother was part of the Popular Committee exposed how factions were not entities in their own right, but people. Their unitary and coherent exterior seemed to be put in question upon closer examination. Finally, this preliminary investigation of the Shatila election also uncovered how ideology played little role in everyday life. Indeed, the camp's population's support and enthusiasm for this experiment in democracy was not directed against any ideological stance of the factions, but rather it was rooted in a profound dissatisfaction of the Popular Committee's day-to-day management of the camp, it was rooted in everyday life.

This initial examination of the 2005 Shatila election also brought out the importance of studying the personal stories and everyday practices of Palestinian refugees as they relate to Palestinian political factions. It showed through empirical evidence that the dividing line between factions and independent initiatives is uncertain. Factions seemed to be of a strange nature: they looked like coherent entities from afar, but their edges became uncertain upon closer examination. This raises two important questions, which are the focus of this thesis. Firstly, what is the nature of factions? If indeed factions are not building-like structures defined by ideology, then what are they? Secondly, why and how do factions appear to be structures if that was not their nature?

In order to develop an analytical framework to answer these questions, I turn to the literature on state and society. I argue that the difficulty in defining the nature of factions and in drawing the line between factions and independent actions closely resembles the problems facing state theorists in studying the

state and its boundary with society. I then outline how the structural effect argument of Timothy Mitchell and the ethnographers of the state move beyond that problem. Instead of structures, both Mitchell and the ethnographers of the state see it as the result of practices. This allows me to develop an appropriate methodology to investigate the nature of factions and faction membership.

### **Literature review: the state-society debate**

This thesis re-conceptualizes the way we imagine and analyze Palestinian political factions and political membership by building upon the 'structural effect' argument of Timothy Mitchell and ethnographies of the state. However before I delve into the literature it is helpful to begin by explaining how state theory is an appropriate framework to study the political structures of a stateless people in exile for over sixty-six years. After all, what Palestinians lack and what they have been demanding and struggling for is the creation of a state of their own. While appearing to be counter-intuitive, the examination of state theory as it relates to Palestinian political factions provides us with invaluable insights that allow us to denaturalize Palestinian political factions and equips us with fresh perspectives into how to study them.

The study of factions presents some of the same problems experienced by state theorists and as such this vast scholarship can inform the study of Palestinian political factions in important ways. In the previous section I examined how the current literature on Palestinian political factions relies on an underlying assumption that factions constitute a separate entity, a structure that stands apart from the refugees themselves. I also illustrated, through the example of the Shatila 2005 election, the difficulty in drawing a line between factions and grassroots and independent initiatives. In the academic literature as well as in everyday discourse, factions are portrayed as self-contained entities that exist separately and in opposition to the camp population. In contrast, the grassroots and independent initiatives were seen to be the site of resistance, the

place where 'society' was attempting to pressure factions to properly assume their responsibilities. However, it was harder to make such a distinction empirically: factions had actually helped the elected committee with the provision of equipment – garbage bins as well as water pipes; the members of the elected committee had complex personal relations with factions. Those relations were not confined to a 'political arena' but rather they crossed into the personal. The political was not a self-contained category that existed separately from people's daily lives.

Similarly, the difficulty of studying the state stems in part due to the difficulty in delineating its expected boundary with society. Indeed, both academic and popular discourses on the state assume that it exists 'above' society and acts upon it. As Asad (2004: 281) argues, "according to the modern concept, the state is an entity with a life of its own, distinct from both governors and governed. And because of this abstraction, it can demand allegiance from both sides". The state is perceived to exist separately and independently from society. However the state's perceived boundary with society has been harder to determine empirically. There are, therefore, direct parallels between the study of the state and the study of Palestinian political factions.

This point can be further expanded upon through a brief review of three approaches to the study of the state: system theory, neo-Marxism, as well as neo-Weberianism. In all three perspectives the difficulty of studying the state stems in part from the impossibility of drawing a line between the state and society or between the political and the social. Nevertheless, this line always reappears as an underlying assumption in those same analyses. This will highlight the importance and power of that uncertain line and how it relates to the study of Palestinian political factions.

Both the system theorists (Almond and Coleman 1960; Almond 1988; Easton 1953, 1957) and the neo-Marxists (Miliband 1973; Poulantzas 1975)

argue that the state is not separate from society and highlight how political parties, pressure groups, and the media can not be clearly classified as being part of the state or society. As a remedy, both the system theorists and the neo-Marxists propose new conceptual categories that in turn are difficult to define. In particular system theorists advocate for the concept of a political system, which allows for the inclusion of political institutions, which cannot be clearly classified as being part of the state or society. Yet when they attempt to draw the boundary of the political system they face a similar problem attempting to draw its edges from the social environment. In other words, system theorists abandoned the concept of the state because it was hard to define and yet they faced a similar problem defining the political system, which they postulated as a “self contained entity” (Easton 1957: 384). Neo-Marxists on the other hand view the state as the institutionalization of the interests of the dominant class. Inspired by Gramsci (1971), they are keen to show how the distinction between the state and society and the political and the social is a source of power to the elite. However, even though neo-Marxists properly point out that no line can be drawn between state and society their analyses are still based on an attempt to draw a line between the political and the social. This point can be illustrated through the works of Miliband (1973). He proposes to substitute the concept of the state for the ‘state-system’ and the ‘state-elite.’ However, Miliband attempts to define the edges of the ‘state-system’ and the ‘state-elite’ by separating them from “giant corporations, Churches, the mass media, etc.” (1973: 51) which “are not ‘political’ at all” (1973: 51). A new line appears between the political and the non-political even though Miliband himself argues that political parties, churches, and the mass media are the main organizations through which the production of consent and the legitimation of capitalist society occurs (Miliband 1973: chapters 7 and 8). Miliband therefore contradicts himself, similarly to the system theorists, by first arguing that the social alters the political, yet in his analysis he attempts to draw a line between them that is impossible to locate. In contrast, neo-Weberians (Evans et al. 1985; Skocpol 1979) argue that the state is separate and autonomous from society, critiquing both the system theorists and the neo-

Marxists (Migdal 2001: 8) However this line that was assumed to exist theoretically was again difficult to locate empirically. This can be illustrated through the work of Theda Skocpol (1979) on social revolutions in France, Russia, and China. Skocpol begins her analysis by emphasizing that the states under study are “actual organizations” whose boundaries are distinct from society (31). However, Skocpol’s analytical distinction is difficult to substantiate empirically. For example, when Skocpol examines the French case, she concludes that the power of the state is inseparable from the political power of the landed classes, which contradicts her earlier statement about the autonomy of the state.

All three approaches examined in this section attempted to answer a common question: How to model the relations and interactions between state and society? In doing so they all faced a similar problem: they assumed that a line could be drawn between the political and the social or between the state and society while being unable to delineate either. In doing so they also highlighted the important, yet illusive, nature of that line.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Foucault’s work on governmentality also highlights the importance of that non-existent line see Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality', in Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (ed.), *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 131-43. By drawing our attention to all the processes by which the conduct of a population is governed by an array of state and non-state institutions, Foucault denaturalizes the function of the state. Indeed the state appears not as a centre of government but as a way of dividing the supposed 'political' from the 'non-political' and in turn maintaining a certain configuration of power. Foucault stresses how the state is actually not important, he argues that “the state is no more than a composite reality and a mythical abstraction, whose importance is a lot more limited than many of us think” *ibid.*, at 142. He further highlights that “it is the tactics of government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not, the public versus the private, and so on” *ibid.*, at 143. Foucault here points out that the job of the 'state' is therefore much different than what we usually assume, in this sense the state’s role is to divide the public versus the private or the political from the non-political. Rose and Miller looking at the political rationalities of liberalism and neo-liberalism expand on Foucault’s argument and argue that the state “can be seen as a specific way in which the problem of government is discursively codified, a way of dividing a 'political sphere', with its particular characteristics of rule from other 'non-political spheres' to which it must be related, and a way in which certain technologies of government are given a temporary institutional durability” see Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller, 'Political Power Beyond the State: Problematics of Government', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 43/2 (1992), 173-205 at 176-77. The state for them exists as a result of discursive practices and the institutionalization of certain techniques of rule, while government happens through an array of alliances between political and non-political entities and state and non-state institutions. Liberalism and neo-liberalism, as particular political rationalities, limit the scope of the state



Is there a way to resolve this conundrum? Is it possible to study state/factions and society relations without assuming the separation of the two (or of the political and the social) while accounting for the fact that they *appeared* to be separate? Moreover, is it possible not to rely on simplistic dichotomies that see the state/ factions as the site of power and society as the site of resistance, but rather to account for how they constitute one another? I suggest that the structural effect argument of Timothy Mitchell and the ethnographers of the state provide us with an invaluable conceptual and empirical way forward.

*The 'structural effect': Effecting the line*

As opposed to the previous scholars Mitchell (1988, 1990, 1991, 2002) advances a conceptual argument as to why the state acquires an appearance of separation from society when it is not the case. He gives special importance to the fact that a line *appears* to separate the state from society when it cannot be drawn in practice. He argues that “this elusiveness should not be overcome by sharper definitions, but explored as a clue to the state’s nature” (1991: 77). He shows how the line drawn between the state and society is a line drawn internally within a given system of political order, and how in turn it helps sustain that order. This argument is vital for my study as it is the only argument that accounts for both the elusiveness and power of that line.

In *Colonizing Egypt* Timothy Mitchell looks at the modern microphysical methods of order that Foucault (1977) calls discipline. Discipline refers to the meticulous organization of space, movement, position, and time sequences and the systematic methods of surveillance and inspection that were developed around the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in factories, schools, prisons,

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discursively in order to appear to “govern at a distance” *ibid.*, at 181. It becomes clear that certain political rationalities need the appearance of lines between the political and the non-political, between the state and civil society, to appear to be governing at a distance. These imaginary lines are therefore powerful as they maintain a certain organization of political power in modern societies.

hospitals, and government offices. Mitchell argues that while Foucault's study of discipline focused on France and northern Europe, these disciplinary practices are actually colonizing in nature. He points out that these practices were first introduced and developed in colonial settings. In particular he examines the introduction and dissemination of these practices in Egypt in the nineteenth century by examining the formation of the Egyptian army, the establishment of military schools, the building of 'model villages,' the destruction and reconstruction of Cairo, the spreading of organized schooling, and finally the introduction of the printing press. Through these examples Mitchell advances his central argument. He contends that modern disciplinary practices created a peculiar metaphysics, it reordered the world into what appears to be two distinct entities: the material world - things in themselves - and a non-material world - the world of meaning. This occurs through a process he calls 'enframing' (1988: 44-48, 79, 92-94), which turns the world into a representation, what he refers to as the world as exhibition. This process can be explained in four steps.

### *1 - The appearance of a framework*

Firstly, Mitchell explains that enframing "is a method of dividing up and containing, as in the construction of barracks or the rebuilding of villages, which operates by conjuring up a neutral surface or volume called 'space'" (1988: 44). To better understand this, Mitchell compares modern spatial order, exemplified by the building of 'model' villages by French engineers in Egypt and Algeria, with pre-modern housing, exemplified by Kabyle housing in Algeria whose description he borrows from Bourdieu (1977, 1979). The French engineers began their work by compiling a list of all the families and animals that lived in a village and of the different industries they took part in. They then destroyed the original homes and rebuilt them according to their new plans, which specified with exact precision the dimensions of rooms, courtyards, windows, and balconies. The villagers then moved into their new homes according to their family size and social rank. The number of animals per courtyard and people per room were also specified, even

the positioning of pots, water jars and food supplies were stipulated. Mitchell points out that this new way of building changed our conception of space. The new homes were built according to a plan whose logic did not seem to derive from practice, it seemed disconnected from the actual social practices occurring inside the homes. Rather the plan seemed to follow an order of a different kind that originated outside of the village. Space lost its social significance; it appeared as a neutral surface that we could use to execute a mental plan. Walls appeared as containers in which things, people and animals could be organized. There is now a separation between the container and the contained. “The plans and dimensions introduce space as something apparently abstract and neutral, a series of inert frames or containers” (1988: 45). This new kind of order, decoupled from local practice, allows for standardization between house and villages. Moreover it produces a visible hierarchy. The dwellings of the peasants differed from those of the rich and the foreigners. It was possible now to visually see the social hierarchy in the village, the village itself became something legible.

In opposition, the Kabyle house was not thought of as a container in which things, people and animals, needed to be ordered. Life was not made up “of inert objects to be ordered but of demands to be attended to and respected” (1988: 51). Mitchell explains, building on Bourdieu’s work, that the walls and ceiling of the Kabyle house should not be seen as a structure or framework that exists outside of the practices occurring within the house. Rather “parts of the house are implicated in the life of the household. What exists is this life, in its cycles of birth, growth and death. The house is a process caught up in this life-and-death, not an inert framework that pretends to stand apart” (1988: 52). Building a house in this sense does not involve the notion of a plan where space is seen as an inert surface ready to be used by a mental plan.

The difference between the two building methods should be clear now. In the Kabyle house it was impossible to separate the home from what was occurring inside it, the house was “a charged process, an inseparable part of life”

(1988: 53). While the new methods of order turned the house into a container that was separated from what it contained, from the everyday practices of life.

Another example can be useful to further explain this process and underlines how for Mitchell enframing does not just refer to spatial ordering but to “a variety of modern practices” (1990: 566). In his critique of James Scott’s work (Scott 1985) on the everyday forms of peasant resistance in Malaysia, Mitchell argues that the expansion of capitalist agriculture introduced new practices that also created a sense of framing producing the effect of structure. I will highlight in particular one practice that exemplifies his argument well: the way that land was rented. Mitchell, basing himself on Scott’s work, explains that in the past tenants used to pay their rent at the end of the season in a quantity of the harvest paddy, whereas now the rent was fixed independently of the harvest and was to be paid in cash ahead of the season (1990: 567). Villagers used to call the old system of rent as ‘living rent’ as it was closely tied to what was being grown in the land that they were renting, while the new rents were ‘dead’ as they were no longer related to their harvest, but rather they were arbitrary. “Rent now appears to stand in relation to agricultural life as this inert container, this framework that is somehow of a different order from the sorts of practices it enframes” (1990: 570). Similarly to the new homes built by the French engineers, the new methods of determining the rent of land seems disconnected from local practice, i.e. what was grown on the land. There are many other examples, such as the fixing of paddy prices by government policy and the international market as opposed to the local and regional market, and the fixing of the water irrigation schedules by the government away from the village. All of these practices were practices like others, but because they now seemed disconnected from local practice and became outside of the control of the villagers they created “the effect of something that is not a part of social practice, something that seems to exist outside the practical world as a program governing particular practices” (1990: 571). In short, enframing is a process, not necessarily just a building method,

which appears to create a framework, a structure that exists separately and independently from what it enframes.

## *2 - The inside versus the outside*

Secondly, Mitchell explains that the modern kind of order, which he calls enframing, works by separating an outside from an inside. “There appears to be an unambiguous line along which an exterior frames an interior” (1988: 55). He explains that the new colonial and European cities of the nineteenth century “made their clearest principle the fixed divide between the bourgeois interior and the public exterior” (1988: 55). At first sight a similar divide can be seen at work in the Kabyle house where the walls seem to separate an interior, which is associated with the private world of women from the exterior, which is seen as the public world of men. However upon closer examination, no such distinction can be made. For example, the female interior contains a male section, and the women occupy the outdoor courtyard during the day. “So the dividing of male and female space, outside and inside, varies with the time, the season, the work to be done, and other forces and demands” (1988: 55). Such a comparison can also be made regarding Arab cities, where the mosques, the markets, the main thoroughfares can be seen to constitute the public world of men, while the inside of homes and of courtyards compose the private realm of women. Yet again the division between the inside and outside, between the private and public realm, are not fixed boundaries but “there are degrees of accessibility and exclusion determined variously by the relations between the persons involved, and by the time and the circumstances” (1988: 56).

## *3 - The observer*

Thirdly, Mitchell explains that an integral part of the modern process of enframing was the creation of the novel position of an observer. The modern practices of spatial distribution (in schools, armies, model villages, or city

planning) provided a place from which the individual could now observe. However “it was not just the particular position that was new; it was the very effect of having a position. ... The subject was set up outside the facades, like the visitor to an exhibition, and yet was surrounded and contained by them. It was a position at once both outside and inside” (1988: 59-60). What was novel about this position, as Mitchell makes clear, was that it gave the individual the appearance that she/he stood outside watching or observing reality while she/he was inside all along. Again, going back to the Kabyle house further clarifies this point. The Kabyle house was not built in a way to provide a particular viewpoint to any observer; there was no centre for a person to occupy. As we saw, the new model homes and villages were standardized and as such they became legible to an outside observer. Mitchell adds, “life is read as an invisible internal meaning made visible in an external material form. The meaning is something made visible only to the outside observer, who stands apart and sees the world as a representation” (Mitchell 1988: 58).

#### *4 - The world-as-exhibition*

Finally, Mitchell contends that the appearance of a framework, the fixing of an inside versus an outside, and the positioning of an observing subject creates the appearance that the world is a picture of something. “The world appears to the observer as a relationship between picture and reality, the one present but secondary, a mere representation, the other only represented, but prior, more original, more real. This order of appearance is what might be called the hierarchy of truth” (1988: 60). The order of appearance refers to the order in which the world appears to us; the order in which we experience the world. First, we see the representation of reality, the image, the plan, but this representation is secondary since it refers back to a reality; its meaning is derived from its reference to a separate reality, which in itself is only represented. This order of appearance is something new as it creates the effect of a separate realm of meaning “a code apart from things themselves” (1988: 61), in the past there was

no symbolism, nothing that stands for the meaning of something else, for example the grain did not symbolize fertility, it was itself fertile. This appearance of order and meaning is what gives this appearance of structure as something that stood apart from reality. Mitchell argues that what Foucault called microphysical power is “a power that worked by reordering material space in exact dimensions and acquiring a continuous bodily hold upon its subjects. Yet at the same time ... this power was something meta-physical. It worked by creating an appearance of order, an appearance of structure as some sort of separate, non-material realm” (1988: 93-94). Reality is seen to be material, without any inherent meaning, and representation is the non-material realm of meaning (2000: xiii).

Mitchell illustrates his argument through the example of the army. The order, precision, and repetition of the disciplinary practices of the army which include the specific division of space, the regular timing, and the coordination of movements, all work to create “the effect of an apparatus apart from the men themselves, whose structure orders, contains, and controls them” (1991: 94). The army now appears as an “artificial machine” (1991: 92) that stands apart from the men and the practices that constitute it. This artificial machine is non-material, it cannot be touched, it is only represented through its soldiers, officers, emblems et cetera... Similarly, Mitchell contends that a similar two-dimensional effect is at work in other institutions of the state (such as the bureaucracy, organized schooling, and urban planning). This contributes “to constructing a world that appears to consist not of a *complex of social practices* but of a binary order: on the one hand individuals and their activities, on the other an inert structure that somehow stands apart from individuals, precedes them, and contains and gives a framework to their lives” (1991: 94 my emphasis). This results in a world where reality seems to have a “two-dimensional form of individuals versus apparatus, practice versus institution, social life and its structure or society versus state” (1991: 94).

The appearance of the state as an immaterial structure existing separately from society is therefore an effect of modern disciplinary practices. The state should not be studied as an actual structure but as “the powerful, metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist” (Mitchell 1991: 94). By approaching the state as an effect Mitchell both acknowledges that the state appears as a structure and at the same time accounts for its elusive nature. Moreover, Mitchell insists that the appearance of separation of the state from society helps maintain a certain configuration of power. He argues, “the boundary of the state (or political system) *never marks a real exterior*. The line between state and society is not the perimeter of an intrinsic entity, which can be thought of as a free-standing object or actor. It is a line drawn internally, *within* the network of institutional mechanisms through which a certain social and political order is maintained” (1991: 90 author's emphasis).

Mitchell's main argument - that the state is an effect of practices - and the four step process by which this effect comes into being (the enactment of a framework, the drawing of a line separating an inside from an outside, the creation of what appears to be an outside observer position, and finally the rendering of the world into an image, a representation) are highly relevant as they show how the state appears as a structure when it is not, and yet takes this very appearance seriously. Building upon these insights I now turn to the ethnographers of the state, who similarly to Mitchell stress the importance of examining practices in order to understand the nature of the state. However they focus on everyday practices and examine how individuals experience the state, and how the state appears in their daily lives. As such, they provide us with a method to trace empirically the creation of the state effect identified by Mitchell.

### *The ethnographers of the state: Studying the line*

In the late 1990s scholars of comparative politics and anthropology began to argue that ethnography as a research method can help overcome the difficulty



of studying the state and its relationship with society. (Das 2004; Das and Poole 2004; A. Gupta 2001, 2005; Ismail 2006; Wedeen 1999, 2010). The ethnographers of the state refuse to look at the state as a coherent set of institutions working for public interest, instead they argue that one should seek to study the state by investigating the everyday practices through which people experience and therefore perceive the state. The basic premise that underlies the work of the ethnographers of the state is that the mundane practices that bind the people with the state, such as applying for a passport, receiving unemployment benefits, watching a military parade, using an official letter head, denouncing the corruption of the state and so on, cause a certain, popular and even scholarly, imagination of the state. In that respect the work of the ethnographers of the state was significant in tearing down the image of the state as a unitary entity (Asad 2004; Fuller and Harris 2001: 14-15; Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 5; Ismail 2006: xxxi-xxxiii). Ethnography as a methodology that privileges experience is therefore an important point of departure that “allows us to pay careful attention to the cultural constitution of the state – that is, how people perceive the state, how their understandings are shaped by their particular locations and intimate and embodied encounters with state processes and officials, and how the state manifests itself in their lives” (Sharma and Gupta 2006: 11). In addition to investigating everyday practices, they emphasize the analysis of the different ways the state represents itself to its citizens as well as to its own employees, they pay particular attention to newspapers articles, television reports, government reports, parades, speeches, memos, stamps, official buildings, uniforms, and so on, as they all play a key role in making people “imagine what the state is, what it is supposed to do, where its boundaries lie, and what their place is in relation to state institutions” (Sharma and Gupta 2006: 18). One of the main contributions of this alternative approach to the study of the state is the way it examines how certain practices create a particular imagination of a state that is separate and above society while other practices break down this very idea. I will be focusing on this double movement of building and breaking, as those are precisely the types of practices that I explore in my ethnography of Palestinian political factions.

Upon examining the practices that the ethnographers put forward as drawing the state as a bounded entity autonomous from society we find that they relate to the imagination of the state as a protector of public good and justice. Conversely, the practices that break down this image are practices of corruption and injustice. Gupta's work on India (A. Gupta 1995) offers an ethnographic investigation of the practices at the lower levels of the state bureaucracies: it shows that the divide between state and society breaks down to reveal that the state is not a unitary entity. He shows how the state takes different shapes and forms through land record officials, village development workers, police, the electricity board, and so on (384), and how the boundary between state and society breaks down through practices of corruption as local state officials collapse the distinction between their roles as public servants and private citizens (378-84). Additionally, he also highlights through an investigation of vernacular and English language newspapers, how the state is represented and constructed as a 'thing' through the discourse of corruption. The discourse of corruption, from critics of the state, therefore helps reify the state and helps to position the critics as citizens (389). It is important to realize here that while *practices of corruption* serve to *break down* the distinction between state and society, the *discourse on corruption*, on the other hand, serves to *reify* the state and re-recreate discursively the boundary between state and society. This reification is important in order to hold a discourse of right. By positioning themselves as 'citizens', meaning on the other side of the boundary with the state, people can ask for entitlements from the state.

Just as practices of corruption blur the edges of the state, the idea of justice crystallizes it. Hansen highlights this point in his study of the Indian state's response to the Mumbai riots in 1992-93 (Hansen 2001). He argues that the "myth of the state', the imagination of the state as a distant but persistent guarantor of a certain social order and a measure of justice and protection from violence" (33) was shattered as the anti-Muslim bias of the Mumbai police

became blatantly apparent during the riots. Interestingly he shows how the myth was shattered differently to the different communities, the Muslims, the middle class Hindus, the right-wing Hindus, and the high court judge, as they all had different imaginations of the state based on their different experiences with it. Nevertheless even when the 'myth of the state' was shattered they all still remained dependent on the idea of the state even if contesting it (63). More importantly he argues that the state to regain its appearance of autonomy from society establishes a commission of inquiry and a special court as it needs to re-establish itself as a provider of universal and impartial justice. Whether it is successful is left open to question by Hansen.

The lack of corruption and the presence of justice are not the only ways through which the state obtains its appearance of separation from society. Ferguson and Gupta (2002) examine how certain governmental practices of supervision, registration and mobility over the Indian territory produce the spatial imagination of a high above and all-encompassing state in both popular and academic discourses. In this situation it is practices that create the imagination of the state as a 'thing' that stands high above and all around society, as opposed to breaking down this imagination as was the case of the practices of corruption. Ferguson and Gupta stress that "an analysis of the imaginary of the state must include not only explicit discursive representations of the state, but also implicit, unmarked, signifying practices" (984). They argue that surprise visits of inspectors, the mobility of the higher levels of the bureaucracy over the Indian territory and the amount of information that needs to be logged in by locals, verified by inspectors, and reported in official reports all serve to create rituals of surveillance. "What such rituals of surveillance actually accomplished was to *represent* and to *embody* state hierarchy and encompassment" (Ferguson and Gupta 2002: 985, author's emphasis). They argue that the mobility over the Indian territory of the higher levels of the bureaucracy is precisely what allows them to disavow the particular knowledge of the local NGO workers and "to claim

to represent the ‘greater’ good for the ‘larger’ dominion of the nation and the world” (988).

These studies demonstrate how the examination of daily practices (such as corruption, criticism, and methods of surveillance) elucidates how the line between the state and society is drawn as well as erased. This thesis follows this tradition by ethnographically examining the everyday practices of Palestinian refugees to trace how factions are produced through everyday life. Using Mitchell’s insights in dialogue with the work of the ethnographers of the state proves extremely helpful in studying the elusive nature of Palestinian political factions. As we saw, Mitchell resolved the conundrum of how the state appeared to be separate from society while it was not the case. Additionally, he directed our attention to the importance of modern disciplinary practices. The ethnographic study of the state follows smoothly from Mitchell’s argument as it also focuses on practices. However it emphasizes the everyday practices and as such allows us to take people’s experiences with and perception of the state seriously.

## **Conclusion**

The debate in the social sciences about the state and society dichotomy sheds light on how to better study Palestinian political factions. The academic and popular image of factions as building-like structures closely resembles the conventional understanding of states as unitary and autonomous entities. Additionally, the difficulty in delineating where factions ended and where independent and grassroots initiatives began is similar to the problem of defining the boundary between state and society. I argue that both Timothy Mitchell’s structural effect argument and the work of the ethnographers of the state can therefore be used to develop an analytical and methodological framework for investigating the strange nature of factions.

Nonetheless, it is important to note the points of divergence between these two approaches. Mitchell argues that the state is the effect of modern disciplinary practices. In contrast, the ethnographers of the state argue that practices create a certain imagination *of* the state, not that they create the imagination that there *is* a state. To be clear, there is a distinction between arguing that practices cause a particular imagination of the state (which assumes that the state has an existence on its own and that through daily interactions, through practices, individuals come to imagine it in particular ways) and positing that the state as a structure does not exist, and that practices create the effect that it does. I contend, like Mitchell, that certain practices induce an imagination that Palestinian political factions are structures existing separately from the very practices that bring them into being. In that sense I study not how Palestinians *imagine* the factions, but how Palestinians *make* the factions through everyday practices. But as the ethnographers of the state maintain, this operation can be brought to light through an ethnographic investigation of quotidian life.

By combining both approaches I advance a novel approach to the study of Palestinian political factions. Through an ethnographic study my work aims at highlighting *both* how factions are not bounded entities and yet how they appear to be. By examining how Palestinians join factions as well as the evolution of political membership over time I reveal that factions are not building-like structures but rather ‘a complex of social practices’ as Mitchell qualifies the state. Then by investigating practices of aid distribution, physical representation, and factionalism I show how they create the effect of structure similarly to Mitchell’s four-step process. Firstly, these practices cause factions to take on the appearance of impersonal containers that exist separately from what they contain (their members). Secondly, they conjure up a line that seems to separate those on the ‘inside’ (faction members) from those on the ‘outside’ (independents). Thirdly, they create a new position from where an individual appears to be able to observe, grasp, critic, and study factions from the ‘outside’ while being ‘inside’ all along. Finally, they effect the appearance that factions are immaterial structures

that exists independently from the very practices that bring them into being. Factions can never be touched, they are only represented in their emblems, stamps, flags, sports clubs et cetera... In other words, their existence comes into being through a process of representation.

What is at stake in this re-conceptualization of Palestinian political factions is not just the definition of their nature, rather what is at stake is also the factions' source of power. Imagining Palestinian political factions as 'entities,' 'objects' creates the imagination of a boundary, a line that can be drawn between the factions and the people. This line is instrumental in keeping a certain order where the factions define what constitutes the political and it is this line that allows them to act as representatives of the 'people.' This thesis attempts to show how that line is produced and reproduced in everyday practices.

### **Thesis outline**

In the next chapter I outline how I carried out this ethnographic exploration by discussing my research methods in more detail. I elaborate on how I chose my field site and interviewees and explain how those choices helped me obtain a different perspective on the nature of Palestinian political factions.

In Chapter 3, I present the context needed to understand this ethnography of Palestinian political factions in Lebanon. I examine the situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon focusing on Nahr el-Bared camp and the battle that destroyed it. I also relate the war story of the family that hosted me in the camp.

In Chapter 4, I present the ethnographic setting of this research. I introduce the family that hosted me in Nahr el-Bared and through their experience illustrate how Palestinian refugees survive the daily struggle of life in Lebanon.

In Chapter 5, I explore the motives of Palestinian refugees in joining factions and examine what that process entails. This will demonstrate that Palestinians do not join factions based on the faction's ideology but based on what I call 'trust relations.' Palestinians basically 'join' people they trust, who could be family members, friends or neighbours. This observation helps to break down the idea that factions are entities defined by their ideologies.

In Chapter 6, I expand upon my argument by examining the evolution of people's relations with factions over time and how they speak of them. Through this exploration I suggest that the relationship between a Palestinian and a faction is not a relationship between a person and a structure that they enter or leave, but a continuously unfolding story of human relations. This chapter will highlight the complexity and ambiguity of that relationship and will breakdown the idea that a line can be drawn between 'factionalized' Palestinians and 'independents.'

In Chapter 7, I examine practices of aid distribution. I relate how Palestinians navigate the web of factions and NGOs in order to better their lives and demonstrate how that process serves to draw factions as impersonal structures that exist outside and separately from the personal relations that were outlined in the previous two chapters. Factions no longer appear as a network of people but as immaterial entities that control people's lives.

In Chapter 8, I examine how factions appear to be autonomous agents through the creation of what appears to be an 'outside.' I investigate two sets of practices, that of physical representation and factionalism, to highlight how a distance is enacted between people and factions, a distance, which is essential to create the effect of structure.

Finally, in Chapter 9, I conclude by examining the effect of having factions appear as separate entities when they are based on personal relations. I argue

that the appearance of separation turns into a source of power for the factions, which become the centre of political life. In turn I also outline the implications of this study on the study of Palestinian political factions and the greater literature on state and society relations.



## 2. 'YOU WANT TO SOLVE OUR PROBLEMS?'

### METHODOLOGY

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Nahr el-Bared panorama. (Photograph: Ali Alouch)

This thesis is an ethnography of Palestinian political factions through an immersion in the daily life of homes in Nahr el-Bared camp in the north of Lebanon. Two core principles define what an ethnography is. Firstly, it involves the immersion of the researcher in the community under study, what is called participant observation (Schatz 2009: 5). It is the process of living, working and 'hanging out' with a defined group of people. The participant observation of daily life of the community allows the researcher to "see from the inside how people lead their lives, how they carry out their daily rounds of activities, what they find meaningful, and how they do so" (Emerson et al. 1995: 2). It provides several insights that interviewing alone would miss. It allows the researcher to compare words with deeds and to experience the social discourse: the way by which language is used in social settings and the way that meanings are negotiated (Soss 2006: 138-39). Secondly ethnography requires a particular sensibility to

the meaning that people attribute to their social and political reality (Schatz 2009: 5). It involves recognizing patterns and exploring the underlying logic that creates particular ways of thinking and doing. Pader (2006: 172) explains,

A willingness to engage underlying issues and their internal structures of meaning ... requires intense respect for differences of opinion and of belief systems as well as a profound ability to listen, to really listen hard to someone else's common sense and logical structure, and to trust the other. It takes an ethnographic sensibility: a feeling, an excitement, and a deep appreciation, maybe even a bit of awe, that human groups create the intricate, rich, and dynamic structures of living.

Ethnography, as a research method, is mostly associated with anthropology and political science's relationship with it has changed over time. Indeed, the dominant aspiration of political scientists to develop research methods close to those used in the natural sciences meant that there was little room for qualitative methods in general, and ethnography in particular, in the study of politics (Oren 2006; Schatz 2009: 1). However, this trend changed in the 2000s as a number of scholars (Kurtz 2001; Schatz 2009; Yanow and Schwatz-Shea 2006) began to draw attention to the important contributions of ethnography to the discipline (Wedeen 2010: 259). Firstly, they argue that political ethnographies produce detailed evidence that calls into question generalizations and assumptions produced by other research methods. Secondly, an exploration of daily life expands the boundaries of what was understood as the 'political.' Finally, through its face-to-face and daily contact with those under research, fieldwork leads to a rethinking of the process of knowledge production, the role of the researcher, and the concept of 'objective' knowledge (Schatz 2009: 10-11). These advantages make ethnography a particularly powerful research method that has been adopted in the study of politics (Ismail 2006; Li 2007; Pachirat 2011; Shehata 2009; Singerman 1995; Wedeen 2008).

Similarly, the ethnographic approach generated a unique perspective on the study of Palestinian political factions. In the introductory chapter we saw how

the academic literature examines factions according to two different approaches: a top-down or bottom-up analyses, by either looking at party publications and interviews with the leadership or by focusing on an ethnographic examination of social organizations and on refugees' opinion on factions. In contrast, I adopt an alternative methodology, which I refer to as a lateral approach.<sup>14</sup> I performed an ethnography of Palestinian political factions through an immersion in the daily life of homes, rather than factions' offices or institutions. In other words, I positioned myself on what appears to be the 'outside' of factions, rather than the 'inside'. This allowed me to study factions from the 'sides' rather than head-on. This alternative position led me to question the very existence of a boundary to factions. Indeed, by positioning myself on what appears to be the 'outside' of factions, I was able to look at how that very distinction comes into being.

In the remainder of this chapter I discuss my research methods in more detail. I begin by providing an overview of the data collection methods I adopted in the field, which included participant observation as well as open-ended interviews. I then discuss the interpretive approach to data analysis that I adopted as well as reflect on the concepts of objectivity and reflexivity in research. Finally, I end by relating the difficulties I faced accessing Nahr el-Bared camp, which was considered a closed military zone at the time of my research.

## **Data Collection**

### *Logic of fieldwork*

Visiting an NGO in Nahr el-Bared camp about a month into my fieldwork, I was introduced to a group of young kindergarten teachers. The head of the NGO

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<sup>14</sup> The term 'lateral' is borrowed from Iris Jean-Klein who studied the Palestinian political committees during the First Intifada in the West Bank through an immersion in the sociality of homes. See Iris Jean-Klein, 'Into Committees, out of the House? Familiar Forms in the Organization of Palestinian Committee Activism During the First Intifada', *American Ethnologist*, 30/4 (2003), 556-77 at 559.

explained that I was a PhD student doing research in the camp. She then left the room to attend to other business. The young women all looked at me waiting for my questions. When I did not come forward with any, one of them asked me “What do you want? You want to solve our problems?” The sarcasm in her voice could not be mistaken.

This incident brought to the fore all the dilemmas I experienced conducting research in an over-researched and under-privileged community (Sukarieh and Tannock 2013). Prior to my PhD I had been to Nahr el-Bared numerous times, had worked on two documentary films about the camp and the battle that destroyed it, and had participated in many local protests. Coming back to Nahr el-Bared as a researcher and not as an activist, I found it difficult to accept my new position. It seemed so passive. In the past I always felt, rightly or wrongly, that I was part of some immediate action. I believed that I was active, debating particular strategies as well as suggesting and working towards certain courses of action. In contrast, as a researcher, I was trying to go along the normal course of the day and was more interested in listening than talking. This was after all the reason why I had chosen to do a PhD. In my prior work I felt I was in too much of a hurry, always visiting the camp with a certain objective and never stopping to just hang out with people. I now wanted to take my time, to observe and listen. This yearning to take it slow continuously clashed with my desire to be – or maybe it is just to feel - more useful. While I told myself that I was doing this research with the hopes of bettering our understanding of the dynamics of the community, I could never ignore the fact that it was I who would ultimately benefit from this research as I would gain a PhD while the circumstances of the community would remain the same. This point was certainly not lost on the young women meeting me in the NGO that day. They were highlighting the role often taken by researchers, who would express sympathy and exhibit a desire to form friendships only to disappear after their fieldwork was done (Sukarieh and Tannock 2013: 504-05). Respondents in the field continuously expressed their fear that I would soon forget about them. It was in great part for this reason that I

chose to conduct research with individuals and families I had known for several years prior to my research. These refugees already had long-standing relations with me. I hoped that their fears would therefore be minimized.

There was an additional reason for wanting to work with past acquaintances. In short, they already knew me. They were familiar with my background, my past experiences and stances on political issues. This created a sense of openness and honesty conducive to building trust (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 77-88; Kanaaneh 1997). In order to study the everyday interactions of Palestinian refugees with political factions I needed my respondents to understand my opinions and thoughts as much as I needed to understand theirs. I wanted to know how and why people joined factions, how they obtained aid, how and why they did or did not participate in factional events, how did their relationship evolved over time, what their fears, doubts, and regrets were over the years. Those were private and sensitive issues that I could only explore through knowing people intimately and over time. Therefore, I considered mutual trust to be the most important factor in determining my choice of camp, host family, and interviewees. While I certainly did not shy away from meeting new people, I only performed in-depth conversations with refugees I felt understood my position and trusted me.

Finally, my choice of Nahr el-Bared camp as the site of my research while providing me with several advantages also presented a few limitations. Firstly, following the destruction of the camp in 2007 Palestinian political factions no longer carried arms within the camp, which meant that I could not directly experience the everyday occurrence of this practice and its ramifications.<sup>15</sup> However, the benefit was that the other roles that factions played in everyday life were highlighted, away from their more visible, abundantly photographed, and highly publicized armed component. Secondly, most residents of Nahr el-Bared no longer lived in their original homes. This disrupted neighbourhood relations

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<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 3 for more information about the battle that destroyed the camp

and they were therefore harder for me to observe on a day-to-day basis. However, this lacuna was remedied through the many stories that people recounted highlighting their role and importance. Finally, in my research I did not prioritize a given faction, rather I was keen on studying political membership across factions. However my choice of Nahr el-Bared camp implied that a good majority of my respondents would be linked to the PFLP and DFLP as those two factions had the largest presence in the camp in the form of well-funded and large NGOs. Nevertheless my relations did encompass a number of other factions including the Islamic Jihad, the PFLP-GC, Fatah, Fatah al-Intifada and Hamas. In the next section I detail how I carried out my research: how I chose my host family and structured my days

### *Host family*

I lived in Nahr el-Bared camp, in the north of Lebanon, for seven months with the Talal family, whom I had known for over three years prior to my research. The family was very generous to offer me to stay with them as long as I needed even though their financial situation was very difficult.<sup>16</sup> I accepted the family's offer to host me for two reasons. Firstly, I was acquainted with their extended family. In particular, I was close to Um Muhammad's, the mother's, family. I knew her brother and his family very well, as well as her own mother. Those relations with the greater family made my presence in the Talal family's home less peculiar. Secondly, I was encouraged by the fact that in the past three years they never treated me like a special guest that needed to be pampered. They always made me feel welcomed without ever making me feel like I was burdening them with, for example, the cooking of special meals. While I never really lost the status of guest, I nevertheless felt like I was part of the household. Family fights would happen in front of me and they would often ask me for my opinion on personal matters. The Talal family's household became my home in the camp, where I

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<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 4 for more detail.

was able to rest, read, write notes, or just relax. I usually spent my mornings and evenings with the family, and in the afternoon I visited other acquaintances. I was free to come and go as I wished as the family provided me with a key to their home although I took care never to be out of the house past nine at night. They were always very considerate of my 'work' although it was obvious from their looks that they did not understand why I was troubling myself so much with Palestinian politics and not just getting married and having children.

Unlike an anthropologist living in a foreign village I was doing research in my home country and the camp was two hours drive away from Beirut. I was therefore able to keep my apartment in Beirut and I usually spent five to ten days in the camp and then would go to Beirut for a couple of days. However in March 2011, two months after I initially began living in Nahr el-Bared camp, I was denied entry to the camp by the Lebanese military at which stage I went to Beirut and became involved in the preparations for the May 15<sup>th</sup> march to the southern Lebanese/Israeli border. Finally, in August 2011 I was able to access Nahr el-Bared camp again and I was able to continue my ethnographic research by living with the Talal family until the end of the year.

### *Interviews*

In addition to participant observation my research was also based on open-ended interviews, as they are "excellent ways to map the conceptual world of participants in ways that illuminate both coherence and inconsistency" (Soss 2006: 143). In an interview the participant has the space to feel safe and the time to think through his or her thoughts and concepts. It offers a high degree of flexibility, control and detail in terms of questioning and probing what the participant means, including highlighting inconsistencies in the logic which allows the interviewee to further reflect upon his or her thoughts. Soss stresses that in interviews "inner conflicts bubble to the surface as individuals traverse complex

issues” (Soss 2006: 143). Interviews also allow the interviewer and the participant to discuss topics not found in written documents or in the social discourse. Finally, interviews allow us to highlight the agency of the participants, to see them as actors. Soss states, “the interviews allowed me to see the people I met as agents acting on their own self-concepts and standards, dreams and aspirations, fears and self-doubt, and histories of accomplishment and disappointment” (Soss 2006: 143).

The interviews were open-ended interviews in which I did not follow a prepared list of questions, rather they provided the freedom to explore new avenues of inquiry and follow up questions (Soss 2006: 135; Worth 2006). When I asked participants about past events I allowed them organize the story according to their own order of priority and I did not impose an order, chronological or other, upon them. This prevented me from interfering “with the sequence of association in recalling the past” (Passerini 1987: 8). Passerini stresses that interviewing “entails accepting the sequence of narration as it slowly threw up new questions and information” (Passerini 1987: 8).

In total, I conducted 73 open-ended interviews: 51 with Palestinians I had known for at least two years prior to my research and 22 with Palestinians I met during my fieldwork. For the remainder of my thesis I will refer to those two categories as ‘close’ Palestinians and as ‘newly-met’ Palestinians. In my interviews I included both women (31) and men (42) as well as Palestinians of the *thawra* generation (30) - the generation that lived through the Palestinian *thawra* and the Lebanese civil war, this is the generation that was born before 1970-1975 – as well as what I refer to as the ‘young generation’ (43) - this is the generation that was born after 1970-1975. As mentioned earlier in selecting the interviewees I took extra care to approach people whom I felt knew me and understood my research. In this sense my discussions with the refugees resembled more a mutual exchange of experiences than interviews (Kanaaneh 1997: 5) and I was able to tape record 43 interviews without feeling like it was



intruding on our conversation. All names have been altered to preserve the anonymity of my interviewees.

The interviews became occasions for storytelling, by which I mean personal narratives of the evolution of an individual's life over time. The analysis of these personal narratives was one of the most fruitful parts of my research. Firstly, "storytelling is an act of 'world-building' and 'world-populating'" (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2006: 320). People told stories to explain to me their understanding of what they did and why they did what they did. In this respect analyzing stories was a great way to understand people's motives, beliefs, and self-understanding (Bevir 2006). In sum, to "understand a story is to understand the storyteller (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2006: 320). Secondly, personal narratives were great ways to highlight people's agency. Through the recounting of certain events and in describing their choices, the subject's agency came to the fore. Maynes highlights that "well-crafted personal narrative analyses not only reveal the dynamics of agency in practice but also can document its construction through culturally embedded narratives forms that, over an individual's life, impose their own logics and thus shape both life stories and lives" (2008: 2). Thirdly, through personal narratives I would be able to include in my work more marginalized voices and counter-narratives to dominant discourses (Maynes et al. 2008: 6-7). This was crucial in my case as I was able to include the experiences of young Palestinians who are often omitted in studies of Palestinian politics. Finally, personal narratives offer the advantage of being less filtered, less altered by the presence of the researcher. Maynard-Moody and Musheno highlight that stories "are told in social settings when the researcher is absent; unlike interviews, stories have a "life" of their own" (2006: 321). Since people tell and retell stories in natural settings they become used to telling the story in a certain way and are less likely to filter it, to omit or add certain details due to the presence of the researcher.

For all of these reasons I was not just a participant-observer but also a “participant-listener” (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2006: 321). Nevertheless, it is important to note that “stories are not facts or evidence waiting for interpretation; they are, from the moment they are conceived through their many telling and retellings, the embodiment of the storytellers’ interpretations” (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2006: 320). So then how do we analyze such data? And what is the role of the researcher in the production of knowledge?

### **Data analysis, reliability, and validity**

In analyzing data I followed an interpretive approach where I gave ‘legitimacy to the local knowledge possessed by actors in the situations under study’ (Yanow 2003: 11). The analysis of data was not a distinct phase in my research as it informed and constantly altered my actions and interactions in the field, and continued throughout the writing process (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 158). Yet, upon ending fieldwork I went through a period of intense reflection, as I was able to take stock of the entirety of my fieldnotes and interviews. At that time I followed a system of ‘open coding’ (Emerson et al. 1995: 150-55). I proceeded inductively, drawing ideas, themes, and insights from my data rather than using my data to support concepts defined prior to fieldwork. This method allowed me to explore new avenues of inquiry as well as question some of my own preconceived ideas. Most importantly it allowed me to learn from those under study. In short, the “driving force in interpretive research is not how well our data support our theoretical presuppositions but how well our interpretations can capture and elucidate social life” (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2006: 329).

The power and advantage of the interpretive approach is that it gives primacy to the context and views knowledge as being historically situated and entangled in power relations (Wedeen 2010: 260; Yanow 2006). As such the role of the researcher in the production of knowledge is also questioned and

examined. Geertz highlights that “what we call data are really our own construction of other people’s construction of what they and their compatriots are up to” (Geertz 1973: 9). Emerson stresses that point by highlighting that even in our note taking in the field we are already creating constructions of what others are saying or doing. “All writing, even seemingly straightforward descriptive writing, is a construction. Through his choice of words and method of organization, a writer presents a *version* of the world. As a selective and creative activity, writing always functions more as a filter than a mirror reflecting the “reality” of events” (Emerson et al. 1995: 66 author’s emphasis). When writing down field notes, either while in the field or later at night, the ethnographer selects what to take note of, and then again once the ethnographer writes for an audience he or she again selects from his or her field notes and his or her memory what to portray to others. There are therefore two levels of selections that the ethnographer goes through which makes a discussion of objectivity and reflexivity vital to any ethnographic work.

### *Objectivity and reflexivity*

It is now common practice to recognize that the researcher is not a tabula rasa rather the researcher is “a person, historically and contextually located, carrying unavoidable conscious and unconscious motives, desires, feelings, and biases – hardly a neutral tool” (Fontana and Frey 2005: 696). What is important for the researcher is to be reflexive. Reflexivity here means “being self-conscious about fieldwork and the role of the ethnographer in the production of knowledge” (Shehata 2006: 246). It is based on the idea that the researcher comes with his or her own background (personal and academic) through which he or she perceives the social world he or she is studying. This background affects every aspect of the research from the choice of topic, to the way of conducting research, to what he or she observes in the field and finally to the final write up of the ethnography. In this sense self-reflective analysis should include “autobiographical accounting in their write-ups, if for no other reason than to

clarify their stakes in the project and their relationship to the narrators” (Maynes et al. 2008: 92).

Moreover, indigenous anthropologist or ‘halfies’ – people with mixed national and cultural identities - face additional accusations of bias and subjectivity within the academic field (Abu-Lughod 1991; Kanaaneh 1997). The alleged problem with studying one’s own culture is the question of whether or not the researcher is able to gain enough distance to be objective. “Since for halfies, the Other is in certain ways the self, there is said to be the danger shared with indigenous anthropologists of identification and the easy slide into subjectivity” (Abu-Lughod 1991: 141). These accusations have been deconstructed by pointing out that they rest on the assumption that the anthropologist is supposed to stand “outside” the subject of research which is impossible as “every view is a view from somewhere and every act of speaking a speaking from somewhere” (Abu-Lughod 1991: 141). There is no ‘outside’ and no ‘neutral ground’ from which to conduct research because “what we call the outside is a position *within* a larger political-historical complex” (Abu-Lughod 1991: 141 author's emphasis). Taking sides does not amount to being biased in one’s scholarship. Many social scientists engage in policy debates and appear in the media (Baubock 2008). “The criterion for objectivity in such cases is not political neutrality, but the trustworthiness of the researcher and the reliability of his work” (Kanaaneh 1997: 6). In other words, as a social researcher my duty is to always be open and honest about my own positioning, to both the participants in my research and to my readers.

So here is my story:

Like any researcher I started my PhD with my own set of ideas and goals. I am a Palestinian refugee but one who was born with a Lebanese citizenship and who has studied and lived in the West for many years. I am originally a mechanical engineer and I came to discover my Palestinian roots rather late in

life. Upon further research into the lives of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, I realized the extent of the privileges that I had due to the fact that I was born with a Lebanese citizenship. This realization was coupled with a new desire to learn more about Lebanese and Palestinian politics. In 2003, I quite my engineering job and decided to explore the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in more depth. I spent four months in the West Bank and I then returned to the United States and pursued a Masters in Arab Studies. Upon graduation I decided to move back to Lebanon and at the end of 2006 I began working with a colleague in an independent capacity to help find countries to accept Palestinian refugees from Iraq. They were being kidnapped, tortured, killed, expelled from their homes and their neighbourhoods were being shelled. Neighbouring countries closed their borders to them and four different camps were erected on the borders between Jordan, Syria and Iraq. This experience opened my eyes to the inadequacy of the current Palestinian political leadership as neither the Palestinian Authority (PA) nor the PLO were willing to act.

A friend and I were able to access the border camps with the help of UNHCR and we filmed a short advocacy video, which we used to advocate for the resettlement of the refugees. As a result of our efforts Chile and Brazil accepted to resettle 120 refugees each from the desert camps. Throughout our advocacy we repeatedly asked PLO representatives for help. While some voiced their support in a private manner, none came forward with concrete help. The PLO's inaction compounded the problems of the Palestinians of Iraq, as a generalized solution to their plight might have been possible if the PLO had acted as a representative to the community.

As an outcome of this experience my colleague and I decided to make a six-part documentary series exploring the experiences and opinions of Palestinian refugees around the world.<sup>17</sup> Through the making of the series and its

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<sup>17</sup> A ten minutes preview of the documentary series *Chronicles of a Refugee* is available on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPyXTW3bjyI>

screening I came to be exposed even more to Palestinians' dissatisfaction of their leadership. Out of the 300 interviewees only one person responded positively to the question: "Does anyone represent you politically today?" The remaining interviewees responded negatively. The uniformity of the 'No' answer across geography, age, and socio-economic status was striking. These experiences made me begin a PhD in politics. At the onset of my PhD I believed that there was no greater, or more important, step for Palestinian activists to work on than on finding a way to change our current political representation.

### **Accessing Nahr el-Bared camp**



Barbed wire fence around Nahr el-Bared camp. (Photograph: Perla Issa)

Armed with a strong conviction in my research question and methods and having decided to carry out my research in Nahr el-Bared camp, I now had an important logistical step to overcome. I needed a permit from the Lebanese

military to access the camp as a Lebanese researcher. Following the destruction of Nahr el-Bared, the Lebanese army had considered the camp a closed military zone and restricted access to it. Technically Nahr el-Bared consisted of two areas, what was commonly referred to as the 'old camp' or simply the 'camp'- which was the original camp that was officially under UNRWA's mandate since 1948 - and the 'new camp' or the 'adjacent area'- which was the camp's extension over the years . In the remainder of this thesis I will refer to 'Nahr el-Bared camp' as the combination of the old and new camp. Otherwise I will speak directly of the new or old camp if need be.

In December 2010 when I began making arrangements to move to Nahr el-Bared the old camp had been completely bulldozed and construction was just starting. The refugees that had returned to Nahr el-Bared all lived in the new camp and it was access to it that I sought from the military. Both the new and old camp were completely encircled by a mixture of barbed wire and concrete blocks, and a series of checkpoints manned by the army restricted access to each. The rules regulating the entrance to both sections of the camp were unclear and changed over time. This highly affected the number of visitors as well as journalists who accessed Nahr el-Bared as it always seemed too complicated to enter the camp. Finally, it is important to note that Nahr el-Bared camp was under the control of the Lebanese military, which meant that the checkpoints at the entrance of the camp separated two areas that were *both* under the control of the military. The checkpoints did not separate two districts that were subjected to different jurisdictions. Palestinian activists repeatedly pointed out that the checkpoints were unnecessary as the military was present *inside* the camp.

What follows is a description of my endeavour to gain access to the 'new camp' of Nahr el-Bared as a Lebanese researcher. While my story is long, I believe that it is important as it illustrates the legal uncertainty under which Palestinian refugees lived and the constraints they were subjected to. The imposition of these regulations was seldom followed by any justification for their

presence and it therefore led many refugees to feel that the Lebanese government and its security apparatus were simply harassing them.

I began by asking fellow Palestinian and Lebanese activists for advice on how to obtain a researcher permit for Nahr el-Bared. Everyone's answer was less than encouraging, that is until I met the wife of a prominent businessman who offered to help. Her staff submitted an application for my permit and I received a call on the following day from the army asking me to meet with Colonel Amr Hasan, the head of the Lebanese Military Intelligence (LMI) in the North. I went to the appointment with a heavy heart; it is never an enjoyable experience to meet with military intelligence in any country. Colonel Hasan asked me about my research and for whom I was doing it. Once Colonel Hasan realized that I was a PhD student and not an NGO worker he called the army's Chief of Staff, Colonel Masri, on the phone in my presence. They discussed my situation and the Chief of Staff asked to see me in person. My heart sank even further; I now needed to go to the Ministry of Defence and meet with the Lebanese army's second in command to be able to conduct research in a Palestinian refugee camp, which was already under heavy military surveillance.

I subsequently went to the appointment but was thankfully accompanied by an aide of the businessman, and, surprisingly- or maybe I should not have been surprised - the meeting went very smoothly. I was not even asked about the topic of my research, just why I chose to do my research in Nahr el-Bared and I explained that I had many contacts there. The aide of the businessman who was accompanying me added that Nahr el-Bared should now be the safest Palestinian camp in Lebanon considering that the army was now present inside it. It therefore made sense for a young woman to choose it as a site for research. To this day I am unsure if my companion was sarcastic or sincere in his comment, but at the time it almost caused me to burst out laughing. The rest of the conversation revolved around the weather and the political situation in Lebanon. I was then taken to a different room with a couple of officers and I wrote down a



brief description of my research. The officers proceeded to tell me about the 'liberation of Nahr el-Bared' while showing me pictures of the different types of bombs and ammunition that were used in the war that obliterated the camp. At the end of the encounter I was told that my permit was approved for a full year but there was still a simple bureaucratic procedure they needed to perform and that they would call me once it was ready. I was ecstatic and a bit in shock about how unreal the meeting was.

About two weeks later I received a phone call from an army officer informing me that I was granted the permit. I was delighted and I asked him where I should direct myself to obtain the permit. He replied that he did not know, that his job was simply to inform me of my permit's approval. The very next day I received another call from yet another army officer who explained that he had been informed that I obtained a permit to conduct research in Nahr el-Bared but that he regretted to inform me that 'Nahr el-Bared was empty.' I did not understand and asked him to elaborate. He added that the residents of Nahr el-Bared had not returned to the camp yet; that no one was there. I responded that I was aware that the refugees had not returned to the original camp but that my permit was for the adjacent area where Palestinians currently lived. The fact that I had applied to the adjacent area of Nahr el-Bared was actually written on the permit and the officer in question should have known this fact if my permit was in his hands. He excused himself and hanged up.

A few days later I received a call from the businessman's aide telling me to go meet again with the head of the LMI in the north but this time to get my permit. I went back to Qobeh, on my own, and once there Colonel Hasan explained to me that I had obtained the 'approval' for my one-year permit from the Chief of Staff's office but that they – the northern LMI office – were the ones who issued the permit and that they had the last word. I was again asked about my research topic, which I explained. I was then issued a two months permit and was told that I needed to visit them every two months to renew my permit and

that I needed to provide them with a copy of 'what I write.' I explained that I would not be writing anything for another two to three years which was when I was supposed to hand in my thesis and that I would be happy to provide them with a copy of what I would publish. They responded that no they wanted a copy of my field notes. I objected and explained that it was against my ethical standards and against university rules. They said I had no choice. I left the office with a two months permit in my hands and very angry. We were now in mid-January; the process of getting the permit took a whole month.

For the next two months I lived in Nahr el-Bared camp. Once my permit expired I went back to the head of the LMI in the North; he was not present and I went to see his lieutenant. Sitting in his office and facing a series of framed joint Lebanese and American training certificates in 'interviewing' and 'counter-terrorism' I explained that I could not hand in my field notes and that I could provide them with my work once it was published. I added that it would be unfair to hold me accountable for what I wrote in the field, that my ideas were not fully developed yet, and that I should be held accountable for my ideas once I deemed them ready to be published. I was told bluntly "we are not interested in your ideas but in *information!*" I pointed out that the Lebanese army was in the camp so they did not need me to gather them information. The lieutenant's only answer was that 'Nahr el-Bared is special.' I was given another permit for ten days and told that by then I needed to give them my notes. I took the permit and decided to leave the camp within ten days. I spent those remaining days in the camp informing my friends of the situation and explaining why I had to leave. After those ten days I went to Beirut and did not attempt to renew my permit any longer.

Later during the month of July my friends in Nahr el-Bared called to inform me that the army announced that women no longer needed a permit to enter the camp. I decided to give it a try. I went to one of its checkpoints, which consisted of two military posts, the first manned by the LMI and the other by the army. At

that point in time women no longer needed to stop at the LMI post but could proceed directly to the army's post. I basically just walked past the LMI officers, who had been denying me entry in the past, and went straight to the army's post. A soldier took my ID, wrote down my information on a notebook and told me I could go in. He did not call headquarters. This was how I entered the camp for the remainder of the year, by simply walking past LMI officers who were officially waiting for my field notes.

This story shows how arbitrary rules regulating Palestinian life in Lebanon can be. A permit system was enacted and then suppressed without explanation and without any change in the camp's situation. An officer of the LMI was unable to explain to me why he needed me to be an informant and his only answer was that 'Nahr el-Bared was special.' The refugees thus felt a clear feeling of harassment as I did.

## **Conclusion**

Living in Nahr el-Bared camp was a deeply humbling experience. Not only was I constantly made aware of my privileges as a Palestinian with Lebanese citizenship, but more importantly, I was repeatedly faced with the inadequacies of my own explanations and understandings of Palestinian politics and of life in the camps in Lebanon. My interlocutors in the field often asked me what I had learned from my research, what I had 'uncovered.' Nothing was more humbling than relating to them what had taken me several months to understand only to be met with a 'that's obvious' stare. Refugees saw little value in my attempts to grasp their understandings of their world. What was the point of me learning what was so obvious to them? Wasn't my time better spent exposing the complex and multi-layered system of domination that Palestinian refugees were subjected to? While the latter project is certainly crucial, I contend that understanding the internal dynamics of a dominated community is just as vital (Ortner 1995). Exploring the

quotidian interactions and encounters between Palestinian refugees and factions brings us valuable insights into the nature of factions, how we should study them, or work with – or against - them as activists interested in bettering Palestinian political representation. Indeed the very questions I ask about our conventional understanding of factions as building-like structures were directly precipitated by the alternative methodological approach I adopted. It is in that same spirit that, in the next chapter, I convey the conditions and constraints that Palestinian refugees faced in Lebanon. Exploring the context within which political relations develop in the Palestinian refugee camps of Lebanon is an indispensable prelude to understanding the forms of political organization Palestinian refugees engage in.

### **3. 'I MISS THE SHOUTING OF OUR NEIGHBOUR' LIFE, STRUGGLE AND WAR IN NAHR EL-BARED CAMP**

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis/dissertation for  
copyright reasons“.

Laundry in Nahr el-Bared camp. (Photograph Ali Alouch)

Sadness is our fate  
Trouble is our fate  
Our dreams cannot be measured  
And by God no one cares  
I swear I miss our neighbourhood  
I swear I miss our home  
I miss the shouting of our neighbour  
I wish I stayed in Nahr el-Bared

10-year-old Palestinian girl displaced from Nahr el-Bared camp singing  
and drumming in the courtyard of the UNRWA school in Beddawi camp  
where she was sheltering with her family. June 2007

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon live on the fringe of Lebanese society.  
For more than sixty-five years their experience has been one of constant

pressure, crisis, and turmoil. Lebanon has given the refugees a mixed package of advantages and hazards that has both given rise to the Palestinian Resistance Movement in the 1970s and 1980s and to its repression. Today, half of the refugees live in overcrowded camps, initially established to house their ancestors who fled from Palestine following the 1948 *Nakba*. They face severe social and legal discrimination in employment, property ownership, construction within the camps and the formation of civil associations. In short, they live in physical misery, fear and insecurity.

In the following chapter I set out the larger historical and political context needed to understand this current ethnography of Palestinian political life in Lebanon. It is impossible to examine the everyday interactions of Palestinian refugees with political factions without first outlining the circumstances within which these practices developed. I begin by giving a brief historical summary of the overall situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. I then focus on Nahr el-Bared camp in the north of Lebanon, the main site of my research, and I provide an overview of the 2007 conflict which demolished the camp and rendered its residents homeless one more time. It was a battle fought between two non-Palestinian sides, the Lebanese army and a small group of Islamic militants calling themselves Fatah al-Islam who had only recently arrived in the camp. Finally, I conclude this chapter with the personal war story of the family that hosted me in the camp. I add this personal story at the end to give the readers the ability to experience the events described at the beginning of this chapter through the eyes of those who lived through them.

### **Palestinians in Lebanon**

In this section, I provide a brief historical sketch of the situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon since their expulsion from their lands in 1948 to the years prior to the 2007 conflict in Nahr el-Bared camp. I show how Palestinians' treatment at the hands of the Lebanese authorities has over the

years depended on their sect and class and how poor, Sunni Palestinians have always been treated with suspicion and systematically excluded from all spheres of activity in Lebanon, whether social, economic or political.

1948 was the year of the Palestinian *Nakba*, the catastrophe, as it was commonly known to Palestinians. Before and during the war of 1948 Zionist forces, which later formed the new Israeli army, expelled about 750,000 Palestinians into neighbouring countries (W. Khalidi 1992: 582). Between 418 (W. Khalidi 1992: xxxi) and 531 villages (Sitta 2004: 71) were destroyed and depopulated, 13,000 people killed (W. Khalidi 1992: xxxiii) and over 18 million of the country's 26 million *dunams* shifted from Arab to Jewish control (R. Khalidi 2007: 14). The new state of Israel now controlled about 77% of the land area of historic Palestine, which had been depopulated of about 90% of its indigenous Arab population (Masalha 2012: 2; R. Sayigh 2007: 99). This uprooting of the Palestinians and the dismemberment and de-arabisation of Palestine have led scholars to refer to those events as the ethnic cleansing of Palestine (Masalha 2012; Pappé 2006).

Of the 110,000 Palestinians who fled to Lebanon (Peteet 2005: 6; R. Sayigh 1994: 17), the majority was from the northern part of Palestine, from the villages of the Galilee, and the coastal cities of Jaffa, Haifa and Acre (R. Sayigh 1994: 17). Their integration into Lebanese society was dependent on their sect and class. Middle and upper class Palestinians settled into towns and cities (Peteet 2005: 6). Christians and wealthy Muslims could easily obtain citizenship if they wished to (R. Sayigh 1994: 23) which made travel and the search for employment easier. However, the mass of rural and poor city refugees had no choice but to settle in one of the fifteen official camps and a number of rural agglomerations. Sunni Palestinians, representing 75% of the refugee population (Sfeir 2009: 106), were seen from the start as a threat to the Maronite Christian community which, at that time, enjoyed political and economic dominance (Peteet 1991: 23; Sfeir 2010).

The establishment of camps allowed the Lebanese state and its army to control the refugees more easily. Camps were established far from the Lebanese-Israeli border and far from each other (Roberts 2010: 78). They were also established in both rural and urban areas to provide a cheap agricultural and industrial labour pool (R. Sayigh 1994: 24). Additionally, Lebanese laws created severe constraints over the refugee population. Those who were not able to obtain Lebanese citizenship were treated as foreigners who were obliged to apply for work permits. Unable to obtain those, they were effectively confined to work in agriculture, construction and the informal sector (R. Sayigh 1994: 24).

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), established in 1950, operated in Lebanon where it provided education, health, social, and relief services (Al-Husseini 2010: 6). In turn, the Lebanese state attempted to control the Palestinians in the camps using a variety of methods over the years. In the first decade after the arrival of the refugees President Chamoun relied mostly on general security and on the Mufti<sup>18</sup> (R. Sayigh 1994: 25). Then following the Lebanese turmoil of 1958 President Chehab used the Army's Intelligence Bureau, also known as the Deuxième Bureau, as well as the police, to control the camps. This period was known for its oppressive and degrading measures against Palestinians. They were severely restricted in all aspects of life. They needed permits to visit other camps, meetings of non-domestic nature were not allowed, listening to the radio or reading the newspaper was forbidden, and building or repairing homes required an unobtainable permit, even if just to add concrete blocks over the corrugated zinc that Palestinians used as roofs. There were no private bathrooms or drainage systems and everyone, whether young or old, male or female, had to walk, night and day, to reach public latrines. Finally, refugees were not allowed to discard washing water out into the open street drains but again had to walk to a

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<sup>18</sup> The Mufti of Jerusalem Hajj Amin Hussaini had taken refuge in Lebanon and continued to have a following in the camps in the early years Rosemary Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies: The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1994) at 25.



designated area to dispose of their used water. Added to these practices were the daily harassments, humiliations, extortions, arrests and sometimes torture at the hands of police officers (R. Sayigh 1994: 68-71; 2007: 139-47, 56-58).

This oppressive situation in exile exacerbated their dispossession from Palestine and fed into the emergence of the *thawra*, the revolution, in the 1960s (Khalili 2007: 46-47; R. Sayigh 2007: 147). Additionally, the increase in education levels, due to UNRWA's services, created a generation of teachers and young professionals who would become the leaders of the *thawra* once the Arab armies were defeated by Israel in 1967 (R. Khalidi 2006: 142; R. Sayigh 2007: 124). While Fatah declared the beginning of the *thawra* in 1965 when it launched its first military operation inside occupied Palestine, its origins can be traced back to the many military operations carried out in the preceding years, and its inspiration found in the long history of mass uprisings that stretch back to the 1936 Great Revolt (R. Sayigh 2007: 152)<sup>19</sup>. By 1969 the burgeoning Palestinian national movement, backed by Lebanese left-wing and nationalist forces, which would later form the Lebanese National Movement, began to clash with the Lebanese army in demonstrations around Lebanon (Traboulsi 2007: 152-55, 64-87). On 28 August 1969 Lebanese policemen attempted to take down a makeshift Fatah office in Nahr el-Bared that a resident had built in his backyard. In response, residents rose up spontaneously against them and chased them out of the camp (Kanj 2010: 64-70; R. Sayigh 2007: 169-70). This was the beginning of the liberation of the camps; an unplanned revolt that would soon see all camps in Lebanon free from the much-hated Deuxième Bureau. The liberation of the camps ushered the era of the *thawra* in Lebanon, when Palestinians felt they had regained their self-respect, pride and dignity. They felt back in control of their destiny and struggling as part of a mass movement to return home. Um Nasser explained:

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<sup>19</sup> The 1936 Great Revolt refers to the mass uprising by Palestinians in Mandatory Palestine against British colonial rule and mass Jewish immigration, see Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

The revolution was a sacred thing at the time; no one could even criticize it. We didn't see anything negative in it or rather we didn't want to see anything negative in the revolution. Due to the oppression we were facing, we were waiting for anything to save us from the situation we were in. And indeed after it people started to build. ... People could enlarge their homes; there were no more restrictions. The people of the camp became responsible for the camp!<sup>20</sup>

This mass uprising of Palestinians led to the signing of the Cairo Accords in 1969 between Yasir Arafat, who was soon to chair the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), and the Lebanese army commander.<sup>21</sup> The accord granted Palestinians the right to manage their own camps and to engage in armed struggle in coordination with the Lebanese Army (Cobban 1984: 47; Khalili 2007: 47; Peteet 2005: 7). Palestinian camps were thereafter administered by the combination of a popular committee, which acted like a municipality dealing with services such as electricity, water, and garbage collection, and the armed struggle command, which acted like a local police force (Peteet 1987: 32-33). Appointed by the Palestinian factions, rather than elected from the camp's residents, they were a welcome change to the rule of the Deuxième Bureau (R. Sayigh 2007: 179). Aided by the local population they quickly started to engage in infrastructural improvements and they established health, social and cultural institutions in the camps in addition to their recruiting programs and military training (Khalili 2007: 48; Peteet 1987: 33; R. Sayigh 1994: 95-96; 2007: 182-87).

As the Palestinian resistance movement developed into a major force in Lebanon it increased its military operations against Israel which augmented its air, naval and ground attacks leading to heavy Lebanese and Palestinian civilian deaths with often minimal losses to PLO combatants, presumably the target of any attack (R. Khalidi 1986: 20-21). This Israeli tactic was designed to alienate

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<sup>20</sup> Saida, 3 December 2011

<sup>21</sup> The PLO was established in 1964 by the Arab League and was taken over by the Palestinian Resistance Movement in 1969 see Helena Lindholm Schulz and Juliane Hammer, *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland* (London: Routledge, 2003) at 118-19.

the Lebanese masses from the PLO and increase Palestinian-Lebanese tensions. Additionally, Palestinians became the target of right-wing Christian militias and continued to be attacked by the Lebanese army regardless of the Cairo accords (R. Sayigh 1994: 97). Allying themselves with the Lebanese National Movement, Palestinians were drawn into the Lebanese civil war.<sup>22</sup> With the breakdown of the Lebanese state the PLO continued to grow in influence until 1982 when Israel invaded Lebanon and expelled PLO forces from it.<sup>23</sup> The period that followed was marred with massacres and sieges and much of the PLO infrastructure was destroyed (Brynen 1990b: 180-81).

In 1987 President Amin Gemayel abrogated the Cairo Accord; since then it has not been replaced by another agreement for the management of the camps or for coordination between the Lebanese state and the Palestinians (Quilty 2007a; Siklawi 2010: 610)<sup>24</sup>. Instead, the Lebanese state seemed to have preferred to operate according to an unofficial arrangement whereby internal policing was left to the Palestinians themselves and when problems arose that needed their intervention they could either enter the camp in coordination with camp authorities (Suleiman 1999: 72), rely on Palestinian factions to hand over wanted individuals (Hassan and Hanafi 2010: 29), or simply blame the Palestinians for bringing insecurity to Lebanon (R. Sayigh 2001: 94). Thereafter the camps were internally governed by a web of complex power structures composed of the PLO popular committee, committees formed by dissident political parties, notables, factions, Islamist non-Palestinian groups, imams, PLO popular organizations, and UNRWA directors (Suleiman 1999).

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<sup>22</sup> For more detail on the Lebanese civil war and its intersection with the Palestinian resistance movement see Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organization: People, Power and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) at 58-80. Rashid Khalidi, *Under Siege: P.L.O. Decisionmaking During the 1982 War* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1986) at 17-41.

<sup>23</sup> At its peak the PLO had over 20,000 military and civilian personnel and an annual budget of over \$200 million Rex Brynen, 'The Dynamics of Palestinian Elite Formation', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 24/3 (1995a), 31-43 at 36.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of the repercussions of the Ta'if agreement that ended the Lebanese civil war on the Palestinians see Jaber Suleiman, 'The Current Political, Organizational, and Security Situation in the Palestinian Refugee Camps of Lebanon', *ibid.* 29/1 (1999), 66-80 at 68-71.

The post-civil war era brought an even sharper increase in the insecurity and marginalization of Palestinian refugees. They were evicted from squatter areas (Abbas 1997: 381) and suffered from a reduction in UNRWA's services, which had chronic budget deficits since the mid-1970s (Al-Husseini 2010: 18). Additionally, in 1994, the Oslo Accords were signed between the PLO and Israel and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) was created as an authority over the West Bank and Gaza and had no official ties to the refugees in Lebanon (Jamil 1995). Starting from that date funding to the PLO was severely cut with both the Palestinian leadership and the international community shifting funding and focus from the PLO to the PNA (Frisch 2009; Hilal 2010: 27-30).

Lebanese media and politicians increased their portrayals of camps as areas of lawlessness and crime, which they called 'security islands' and a 'ticking time bomb' (R. Sayigh 2001: 102). In reality the camps were areas where poor Sunni Palestinians were confined to by discriminatory laws and racist attitudes that prevented them from bettering their lives through work. The fear of implantation in Lebanon, or *tawīn*, has long been the ruse by which unjust laws were not only justified but actually labelled as being beneficial to Palestinians. In this absurd scenario, the Lebanese authorities were helping Palestinians not to forget about Palestine by preventing them from settling comfortably in Lebanon. As many Palestinians point out the Lebanese authorities 'loved Palestine but hated the Palestinians.'

Defined in law as foreigners, Lebanese politicians found an easy way to exclude Palestinians by applying the principle of reciprocity to the decrees that pertained to them (Al-Natour 1997: 366; Suleiman 2006: 14-20). This principle operated by the logic that the treatment of a foreigner (e.g. Palestinian) in Lebanon was determined by the treatment of Lebanese nationals in the foreigner's country of origin (e.g. Palestine). Considering that there was no Palestinian state, which could treat Lebanese in any given way, this was a

convenient and effective legal ruse that lawmakers used to exclude Palestinians from the labour market. In 2001 Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri used that same tactic to prevent Palestinians from owning property (Saghieh and Saghieh 2008: 22-22). Portrayed by the Lebanese as the instigators of the civil war (Haddad 2003: 85), their meagre rights were reduced even further.

Restricted to working in menial jobs, and unable to achieve a minimum of stability in the form of homeownership, Palestinians have been pushed to emigrate (Al-Husseini and Bocco 2011: 133-34; R. Sayigh 2001: 100). Those unable to escape from Lebanon's suffocating laws lived in physical misery, fear and insecurity. Recent surveys have found that 56% are jobless, two thirds poor, and 58% vulnerable to food insecurity (with 15% reporting severe food insecurity), while 40% of households had water leaking through their roofs or walls (Chaaban et al. 2010b: xi-xiv). Additionally, a survey by the International Labour Organization (2011) reported that over 50% worked in construction and commerce, and faced insecure employment, with more than a third working on weekly, or daily basis, compared to just 10% of Lebanese. They worked long hours and their average monthly income, which was below the minimum wage, represented 80% of the Lebanese average monthly wage (2011: 15-20). Although 90% of the Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon in 2011 were born there, the opportunities and choices available to them continued to be dictated by the sect, class and place of birth of their paternal ancestors over 65 years ago. In addition to this legal and social discrimination, Palestinian refugees also had to live with the constant fear that even the precarious lives, that they had painfully built for themselves, could be taken away at a moment's notice, and with impunity, as the 2007 Nahr el-Bared conflict taught them.

### **Nahr el-Bared and the 2007 conflict**

Stigmatized by Lebanese society as having caused the civil war (Haddad 2003: 85; Peteet 2005: 173-74), Palestinians served as a convenient scapegoat

for any ill in Lebanon (Khalili 2005: 35; Sfeir 2010: 28-29). This was especially visible during the 2007 Nahr el-Bared conflict as it was the only moment when unity in the Lebanese political spectrum was exhibited in a long period of internal and sometimes deadly divisions. In the following section, I first give a brief overview of the Lebanese political situation at the onset of the 2007 conflict, then I introduce Nahr el-Bared camp before going into the details of Fatah al-Islam and finally, the 2007 battle.

### *Lebanese politics*

The Lebanese political divisions that affected the Nahr el-Bared camp and the war that destroyed it can be traced back to 2005 when Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri was assassinated in a massive car bomb which also killed twenty-two other people (Hirst 2010: 305). The Future Movement, the political party that Hariri established and that was to be led after his death by his son Saad, accused Syria of the assassination. It was a pivotal moment when the Future Movement turned against the presence of the Syrian military in Lebanon, to which they had acquiesced throughout the fifteen years since the end of the Lebanese civil war. This also caused a rapprochement between the Future Movement and the United States (US), as it thought that Syria deserved to be included in the 'axis of evil' (Hirst 2010: 299).<sup>25</sup> Rafiq al-Hariri's assassination triggered a series of protests for and against the presence of the Syrian military in Lebanon. Most significantly, on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2005 about half a million people led by the Lebanese political party Hezbollah gathered in downtown Beirut in support of the Syrian regime. Having lived under a brutal Israeli occupation for twenty-eight years Hezbollah's constituency looked at Syria as a strong ally who had stood by them politically, militarily and financially in their fight for liberation.

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<sup>25</sup> On January 29<sup>th</sup> 2002 the United States President George W. Bush labeled Iraq, Iran and North Korea as the 'axis of evil'. In December 2003, after the US invasion of Iraq the US congress passed the 'Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Act' which was written by staunch Zionists and which portrayed Syria as a supporter of international terrorism and a potential fitting member of the 'axis of evil' David Hirst, *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2010) at 299-300.

However, less than a week later more than a million people gathered in downtown Beirut to demonstrate against Syrian domination in Lebanon. They called for the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, who in spite of supporting the Lebanese resistance against Israel, had a long history of corruption, racketeering, and kidnappings, not to mention bombing and besieging different Lebanese areas during the civil war. Riding the wave of these massive protests, Lebanese political parties used the dates of these demonstrations as the names of the two political coalitions that were set to dominate the Lebanese political scene for several years to come. In simplified form it was the anti-American March 8 camp and the anti-Syrian March 14 camp.

In July 2006, Hezbollah captured two Israeli soldiers along the border with the intention of subsequently conducting a prisoner exchange with Israel. The Israeli response was a thirty-four day war on Lebanon, by the end of which they were not able either to recapture their kidnapped soldiers or to re-occupy the south of Lebanon. Hezbollah led the offensive, with the Lebanese military playing only a tangential role, and declared the war a victory. However, the March 14 camp considered that Hezbollah had dragged the country into an unnecessary war of its own choosing. The divisions between the two camps were exacerbated. The March 8 coalition demanded the formation of a national unity government in which they would hold veto power and in December 2006 they held an open sit-in in downtown Beirut as part of a campaign of civil disobedience (Hirst 2010: 385). A month later clashes occurred at the Beirut Arab University, leading to the death of four people. The Lebanese army's effectively stood between the protesters, keeping them apart in an attempt to decrease the violence. The army's logic was not to interfere in favour of one side afraid of being drawn into sectarian clashes that could jeopardize its own integrity, since it was itself formed along sectarian lines (Quilty 2007a).

It was in this context that the Nahr el-Bared conflict happened. In contrast to previous incidents and to its position during the 2006 July war, in Nahr el-

Bared the army was for the first time in active combat since the end of the Lebanese civil war. It was an opportunity for the army to boost its public image. In the next sections I will give background information on Nahr el-Bared camp as well as on Fatah al-Islam and its intersection with the United State's 'war on terror' before delving into the details of the 2007 war.

### *Nahr el-Bared camp*

Nahr el-Bared camp was the second largest Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, housing in 2007 about 33,000 refugees (Hassan and Hanafi 2010: 31). It was established in 1949 by the League of Red Cross Societies (LRCS) to house Palestinian refugees relocated from the south of Lebanon and from the Beqaa valley (Kanj 2010: xvii; UNRWA). Nahr el-Bared was situated on the Mediterranean shoreline, approximately twenty kilometres north of Tripoli, the second largest Lebanese city, some thirty kilometres from the Syrian border. Additionally, the camp was intersected by the main road that linked Tripoli to the villages of Akkar and neighbouring Syria, as well as by the Bared River (*Nahr el-Bared*, which means cold river), which gave the camp its name. Like all Palestinian camps in Lebanon, it began as a series of makeshift tents and slowly its residents started to replace their tents with stones and concrete. However, it was not until the 1970s, when the Lebanese Deuxième Bureau was kicked out of the camp, that the residents started building and expanding their homes as their material conditions allowed them to.

During the Lebanese civil war of 1975 to 1990, Nahr el-Bared experienced fewer battles than other Palestinian camps. However, this did not mean that it was spared violence. Israel routinely bombed the camp from the sea and air during the 70s and 80s (Kanj 2010: 80-93). Nahr el-Bared was also the site of a major inter-factional battle in 1983. After the expulsion of the PLO forces from Beirut following the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon some Fatah fighters remained in the north which was at the time under Syrian control. In the middle of



1983 a rebellion happened inside Fatah led by colonels Abu Musa and Abu Saleh. The rebels called for reform inside Fatah and were backed by Syria politically and militarily. They soon engaged in armed confrontation with Fatah forces loyal to Arafat in Nahr el-Bared and Beddawi camps, as well as in the city of Tripoli (Y. Sayigh 1997: 570-73). The loyalists were eventually defeated and expelled from the northern Palestinian camps (Strindberg 2000: 70). The new faction called itself Fatah al-Intifada, meaning 'Fatah Uprising' and along with other opposition groups established the Syria-based National Salvation Front (NSF) and took over the governing bodies of Nahr el-Bared camp. Thereafter the camp exhibited relative calm and the residents used the camp's strategic location by the sea and on the main road linking Tripoli to Syria to their advantage.

Nahr el-Bared became an important commercial hub. It was a trading centre for goods smuggled in from Syria, for agricultural products going from the countryside into Tripoli as well as for cheap manufacturing goods moving from Tripoli to the villages (Hassan and Hanafi 2010: 31; Quilty 2007b). This commercial activity meant that Nahr el-Bared had strong economic and social ties with the adjacent area, which translated into many mixed marriages between Lebanese and Palestinian refugees. Camp residents emphasized this point repeatedly as they were keen on showing that their interests and those of the hinterland were one and the same. Abu Rabieh, a member of the executive board of the Trade Union in Nahr el-Bared emphasized that business transactions were often done on credit, as the level of trust was high. He explained:

Any trader who came to Nahr el-Bared would put his merchandise here and wouldn't even need to take money or a bill to account for it as he knew that his rights were safeguarded here. He had several recourses available to him. If he came to my neighbour and he didn't pay him, he could come to me and I would go to my neighbour and ask him why didn't you pay him yet?<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Nahr el-Bared camp, 29 October 2011.

However, things changed dramatically fast at the end of 2006 and early 2007 with the arrival of Islamic militants, who later called themselves Fatah al-Islam.

### *Fatah al-Islam*

The story of Fatah al-Islam is difficult to piece together, as many of its alleged members are either dead or in prison. However, its composition of mostly non-Palestinian members is not in dispute, as even the Lebanese Judiciary Council confirmed it (Haddad 2010: 559). Rather, it is its origins that are debated. The March 8 coalition claimed that Fatah al-Islam was the creation of the Future Movement who sought to create its own Sunni militia. In contrast, the March 14 camp argued that Fatah al-Islam was a Syrian implant in Lebanon with ties to al-Qaeda and as such they linked the Lebanese government's struggle with Fatah al-Islam to the United States 'war on terror.' However journalists found another connection between Fatah al-Islam and the 'war on terror.'

Seymour Hersh, a veteran investigative journalist for the New Yorker, claimed in 2007 that the Bush administration, and in particular Vice-President Dick Cheney in collaboration with Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the Saudi national-security advisor, shifted the United States' Middle East strategy during its 'war on terror' towards bolstering Sunni extremist groups in an attempt to weaken Hezbollah, as well as the Syrian and Iranian regimes (Hersh 2007).<sup>27</sup> It has done so even if it meant strengthening groups that were sympathetic to al-Qaeda, as they perceived Iran, with its potential nuclear program, as the bigger threat. This 'redirection' meant that the US administration, through the Saudi government and its allies in Lebanon, most notably the Future movement led by Saad al-Hariri, had been helping Sunni militant groups in Lebanon to develop. Alastair Crooke, a thirty year veteran of the British intelligence service, MI6, who subsequently

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<sup>27</sup> Prince Bandar bin Sultan served as the Saudi Ambassador to the United States for twenty-two years until 2005.

worked for a think tank in Beirut, claimed that “within twenty-four hours [of the establishment of Fatah al-Islam] they were being offered weapons and money by people presenting themselves as representatives of the Lebanese government’s interests – presumably to take on Hezbollah” (as cited in Hersh 2007).

Hersh also cited a 2005 International Crisis Group (ICG) report which claims that Saad al-Hariri, the leader of the Future movement, paid \$48,000 to bail out of prison Lebanese Islamists from the Dinniyeh Group, who, in 2000, launched a failed armed attempt at establishing an Islamic ‘mini-state’ in northern Lebanon (Hersh 2007). Bahiyya al-Hariri, Saad al-Hariri’s aunt, was also reported to have paid money to Sunni militants to leave the Palestinian refugee camp of Ein el-Helwe, located in the south of Lebanon by Saida, where she resided. They subsequently left for the Palestinian camps in the north of Lebanon (Knudsen 2011: 101; Quilty 2007b). Finally, investigative journalist Nir Rosen stated that by the end of 2006 Sunni militants who had been fighting in Iraq were moving to Lebanon (2010: 198). Like Hersh, Rosen also claimed that these militant groups had links to the staunchly anti-Syrian Future movement (199). However Rosen added that such a movement could not have happened without the Syrian regime’s approval. Indeed many of these militants came to Lebanon under the umbrella of the pro-Syrian Palestinian political faction of Fatah al-Intifada (Quilty 2007b; Rosen 2010: 197). However, Rosen painted a picture of confusion and lack of agreement inside Fatah al-Intifada, where some leaders of this secular movement encouraged this move of Sunni Islamists to Lebanon while others opposed it (197).

The newcomers first settled in Beddawi camp, about fifteen kilometres south of Nahr el-Bared, where the camp’s security committee started investigating them (Hassan and Hanafi 2010: 32; Rosen 2010: 197-98). This led to an armed clash in which one member of the Beddawi security committee was killed (Rosen 2010: 198; The Daily Star 2006a). Two militants were subsequently captured by the Palestinian security committee and handed over to the Lebanese

Army (Rosen 2010: 198) but the remaining militants escaped and moved to the outskirts of Nahr el-Bared camp (Hassan and Hanafi 2010: 32). In response the Lebanese Army set up checkpoints around the camp, severely restricting its commercial activity. However, many residents point to the fact that many more militants continued to arrive even after the army set up its checkpoints. Ultimately, what became apparent was that the Syrian regime, the Future movement, the Lebanese government and its armed forces were all well aware of, if not sometimes encouraging, the movement and settlement of these militants in the Palestinian camps in the north of Lebanon (International Crisis Group 2009: 26; M. A. Khalidi and Riskedahl 2007: 28-29).

Soon after the militants arrived in Nahr el-Bared camp, an internal coup occurred inside Fatah al-Intifada with Shaker al-Abssi, the third-ranking official in Fatah al-Intifada (Rosen 2010: 197), announcing the establishment of Fatah al-Islam (Hassan and Hanafi 2010: 32; The Daily Star 2006b). Not all the camp's residents welcomed this announcement. Instead, many residents staged protests demanding that Fatah al-Islam leave the camp (Bathist 2007a; Ramadan 2009: 155; Taarnby and Hallundbaek 2008: 5-6). Two separate armed incidents ensued in which one member of Fatah al-Islam was stabbed to death (The Daily Star 2007); a month later a member of Fatah was shot dead (Bathist 2007b).

### *The battle*

On May 19<sup>th</sup> 2007 members of Fatah al-Islam robbed a bank in Amyun, a small town south of Tripoli. Subsequently, the Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF) raided their apartments in Tripoli and a firefight ensued (Hassan and Hanafi 2010: 34). In response, Fatah al-Islam launched a nighttime brutal attack against the Lebanese army barrack stationed outside Nahr el-Bared camp during which twenty-seven Lebanese soldiers died, some of whom were killed in their sleep

(Human Rights Watch 2007c; M. A. Khalidi and Riskedahl 2007: 28-29).<sup>28</sup> The army responded by carrying out heavy and indiscriminate shelling of the camp. The battle turned into a 100-day conflict and was framed by the Hariri government in terms of the global 'war on terror': Fatah al-Islam was labelled an international terrorist organization linked to al-Qaeda. In less than a week, the United States sent several transport planes carrying ammunition and weaponry (M. A. Khalidi and Riskedahl 2007: 33). US security assistance to Lebanon dramatically increased from \$28 million in 2006 to \$325 million in 2007 (United States Government Accountability Office 2013: 10). The equipment provided was not the kind that would help the Lebanese army defend its borders from a foreign attack, such as anti-aircraft weapons, but weaponry designed for urban warfare, most likely for internal use, such as assault rifles, grenade launchers, sniper weapon systems, and bunker weapons (Schenker 2008). The US also financed an \$86 million project to train Internal Security Forces cadets in "the latest policing, law enforcement and community relations skills" (Galey 2010) making the US training program in Lebanon the fourth largest in the world (The White House 2013).

At the time, there was no public criticism against the army's actions in Nahr el-Bared (Hassan and Hanafi 2010: 34; Quilty 2007b). Instead, strong support was shown from the entire Lebanese political spectrum. While it was the Hariri government that led the offensive on the camp, Nasrallah, the Secretary General of Hezbollah, labelled both the attacking of the camp and the army as red lines. However, no action was taken as the army systematically demolished the camp. While all parties claimed that the battle was against Fatah al-Islam rather than Palestinians, the newly displaced refugees were routinely detained and abused by the Lebanese military as they were fleeing the camp and at

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<sup>28</sup> Due to the lack of coordination between the ISF and the Lebanese army, the military barrack stationed outside of Nahr el-Bared was not alerted when the ISF raided Fatah al-Islam's apartments in Tripoli although both security apparatus knew that members of Fatah al-Islam resided in Nahr el-Bared. See Jamal Krayem Kanj, *Children of Catastrophe: Journey from a Refugee Camp to America* (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing Limited, 2010) at 189, Jim Quilty, 'The Collateral Damage of Lebanese Sovereignty', *Middle East Research and Information Project Online*, Jun 18 (2007b).

different checkpoints around Lebanon. Harassment included being stripped, forced to lie on the ground, being kicked, beaten, insulted and humiliated (Amnesty International 2008; Human Rights Watch 2007b).

Initially the attack continued for three consecutive days, causing the death of twenty-seven Palestinian civilians, before a cease-fire was declared which allowed the first wave of refugees to flee (Human Rights Watch 2007c). Most of the displaced went to Beddawi camp to stay with relatives and friends or to shelter in offices, garages, storerooms, and schools (FAFO 2007: 3). The refugees initially thought that their displacement from their camp was temporary, however as days turned into weeks they soon feared that there would not be a return to Nahr el-Bared camp. Young children and adults alike began to voice their fears, despairs and most importantly their longing for their homes and neighbourhoods regardless of all their drawbacks. Some of these expressions took the form of songs, as quoted at the beginning of this chapter; in other cases it took the form of protest. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, more than a month after the war started, residents of Nahr el-Bared, now displaced to Beddawi camp, staged a protest calling for the fighting to end and demanding to be allowed to return home. However, as the protest exited Beddawi camp and marched along the main road leading to Nahr el-Bared, which was still some fifteen kilometres away, the Lebanese military opened fire, killing two protesters and injuring at least twenty-eight others (Amnesty International 2008; Human Rights Watch 2007a). Additionally, fleeing protesters who took shelter in the lobby of nearby buildings were attacked by local Lebanese residents with sticks and knives (Human Rights Watch 2007a).

The position of the Palestinian leadership was deeply unpopular during the conflict. On the fourth day of fighting and as civilians were being killed indiscriminately, the PLO representative to Lebanon Abbas Zaki declared to the media that the PLO had no objections to the Lebanese military sending troops to Nahr el-Bared, that "this is a Lebanese decision" (as quoted in Qawas and

Zaatari 2007). Many also pointed out that if the Palestinians had a united and effective leadership then the conflict and the camp's destruction might have been averted as the armed factions themselves could have acted against Fatah al-Islam (Hassan and Hanafi 2010: 33; Ramadan 2009: 161). Abu Ali, a resident of Nahr el-Bared in his fifties, expressed this commonly held-view:

The crisis of Nahr el-Bared was the biggest indicator of the weakness of the factions and our leaders. Look at where we are today! They took the decision to displace 30,000 refugees! For what? Because they were not able to take a decision to fight a gang?<sup>29</sup>

The battle continued until the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 2007 when the Lebanese army declared its first victory over global terrorism. Chawki Masri, the army chief of staff during the conflict, later declared:

The LAF's [Lebanese Armed Forces] morale was very high after the conflict and we were proud that all the Lebanese, and the U.S., UK, Spain and other friendly countries, were astonished by how we were able to throw a 4,000-pound bomb. They came here and asked how we did all this with such limited capabilities, and they told us they were very proud. It was a very good sign for us that not only the Lebanese but also the great armies from around the world said they were proud of what we did in Nahr el-Bared (International Crisis Group 2012: 3).

The army had effectively won a battle fought against a group of militants whose numbers, even by the account of the Lebanese government, did not exceed 450.<sup>30</sup> In the process, the conflict led to the death of 42 civilians, 168 Lebanese soldiers and 220 militants, as well as the displacement of over 30,000 refugees (Amnesty International 2008). All 1,700 buildings in the old camp were turned to rubble (Hassan and Hanafi 2010: 34), and about 65% of the new camp

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<sup>29</sup> Nahr el-Bared camp 11 November 2011.

<sup>30</sup> The Lebanese government has stated that 226 militants were killed in the war and 215 were captured see Government of Lebanon, 'A Common Challenge, a Shared Responsibility: The International Donor Conference for the Recovery and Reconstruction of the Nahr Al-Bared Palestinian Refugee Camp and Conflict-Affected Areas of North Lebanon', (Beirut: Government of Lebanon 2008) at 19.

buildings needed repair (IRIN 2007), including 100 totally demolished buildings (Hassan and Hanafi 2010: 34).

Once the battle ended residents were denied access to the ruins of their own homes. While the army had declared that the camp was disarmed and free from Fatah al-Islam, they still did not allow Palestinians to return. Instead, they surrounded the new and old camps with two sets of barbed wire and concrete blocks. Checkpoints, manned by the Lebanese army, now controlled the entrance of people and goods to the camp. The old camp was completely off-limits to its previous residents. They were only allowed a one-time ten to thirty minutes visit to their demolished homes, during which time they had to first locate which pile of rubble was theirs and then attempt to retrieve what was possible from it. The new camp was divided into different areas and the army determined the timing of their handover without consultation with their inhabitants. It first took a month after the war was declared over for the first residents to be allowed back to their homes in the new camp and to this day, six years after the war ended, certain areas are still off limits to their inhabitants.

This was the continuation of a long series of humiliating experiences to the residents of Nahr el-Bared who now needed a military permit to access rubble. Even more upsetting was that once they got access to their homes and businesses in the camp they found them vandalized, looted, and burned. Racist graffiti had been written on the walls insulting Palestinians (Amnesty International 2008; Ramadan 2009, 2010). Upon visiting a burned out and looted dental clinic in Nahr el-Bared camp in October 2007 I saw spray painted on the walls “Fuck you Palestine! With regards from the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade”. While it is hard to believe that the destruction of the entire camp was a military necessity in a fight against a group of 450 militants, the accompanying looting, burning, vandalism, racism and the subsequent militarization of the disarmed camp made it clear that Palestinian refugees were being treated as a guilty party. Although Lebanese officials repeatedly declared that Fatah al-Islam was not a Palestinian entity, they



nonetheless seemed to blame the Palestinian community for their emergence (International Crisis Group 2009: 12). Residents felt yet again used as scapegoats as they knew full well that the Lebanese government and its security apparatuses were all well aware, if not supportive, of the presence of the militants who formed Fatah al-Islam, and, had allowed them to move around and operate openly. Furthermore, Palestinians felt that by leaving the camp they had in effect sided with the army. They saw their departure from the camp as supporting the military campaign, as the army could subsequently lead a more aggressive assault on the camp without the fear of civilian casualties. Their subsequent treatment by the army as a suspect community only aggravated their feelings of betrayal and distrust.

Finally, in May 2008 the army commander during the conflict, General Michel Suleiman, became the consensus presidential candidate for both the March 8 and 14 coalitions (Quilty 2008). To mark the occasion, Lebanese newspaper *The Daily Star* published a biography of the general entitled “Nahr al-Bared victory launched Suleiman to Baabda” (Elghossain 2008). Simply put, the destruction of the second largest Palestinian camp in Lebanon became a source of unity for the two main Lebanese political coalitions. In his inaugural speech the new President reiterated his ‘firm rejection of the settlement’ of Palestinians in Lebanon in order to preserve their right of return to their homeland and he explained that it did not mean that he ‘objected’ to ‘taking care of their humanitarian rights’ (Sleiman 2008). However, as with previous presidents, no action was taken to change the oppressive legal situation that the Palestinian refugees lived under. In the next section I recount the war story of the family that hosted me in the camp in 2011 to give the readers an idea on how the events described in this chapter were experienced by those who were forced to endure them.<sup>31</sup> Adding this personal narrative reminds us that issues of legal and social

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<sup>31</sup> I collected this story through several conversations with the Talal family as well as their extended family throughout my stay in Nahr el-Bared camp. Most, but all, of our conversations were during our nightly gatherings when different family members would recall particular aspects

discrimination and war are not just abstract issues to be researched and studied, but concrete situations that Palestinian have to live and manoeuvre through.

### **Family and survival**

In the early hours of the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 2007, the Talal family woke to the sound of bombs. The father, Abu Muhammad, got up and went up on the roof to see what was going on. Having been a fighter for 18 years, Abu Muhammad had developed a sense of invulnerability to physical danger. He was watching the bombs fall on the camp and was calling the rest of his family to come up and join him. He initially thought it was an Israeli attack on the camp as those had been frequent in the 70s and the 80s. After all he initially met Um Muhammad while she was carrying cement blocks to rebuild her parents' home after it was demolished by an Israeli attack. Over the years that home was to be bombed and destroyed by Israel and rebuilt by Um Muhammad's family over three times. However on this occasion the shelling was from the Lebanese army stationed not far from Abu Muhammad. On the other hand, Um Muhammad, less interested in the theatrics of war and more concerned with the practicalities of survival, right away took a shower. The electricity had been cut off and she thought that it would take at least a week for it to be repaired again. Without electricity there would be no hot water and more importantly, within a couple days, there would be no water at all, as the water pump would stop functioning. She told her husband that since he was enjoying himself on the roof that he might as well bring down the laundry she hanged out to dry the night before, otherwise it would soon smell like gunpowder. She woke up her two sons Mahmud and Ahmad asking them to shower too but they refused to get out of bed. Their sister Nadia was sleeping at her grandparents' home in the old camp, and their eldest brother Muhammad was working with an NGO in the Buss camp in Sour. Everyone thought that the clashes would last a few hours, or maybe a few days, but that it

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of the events, which allowed me to piece together the overall story as experienced by several members of the family.

would be over soon. No one thought that this would be the last time they would see their home, their neighbourhood, and the entire camp. Abu Muhammad went out to get some food and heard from other people in the camp that it was a battle between the Lebanese Army and Fatah al-Islam.

Abu Muhammad was unhappy with the news. He first heard of the newcomers to the camp at the end of the previous year. Rumours started circulating that Fatah al-Intifada was bringing in people into the camp, people who didn't even speak Arabic. Then at the end of November 2006, his son read to him a public statement distributed in the camp declaring the establishment of Fatah al-Islam who was announcing its split from Fatah al-Intifada. Next, people claiming to be members of Fatah al-Islam took over the main office of Fatah al-Intifada that laid on a main crossing between the old and the new camp. Since that day Abu Muhammad stopped walking on the main road not wanting to come face to face with them and having to salute them as he distrusted them. Um Muhammad would always tease him that he would take the long way home just to avoid them. In contrast, Um Muhammad and her daughter Nadia welcomed their presence at the main intersection as they could now take that road to the market. When the office had been under the care of Fatah al-Intifada, their members had been notorious in sitting outside the office occasionally harassing women passing by. But since Fatah al-Islam took over the space, no such incidents occurred; they were most often seen reading the Qur'an.

Several members of Fatah al-Islam then rented apartments close to where the Talal family lived. On one occasion the wife of a member of Fatah al-Islam asked Um Muhammad for advice on where to seek medical help in the camp for her sick child. Abu Muhammad was unhappy about that; he didn't want any member of his family to have contact with them. He was suspicious of their presence and felt that trouble was about to befall them. He told Um Muhammad of his desire to leave the camp but he did not want to sell his home to members of Fatah al-Islam, the only people buying apartments at that time. Um

Muhammad on the other hand would argue that if these people were here to fight and cause trouble would they bring their families with them?

Regardless of their past positions towards the newcomers both Um and Abu Muhammad were now in agreement that they had to leave their house immediately. They feared that their area, inhabited by several families of Fatah al-Islam, would be targeted by the Lebanese army. Um Muhammad called her sister Najah and learned that her extended family was congregating at Najah's house. Located in the middle of the old camp, it was deemed the safest as it was far from Fatah al-Islam and far from the edges of the camp that always bore the brunt of any attack. Um Muhammad put an *'abaya* over her night gown and took her most precious possession: a plastic bag full of documents. Abu Muhammad, and by inheritance all of his children, were not legally recognized by the Lebanese government. Abu Muhammad, a Palestinian refugee from Jordan who came to Lebanon in 1976 to join the *thawra*, lost his Jordanian passport in 1982 during the Israeli occupation of Lebanon. Thereafter the Jordanian government refused to issue him a new passport. His four children, born in Lebanon, were not recognized by either the Jordanian or the Lebanese government.<sup>32</sup> Legally, they did not exist. Their mother Um Muhammad, a holder of the blue identity card issued by the Lebanese government for Palestinian refugees, could not under Lebanese law register her children under her name. During the 2006 war with Israel Um Muhammad had collected all those papers into a plastic bag, with a sturdy handle, that was ready to be taken at a moment's notice. No paper, no matter how insignificant, was deemed unworthy of protection. Abu Muhammad laughed at her when he saw her taking the bag with her, but it was Um Muhammad who later laughed at him pointing out her foresight. With the bag in hand, they waited for a lull in the bombings but no such moment occurred, so they dashed through the alleys as quickly as they could and made it to Najah's house safely.

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<sup>32</sup> In Lebanon these legally unrecognized refugees are called non-IDs.

They found the three-floor house bursting with people. Um Muhammad's brother Sami was present with his wife and three children, her other sister Fatima was also here with her husband and four children, and her third sister Mariam and her mother also joined them with Um Muhammad's daughter Nadia. Finally, looking for safety in numbers, neighbours had also converged onto the house. Everyone discussed the latest political developments pertaining to the crisis, as well as any updates as to which homes got hit, who got killed and who got injured. The last floor of the house was left empty as it was deemed to be too dangerous. At times of war the number of walls and roofs separating oneself from the outside world were counted as a form of protection against deadly flying missiles. Following that logic, the women settled into the bottom floor of the house, considered the safest, and the men in the first floor. The children could move from one floor to the other in an attempt to deal with their fears and their feelings of confinement caused by being indoors surrounded by so many people.

On the second day of bombing Abu Muhammad decided to go and check on his home. It had taken him and Um Muhammad twenty-two years to secure that small home which possessed the two most important features: it was theirs and it had concrete walls and roofs. It initially took them fifteen years to be able to secure one room that was five by seven-meter with a small kitchen and bathroom attached. That room was allocated to them by the popular committee of Nahr el-Bared in an area called *al-muhajjarin*, which in Arabic means the displaced. *Al-muhajjarin* was initially built to accommodate the refugees that had been displaced by the Tal al-Za'atar massacre in 1976. The Talal family was only able to obtain that room once that very room was considered unfit for living and when UNRWA, with an agreement with the PLO, built new housing units for those previously living there. As the previous residents of *al-muhajjarin* moved into their new units, their old unliveable homes were given to people who were desperate for any place to call their own.

They first divided the space into a two by five-meter room where Um and Abu Muhammad slept while their children slept in the five by five-meter room that was turned into a sitting area and study area during the day. The roof was made of zinc metal sheets overlaying each other. With the pouring of concrete roofs banned by the Lebanese authorities, they had to live under flimsy metal sheets that were notorious for water leakage during the rainy and cold winter months. They in turn transformed their homes into ovens in the summer as the metal radiated the sun's heat into their small living space. It took three years and a Norwegian NGO to convince the Lebanese government to allow them to pour concrete roofs. Then it took two more years and the help of Um Muhammad's brothers to pour a second concrete roof, which gave the Talal family another floor. However, they had to wait yet another year in order to save enough money to be able to buy the concrete blocks to add walls to it. They first built one room, and then later added another. Finally, a few months before the war, they bought a new batch of cinder blocks, that now laid on the roof, as they were planning on adding a second floor to the house to make room for their eldest son Muhammad who was starting to make marriage plans.

However, those plans and the house itself were now under threat. Upon approaching the house Abu Muhammad found that a missile had struck the outer wall of their neighbour's house but had not detonated. Members of Fatah al-Islam used the house. He went in to tell them that an unexploded missile laid outside their wall, but they did not speak any Arabic and seemed lost and confused. He gave up on trying to communicate with them and instead decided to remove the missile himself. From his past training he had learned that if a missile doesn't explode once its head explodes, which happened when the missile struck the wall, then it was safe to manipulate it. He therefore carried it and took it to Najah's house. Once the women saw him approaching carrying a missile in his hands they started screaming at him. He tried to reassure them that it was not dangerous but they told him to get rid of it. The question for him was where? He

went to the office of the PFLP, who again screamed at him, and in the end he decided to throw it into the sea.

Um Muhammad herself would sometimes venture out of the house with her sister Mariam. They would wait for the bombing to decrease and they would run through the alleys to go to their mother's house, which was the closest, in order to get additional food supplies. They didn't want to use up all of Najah's food reserves, believing that it was unfair for her to carry alone the financial burden of feeding five different families.

Finally, on Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> of May, after three days of indiscriminate and continuous bombings a cease-fire was declared. Rumours circulated that UNRWA sent trucks full of bread into the camp. Abu Muhammad collected the UNRWA ID cards of all the different families present and was happy to go out and collect their respective rations. Mahmud, Um Muhammad's fifteen year old son wanted to go out with his cousins, Aboud and Ammar. Mahmud and Ammar in particular had a very special relationship; they both had a cheerful disposition and were always seen together laughing and joking. However, Um Muhammad did not let Mahmud go, telling him that she needed him with her. Ammar who was studying in the UNRWA technical school of Sibling had come home on Saturday for the weekend and bought a new outfit. Unable to leave again for his classes on Monday due to the bombings, he was eager to go to his home and change into his new clothes. His brother Aboud accompanied him and as they sat outside their home, Ammar in his new attire, they heard that the media was present with the UNRWA bread trucks. They decided to seek them out. As they reached the bread truck, and as Abu Muhammad was walking away from it, bread loafs in hand, a missile struck the truck. Abu Muhammad felt the blow but was not injured. Aboud was thrown to the ground and Ammar was killed. In the great commotion that ensued Aboud could not locate his brother and he did not realize that he had been killed, he simply thought that Ammar must have returned home on his own. He therefore got up and went home.

In the meantime Jihad, their father, had heard the explosion and went out to look for them. He overheard people saying that 'ibn Jihad' (the son of Jihad) was killed. He asked them where were the bodies taken without telling them that he was Jihad. There were, after all, many Jihads in the camp. He went to the clinic that was indicated to him and to his greatest distress he found his son dead. He pushed himself to go back home and tell his family. His wife was devastated. Everyone was screaming. Aboud could not believe it, "he was standing right next to me," he kept repeating. At that moment, Um Muhammad's oldest brother, also named Muhammad, called from the United States. While speaking to him Um Muhammad dropped the phone on the floor and all that could Muhammad hear on the telephone was screams; he thought that the house had just been hit and began to go crazy in distant Washington DC. In a desperate attempt to keep some cool he called the one person he knew that was not in the house, the sister of the wife of his brother Sami. Fortunately, she answered the phone and living nearby she went to check on them and learned the news. She reported back to Muhammad the bad news.

The shelling of the camp had now started again and Jihad urgently needed to go back to the clinic to bury his son. His two brothers in law Abu Muhammad and Sami decided to accompany him. Upon arriving they discovered that the staff of the clinic, due to the renewal of the bombing, had already buried Ammar in the mass grave they had dug for those who were killed in the previous three days. The mass grave was partitioned so that each person buried had a specific spot. However, when Jihad asked which spot was his son's he was indicated two spots. To this day when Fatima goes to pray for her dead son, she is unsure where his body has been laid to rest.

Back in Najah's house, while everyone was in shock over the killing of Ammar, a quick decision needed to be taken about whether to stay in the camp or to flee for safety. Um Muhammad wanted to leave the camp with her children.



Sami's wife, Rania, was of the same opinion. The bombing of the bread truck had signalled to them that this conflict was being played by a different set of rules than previous ones. It was hard to interpret the truck bombing as anything other than a deliberate targeting of civilians. They feared for their lives and believed that they had no role to play in this fight. They viewed this fight as being between the Lebanese Army and Fatah al-Islam and they preferred not to be caught in its midst. They were encouraged by the great number of refugees who had begun to leave the camp. However, Fatima who had just lost her son and her sister Najah were too afraid of leaving the camp. They worried that they would not reach the outside of the camp alive and they wondered where would they go? Their fears were compounded when they heard that a man and a pregnant woman were shot dead and others injured as their fleeing bus approached a Lebanese army checkpoint. Fatima and Najah decided to stay in the camp while Um Muhammad and Rania decided to leave the camp with their children.

Um Muhammad told her husband to go home and get clothes for the family, as she and her children were still wearing their sleeping wear from the first day of the battle. Abu Muhammad complied and brought back a big bag of garments. Upon opening the bag, Um Muhammad realized that he brought back the clothing that was in the closet. Those were old discarded clothes that were torn and that she kept aside for her husband and sons to use when working on construction sites. Their wearable clothing laid on her bed unfolded. Abu Muhammad had forgotten that he placed them there when he brought them down from the roof on the first day of the bombings. They would keep talking about this misplacement for years to come as once their home destroyed they could simply not afford to buy any new outfits and had to keep on wearing their old, previously discarded ones.

The next morning, in a brief lull in the fighting, Um and Abu Muhammad and their three children left with Sami's wife and her three children looking for a way out of the camp. Abu Muhammad spotted a car with the flag of the Lebanese

Future movement, the party of the Hariri family. At first Um Muhammad refused to get in, but upon looking closer she realized that a Palestinian from the camp was in the car and that actually the car was his, but that the driver was from the Future movement. At that point they got in the car, Abu Muhammad sat in the front with the two other men, Um Muhammad, and her daughter, Sami's wife, and her three children sat in the back seat, and Mahmud and Ahmad sat in the trunk that was left open. They soon realized that they had done well as they went through the Lebanese Army's checkpoint without being stopped or searched. Instead, the man from the Future movement just waved at the soldiers and passed through while they watched other camp residents wait in a long line at the checkpoint. They took them to a house outside the camp that was turned into a relief station for Nahr el-Bared residents. They were giving juice boxes and from there other cars took them to Beddawi camp. They were surprised at how well organized the evacuation was and they started wondering why was the Lebanese Future party helping them leave the camp? But there was no time to dwell on such thoughts; they first needed to find a refuge. Um Muhammad planned on going to Tyr to her eldest son's home. However when her other children saw that most of Nahr el-Bared, and therefore many of their friends, were now in Beddawi camp, they convinced her to stay at her relative's home in the camp. It was a few days later and in that home that I first met them in 2007.

## **Conclusion**

Palestinians in Lebanon face material hardship, economic exploitation, the loss of civic and national rights, as well as a constant sense of insecurity. It is a permanent and daily struggle. In the present chapter I gave a brief historical overview of the situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon focusing on Nahr el-Bared camp and the 2007 battle that destroyed it and turned its residents homeless one more time. Finally, I presented the personal war story of the Talal family to give a glimpse of how Palestinian refugees navigated through the 2007 crisis. In the next chapter, I expand upon my focus of the Talal family to illustrate

how Palestinians survive the daily struggle of life in Lebanon. Through presenting the ethnographic setting for this research, I show how the legal discrimination and constant insecurity, explored in this chapter, narrow the refugees' options and how they manage to overcome these obstacles to build meaningful lives.

#### 4. *'ISH AL-MAJĀNĪN: 'THE NEST OF THE CRAZY'*

##### THE ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTING

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Women and eggs in Nahr el-Bared camp. (Photograph: Ali Alouch)

Prior to starting my research, I had visited Nahr el-Bared camp numerous times. The experience was always the same. Upon approaching the Lebanese army's checkpoint, my stomach would tie in knots as I found myself entering a different world; a world of military control and surveillance, destruction, destitution, and injustice. The proximity of this world to the world I was coming from always overwhelmed me. I have to confess, even if I run the risk of sounding weak and self-centred, that as I made plans to live in Nahr el-Bared I worried about how it would affect me. Would I become depressed? Would I be able to handle it?

Amazingly what I found was that the overt signs of poverty, misery and hardship, that were so visible to me on my visits, actually disappeared. I no

longer noticed the holes in buildings, the dark alleys, the corrugated iron roofs, the piles of rubble, the bullet and shell holes. It is not that they went away but they just melted into the background; what became visible in their place was misery in its detail and daily occurrence. No longer in the forms of buildings or roads, this misery was instead to be found in mundane things such as the choice of room to sit in, of fruit to buy and of hot drink to consume, as well as in life changing decisions of pursuing an education or searching for employment. Everything that a person did or did not do was determined by material necessity. However, in turn what this misery in its detail revealed was the survival techniques, the ingenuity of the refugees in making it. To me, Nahr el-Bared was no longer just a place of destitution, but also, and more importantly, a place of collective survival and great inspiration.

In the present chapter I hope to convey this impressive collective endurance through the life of the family that hosted me. Through presenting the ethnographic setting I show what Palestinian refugees were up against in Lebanon, how their lives were controlled by the laws that governed them, how they were restricted and more importantly how they survived; how they managed to build lives and raise children in a world that systematically excluded them and prevented them from working.

I begin by presenting the house that became my home in the camp and by giving an overview of the life course of Abu and Um Muhammad, which are essential components in understanding the situation in which the family found itself. Then, I describe the family's survival techniques by first looking at their daily struggle through outlining the structure of a typical day and by looking at food security as an example of the family's precarious situation. Finally, I examine the opportunities available and efforts exerted by Mahmud in trying to help his parents as well as begin a life of his own.

## The setting

When I first moved in with the Talal family, they lived in a rented apartment in a partially destroyed building situated on the main road of the new camp. The owner had repaired part of the floors while others still bore the signs of war with large shell holes visible.<sup>33</sup> The outside finishing of the building was not completed with cinder blocks and concrete pillars remaining exposed. A series of shops lined the ground floor of the building. There was a computer and Internet store, a vegetable seller, a grocery store and a calling centre. The building stood next to an open field of gravel, which extended to its left and behind it. The winter rains had created large puddles of water in which wild vegetation was growing. The field was used as a storage place for cinderblocks for sale, as a parking lot for cars and as a playground for children.

The building's entrance, situated at the back, was reached through a slightly elevated path that circled around the structure. A few steps led up to the building's concrete hallway where electric cables dangled out of countless circuit breakers and the occasional electricity meter. On the left, next to an apartment door, stood a concrete stairwell leading to the upper floors. The rough and uneven finishing of the concrete made cleaning the stairwell and the hallway very difficult. Despite the frequent attempts of residents to sweep them or hose them down with water, they would remain dirty and dusty.

The Talal family lived on the third floor in an apartment that faced the main street. The apartment consisted of three bedrooms, a salon, a short but wide hallway that had been turned into a living room, a kitchen, a bathroom, and two balconies on the eastern and southern sides of the building. A rarity in the camp, their home had a lot of natural light, a nice breeze when doors and windows were

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<sup>33</sup> For further information on the legal restrictions for the purchase of land and apartments and the challenges faced after the 2007 war for the reconstruction of the new camp see Nizar Saghie and Rana Saghie, 'Legal Assessment of Housing, Land and Property Ownership, Rights, Transfers, and Property Law related to Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon,' (Beirut: Norwegian Refugee Council) at 20-29, 66-74.

opened, and a great view of the snow capped mountains of Akkar in the distance. When the family first moved back to Nahr el-Bared camp after the war, they had lived in a two-room apartment, where Um and Abu Muhammad shared a room while their children slept in the second. On my earlier visits to Nahr el-Bared I often visited them in that home and would even take the opportunity to nap to beat the afternoon heat. However, once Muhammad got married and was working on a project with a local NGO, they moved into the present apartment. Muhammad and his wife occupied one room, Um and Abu Muhammad took another, while Mahmud, Ahmad and Nadia shared the third. The rent was partially covered by Muhammad and by a rent subsidy that UNRWA provided for displaced Nahr el-Bared families whose homes had been demolished. However, after a few months the project on which Muhammad was working on ended. Despite assurances from the NGO that they would keep him on staff after the end of the project, they did not do so and he lost his job. Looking for new employment, Muhammad found a position in an NGO in the south of Lebanon, where he relocated. At that point the family began to look for a smaller home to rent as Muhammad was still helping them with the rent of this home and they wanted to eliminate that expense for him. Homes were difficult to find in Nahr el-Bared as few of them were left standing after the war and there was a large number of families, who like the Talal family, had been made homeless by the war and were searching for housing. Throughout my stay with them, the family was not able to find a cheaper apartment to rent.

At the time of my arrival, Nadia had moved into the room that Muhammad and his wife used to occupy and it was this room that I shared with her. The house was scarcely furnished, consisting mostly of foam mattresses that doubled as beds at night and as sitting areas in the day. There were two different kinds of foam mattresses, a thicker and harder kind that was in the salon, handed out by Hamas after the war, and a thinner and softer type that was used in the sitting area and the children's bedrooms, that was distributed by UNRWA. The rest of the furniture consisted of one bed that Um and Abu Muhammad used, two old

closets, and a plastic kitchen table with four chairs. In the winter, the tile floors of the living room and salon were covered with plastic rugs, handed out by UNRWA, in an attempt to insulate feet from the cold. The walls were bare. The kitchen had second hand appliances with a gas stove, a washing machine and a fridge notorious for its breakdowns. There was an electric heater with 'donated by ECHO'<sup>34</sup> printed in large on it in the hallway, and finally, their son Mahmud had bought a used computer and he obtained a wired Internet connection from the ground floor shop.

Most of the time at home was spent in the hallway that had been turned into a sitting area. Connecting the bedrooms at one end of the apartment to the kitchen and salon at the other, three of its walls were lined with mattresses; a television set was against the fourth. It was a windowless room with little natural light. I always wondered why the family picked this room to spend so much of their time in, when the rest of the rooms were well lit with either windows or balconies that had such nice views of the mountains. At first I wondered if the Nahr el-Bared war had had a lasting impact on the family, who now always worried about sudden and indiscriminate bombings. Hallways were always deemed the safest at times of war as they increased the number of walls between the person and the incoming missiles; maybe the family was continuously worried about its physical safety. However, I soon realized that that my preference for a well-lit room with a mountain view reflected my privilege. I was thinking of looking at nice scenery while they were worried about saving money. Being the smallest room in the house, the hallway was the easiest and therefore the cheapest room to heat during the winter. Often, just the heat of our bodies under a pile of shared blankets would be enough to warm it up; if not, then a small electric heater would suffice to heat the room. In the summer, with the lack of electric fans, let alone air-conditioning, it was important to look for the coolest room in the house. The lack of direct sunlight turned into a blessing,

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<sup>34</sup> European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO).



which kept the hallway cooler than other rooms; a breeze still crossed it when windows and doors were opened.

Evening family gatherings soon became one of my favourite times in the camp. Ahmad would often be on the computer browsing the Internet for news about the Arab Spring, Mahmud would try to distract him by making jokes while Abu Muhammad would purposely tease his sons by commenting that the only 'real *thawra*' was the one of his generation. This would have the intended effect of provoking Ahmad who would get angry and tell his father not to talk to him of a *thawra* that ended up in the Chadian desert of Aouzou, referring to his father's six-months involvement in the Libyan-Chad war in 1987. In the mean time, Um Muhammad would tap her husband on his shoulder telling him not to instigate trouble, while Nadia would laugh and tell me 'see this is why I don't like politics.' It is those evenings that made Um Muhammad call her family 'the nest of the crazy' (*'ish al-majānīn*) and it is those evenings that warmed my heart and made me look forward to visiting Nahr el-Bared. Abu and Um Muhammad's life course and past political engagement were often the topic of conversation in these nightly gatherings and it is through them that I learned of their past experiences which helped me better understand the challenges facing the family and the strategies it adopted to overcome them.

### *Abu Muhammad*

Abu Muhammad, a humorous man, often told me that if I wanted to understand Palestinian politics all I had to do was listen to his personal experience. In many ways he was right. It featured many of the defining experiences of the *thawra*: the initial enthusiasm, the suspension of education in favour of joining the struggle, the witnessing of corruption, the subsequent disillusionment, the betrayal and abandonment from the leadership, the retreat from politics and finally the attempt to make a living, and raise a family, as an unskilled labourer. However, what was even more telling about Abu

Muhammad's experience was his lack of desire to talk about it. Indeed, despite his insistence that his life story alone would be enough for me to 'get my PhD' he did not like to elaborate on it. Later, Um Muhammad explained that he did not want to talk about his experience in too many details in front of his children, afraid that his stories would inspire them to partake in political work that could jeopardize their lives or their futures. This did not mean that he was not proud of his past actions, but the lesson he wanted his children and me to learn was: 'don't get involved with the factions', 'don't waste your time with Palestinian politics', it is all 'nonsense' (*ḥakī fāḍīl*), it is better to build a future and raise a family. In this section, I briefly outline Abu Muhammad's experiences with the *thawra* that I gathered over several conversations. It shows the high price that he paid for his political engagement and for doing what he thought was right.

Abu Muhammad was born in the Zarqa Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan in the mid 1950s. At the age of fifteen he became a *shibil*<sup>35</sup> in Fatah following in the footsteps of an older cousin who was a *fidāī*.<sup>36</sup> This was in 1969, two years after the Arab defeat of 1967 and as Fatah increased its military operations against Israel. In 1970, during Black September he was imprisoned for several months by the Jordanian authorities at the age of sixteen.<sup>37</sup> When I asked him if he was beaten, he laughed and told me that I better not ask and then recounted how his older cousin, who had initially inspired him to join the struggle, had been shot dead outside his family's home by the Jordanian authorities. After his release from prison in Jordan, Abu Muhammad still feared for his life and hid for a year in the hills until his parents used their connections to

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<sup>35</sup> A literal translation of *shibil* is a lion cub. They were the youngest members of Palestinian political factions who partook in basic military training.

<sup>36</sup> A literal translation of *fidāī* is the one who sacrifices his or her life for the cause. It was used to refer to the Palestinian guerilla fighters who became the symbol of the Palestinian resistance movement. See Nasser Abufarha, *The Making of a Human Bomb: An Ethnography of Palestinian Resistance* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009) at 7-8.

<sup>37</sup> From September 1970 to July 1971 the Jordanian Army fought the armed Palestinian factions leading to their disintegration in Jordan and their expulsion to Syria and Lebanon. Several refugee camps were turned to rubble and around 3,000 to 5,000 Palestinians were killed. See Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organization: People, Power and Politics* at 49-52, Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) at 262-81.

fly him out to Kuwait to join his brothers. There, he worked as an electrical technician. He remained active in Fatah and in 1976 went to Lebanon to help in the defence of Tal al-Za'tar camp.<sup>38</sup> The camp fell three months later and Abu Muhammad went back to Kuwait for another three years. In 1979, he left Kuwait permanently to join the Fatah Force 17 in Lebanon.<sup>39</sup>

Abu Muhammad did not like to talk of his experiences in Tal al-Za'tar or as part of Force 17. He was more interested in discussing the dual effect of petrodollars. He would highlight how the pouring of money from oil-rich countries made many Palestinian fighters prefer to be in office jobs in Beirut rather than on the frontline in the south, and how the influx of money gave foreign countries influence over Palestinian decision making. However, when I asked him how he lost his passport and became a non-ID,<sup>40</sup> I learned that during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon Abu Muhammad had taken part in famous battles at Khalda and Beirut airport.<sup>41</sup> To my great disappointment he did not provide me details of these battles, which I had only read about in books and which I had been longing to hear about from people who had fought in them. Instead, Abu Muhammad just recounted how, during the airport battle, they were able to repel the Israelis on two occasions, but on the third attack Israeli tanks managed to reach the runway. Abu Muhammad explained that as the tanks were driving down the runway, he

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<sup>38</sup> Right-wing Christian militias besieged Tal al-Za'tar camp for two months and a large-scale massacre occurred where about 4,000 Palestinians were killed including 1,500 camp residents on the last day of the siege as the camp surrendered. See Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organization: People, Power and Politics* at 73, Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993* at 400-01.

<sup>39</sup> Force 17 was a commando operations unit of Fatah, which expanded in the 1980s due to the large availability of funds and to Arafat's desire to create multiple security agencies that would secure his control over the military. See Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993* at 456-57.

<sup>40</sup> Non-IDs are Palestinian refugees with no form of government-issued legal identification. According to the Lebanese state they do not exist. The children of non-IDs inherit their father's status and become non-IDs. See Danish Refugee Council, 'Survey Report on the Situation of Non-ID Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon', (Beirut: Danish Refugee Council, 2007).

<sup>41</sup> From June 9<sup>th</sup> to June 15<sup>th</sup> 1982 a few hundred Palestinian and Lebanese fighters backed by PLO and Syrian artillery were able to hold off the Israeli Army at Khalda, a Lebanese town on the coast south of Beirut. This grace period of six days was essential to allow the PLO to prepare Beirut defenses. See Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993* at 527.

and fellow fighters asked the leadership to bomb the tanks, which they refused to do. He then added that he witnessed the looting and burning of the airport by fellow Palestinians. When he attempted to call the fire-fighters, he was told by a commanding officer that 'there is no need for that.' This, he said, was the beginning of his troubles with part of the Fatah leadership.

The story of how Abu Muhammad lost his passport and later found himself in Nahr el-Bared was long, but he was happy to provide details of it. I record it here as this story highlights the price paid by Palestinian refugees for their political engagement, the subsequent betrayal of the leadership, and the narrow options open to them. Abu Muhammad explained that he left some of his clothes and his passport in a Force 17 office in Beirut. When he returned to retrieve them after the fall of the airport, he found the office hit. His bag was open, his clothes were spread everywhere, and he could not locate his passport. He assumed that it had been burned. In September 1982 Abu Muhammad left Beirut with the departing PLO forces for Tunisia. He had little to say about his stay in Tunis other than the fact that it basically consisted of 'eating, drinking, sleeping, and sitting.' But crucially, it was in Tunis that he learned that his passport had not been burned, but had been stolen by a Fatah official in Beirut. Abu Muhammad was keen on naming the given official, whom I will call Official X. He mentioned that, in the post-Oslo years, he often saw Official X standing behind Yasir Arafat on television.

Upon confronting Official X, Abu Muhammad was accused of being a Jordanian spy and imprisoned in the hotel nightclub in Tunis. Abu Muhammad laughed, saying that they had turned the nightclub into a prison just for him. However, security was lax and Abu Muhammad was able to escape within a few days and then hid in Tunis for the next seven months. He later made contact with a friend who informed him that both Fatah and the Tunisian police were looking for him, and advised him to leave the country. Abu Muhammad thought of his aunt who lived in neighbouring Algeria and decided to attempt to cross the border

on foot. He took a train to the last town before the Tunisian-Algerian border and started walking following the train tracks. Soon his shoes fell apart and he continued barefoot until he reached a small village. Tired and hungry, his only option was to knock on someone's door and hope that they would help him. He heard the voice of an elderly woman coming from one house and decided that this was probably the safest to ask help from. He knocked on the door but, to Abu Muhammad's surprise, the door was opened by a young man, not an old woman. Once the young man realized that Abu Muhammad was Palestinian, he invited him inside, served him food and tea, and gave him a pair of boots. Abu Muhammad learned that he was still in Tunisia and the young man directed him on how to walk the rest of the way to Algeria.

He walked all night until he reached a river and found a fisherman. Again once the fisherman realized that Abu Muhammad was Palestinian he offered him food and a place to sleep and informed him that he had now crossed over the border to Algeria. The next morning Abu Muhammad took the train to his relative's village where he spent a week until he heard that there would be a meeting of the Palestinian National Council (PNC) in Algiers.<sup>42</sup> He decided to go to try to speak with the head of the Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA) and seek his help.<sup>43</sup> Upon meeting him, the head of the PLA, to Abu Muhammad's distress, called official X, who was also at the PNC meeting. After a heated argument they agreed to give Abu Muhammad a six-month Tunisian travel document, a one-way ticket to Cyprus, from where he could take a boat to reach Tripoli in Lebanon, and a small amount of pocket money. He arrived in Lebanon just as the Fatah mutiny was taking place.<sup>44</sup> The mutineers called themselves Fatah al-Intifada and were engaged in armed combat against Fatah. Upon reporting to his assigned commanding officer, Abu Muhammad was put in charge of a hill facing Fatah al-Intifada and asked to lead an attack that evening, even though he was unfamiliar

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<sup>42</sup> The PNC is the legislative body of the PLO, it acts like the PLO parliament in exile.

<sup>43</sup> The PLA was setup in 1964 by the Arab League as the official military wing of the PLO. It was mainly stationed in Syria.

<sup>44</sup> See Chapter 3 for more information.

with the terrain and didn't know any of the men he was supposed to lead. In fact, it was his first time in the north of Lebanon. Abu Muhammad felt that he could not obey his orders; he had lost trust in the leadership of Fatah and was even afraid that they might want him dead. He thought that maybe they wanted him to lead an attack either to get killed by Fatah al-Intifada or to get killed from behind. Abu Muhammad decided to disobey his orders and fled to Tripoli, where he hid in a school that was sheltering newly displaced Palestinians from the fighting. He spent three days thinking of his options. Without a valid passport he could not leave Lebanon, and certainly could not return to Jordan. He could not stay in Tripoli for long as Fatah could soon find him and he feared what would happen to him if they did. He thought that his only option was to defect to Fatah al-Intifada.

He knew that Fatah al-Intifada now controlled Nahr el-Bared camp. However, two Fatah checkpoints separated him from it. He carefully selected a shared taxi with two women as passengers, thinking that it would not be stopped at the checkpoints. Indeed he was right. He reached Nahr el-Bared safely and defected to Fatah al-Intifada, with one condition. He argued that, since he refused to lead an attack against Fatah al-Intifada, similarly he would not fight Fatah. They agreed that he would go to Syria until the end of the battles. Two weeks later, as Fatah forces withdrew from Tripoli, Abu Muhammad returned to Nahr el-Bared and became a guard at one of the camp's checkpoints. This was how he met Nasser, Um Muhammad's brother in law, who then introduced them to one other. They were engaged a few months later and married in the summer of 1984. The following year their first son, Muhammad, was born.

Over the next two years Abu Muhammad continued to work as a guard for Fatah al-Intifada until Qaddafi went to war with Chad fighting over control of the Aouzou strip in 1987. Fatah al-Intifada, which had close ties to the Qaddafi regime, gave its fighters the option of going to fight in Aouzou, northern Chad, with the reward of receiving double pay if they did so. One salary would be paid immediately to the fighter's wife in Nahr el-Bared while the second instalment

would be paid to the fighter upon his return from Aouzou. However, Abu Muhammad explained that it was not money that made him go but a friend who had signed him up without his knowledge. He smiled as he told me that he would have been deemed a coward if he had removed his name. He therefore went to Aouzou as Um Muhammad was pregnant with Ahmad. He stressed the fact that in Aouzou there was in fact no fighting and that they basically just sat around in their barracks in the desert.

Upon returning from Aouzou Abu Muhammad was asked to fight in Shatila. The War of the Camps was over, but a battle between Fatah and Fatah al-Intifada erupted when the splinter group wanted to expel the remaining Fatah loyalist from Shatila and were bringing in fighters from other camps.<sup>45</sup> Abu Muhammad refused to join the fight. He remembered how he told his leadership that 'my fingers don't know how to shoot' (*aṣābi'ī mā bya'irfū yṭukhkhū*). He explained that he stayed home, at which point they refused to pay him the remaining six months of pay they owed him from his trip to Aouzou.

I realized that there were several reasons why his children often mentioned this trip to Aouzou. It not only reflected how the *thawra* went astray by fighting other people's wars, but also referred to what Abu Muhammad had to leave behind when he refused to fight in Shatila. The renunciation of six months of pay was not a small sacrifice. I learned from Um Muhammad that at the time she had just given birth to Ahmad; they were still living in a rented apartment and were desperate for money so they could settle down. Abu Muhammad's dissociation from Fatah al-Intifada also meant that he now had to fend for himself. His children had not missed this important point. One night, Mahmud pointed out to his father that former Fatah fighters now received a pension from Fatah, and suggested he should he could try asking for it. Um Muhammad laughed, telling Mahmud that his father gave up six months of salary not to fight in Shatila – did

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<sup>45</sup> The War of the Camps was a series of intense sieges and fierce bombings of several Palestinian camps in Lebanon from 1985 to 1987. See Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies: The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon*.

her son now want him to beg Fatah for a pension? Abu Muhammad added that Fatah never forgave the Intifada people and he would not go to them.

Abu Muhammad finished his story by saying 'My dear, I became a porter at the port from that day until now, 22 years', (*yā sittī 'attāl 'ala bawwābat al-mīnā min waqtha lal-yawm, 22 sana*). Abu Muhammad's past involvement in the *thawra* meant that he had no particular skill or trade, let alone education, in order to find a stable job. His only choice was to find work as a day labourer, which he did as a porter at the Tripoli port. Abu Muhammad was a hard-working man, waking up everyday at 6am except on Sundays. I never saw him tired nor did he ever complain of any ailment although he was approaching his sixties and was performing physically taxing labour everyday. His life experiences taught him to be wary of grand political claims, stating that 'all look for their interests and if someone comes and talks to me about freeing Palestine from the water to the water I will bring out my shoe and hit him in the head.'<sup>46</sup> He often said that the best thing he did in life was to start a family with Um Muhammad.

### *Um Muhammad*

Um Muhammad was the family's centre of gravity and kept everyone on their feet and well balanced. She was the one who knew where everyone was, what they were doing, when they would come home, what they needed, whether they had problems, and what to do about it. At the time of my research, Abu Muhammad's role was to make money, while Um Muhammad's role was to find ways for the family to survive using that money. Faced with this daunting task, she never complained. In this section, I trace Um Muhammad's life story before moving on to the family's daily survival.

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<sup>46</sup> Palestine 'from the water to the water' refers to historical Palestine, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River.



Um Muhammad was born in Nahr el-Bared camp in the early 1960s and lost her father in her teens. Her oldest brother, Muhammad, who resided in the United States at the time of my research, soon dropped out of school and began to work in different electrical jobs in the camp. Um Muhammad, the second oldest daughter, decided to also help the family. While she worked during the summer in picking and sorting tobacco, she felt it was not enough and participated in a sewing workshop offered by the General Union of Palestinian Women in Nahr el-Bared camp. She explained that this was how she began her involvement with Fatah. Um Muhammad often used Fatah and the Women's Union interchangeably while she spoke. While she was certainly aware that the Women's Union was supposed to be an umbrella organization for all Palestinian political factions, she also knew that it was controlled and funded by Fatah, so for her the two were interchangeable. She explained that once she became involved in the workshop, she started participating in different political events, marches, and conferences. At that time, Israeli raids and incursions into the camp were frequent and she often helped deliver food to the fighters and provided first aid to the injured. Her family's home was itself destroyed at least three times by Israeli bombardments and she helped rebuild it both by partaking in the physical labour of rebuilding the house and by funding the purchase of required materials through her earned income.

In addition to her sewing activities, Um Muhammad started working in Fatah's radio communication department and later worked in 'the cooperative' (*ta'awuniyya*) operated by Fatah, where the popular committee was located along with several shops selling household items from furniture to cleaning products, all at a lower price than in the market. Um Muhammad ran a small cassette shop. She explained that after the 1983 Fatah mutiny she left her job and went home (*rawwahit 'al-bayt*). She did not work after that, and although Fatah told her that they would keep on paying her even if she remained at home, she told them to stop as she worried that the Syrian authorities would know of her involvement with them.

This was also the time when she met Abu Muhammad. She explained that the first time she met him and learned that he was with Fatah al-Intifada, she argued with him. She told him that she disliked them and accused them of destroying the camp. He had apparently smiled and told her that she was right and that all Palestinian factions were bad. After that they got along, she explained. Although Um Muhammad did not seek formal employment after her marriage, this did not mean that she was not working: it was rather that the nature of her work changed. She was now responsible for raising a family and making ends meet with the income that Abu Muhammad brought home. She was the one responsible for convincing the popular committee to allocate them the one room apartment in *al-muhajjarin* that I described in the previous chapter.<sup>47</sup> Daily survival soon filled her days and it is to it that I turn to next.

### **Daily survival**

Abu Muhammad went everyday to the port of Tripoli to look for trucks to load or unload for a wage. Occasionally he would be hired for petty jobs such as taking furniture apart and helping in a move. Throughout my stay with the family they never discussed in front of me whether Abu Muhammad was successful at finding work on a given day or not, and I never asked. They seldom spoke to me directly of their financial difficulties but it was visible in every detail of their lives. In the following section I outline how material necessity regulated the family's daily life. I begin by outlining a typical day for Um Muhammad and then look at food security as an example of the family's precarious situation.

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<sup>47</sup> *Al-muhajjarin* stands for 'the displaced' it is an area of Nahr el-Bared camp that was originally built to house the survivors of the Tal al-Za'atar massacre in 1976. See chapter 3 p 93.

## *A day*

A typical day for Um Muhammad started at 6am when her husband rose. While he would always tell her not to get up, as he liked to prepare his own breakfast, she argued that she didn't like the mess he usually left behind. Nadia would soon wake up too and begin her studies for the baccalaureate exam. Having failed the matriculation exam the year before, she wanted to retake the exam but decided not to go back to school and to prepare for it on her own. Mahmud, who was working as a day labourer in the old camp, would be next in line to wake up. After a quick breakfast he got ready to leave and soon a discussion with his mother began about which clothes he could wear for work and which boots he could use. The debate about clothing and footwear was fuelled by necessity. The Talal family had some old clothes that Mahmud could use for work and they did not want to damage good clothing during construction work. This meant that Um Muhammad had to wash Mahmud's work clothes almost daily in order to make sure that he had clean clothing to wear the next day. However, it was shoes that were the real cause of concern. At the construction site where Mahmud worked there was a large number of nails on the ground, which frequently pierced through Mahmud's flimsy shoes and caused injury. His mother feared that he would contract tetanus. Mahmud had already used - and pierced - most of his old shoes, and discussions would revolve around the possibility of getting new, tougher shoes or which old shoe would withstand the day better.

Soon after Mahmud's departure, Ahmad would wake up and have his breakfast. By that time, Um Muhammad would have decided what the daily meal would be and would send Ahmad on errands to obtain the required ingredients for the day. After this errand Ahmad would go to college and it was at that point that Um Muhammad, Nadia, and myself would have our breakfast, before starting our cleaning chores. Um Muhammad always insisted that Nadia should concentrate on her studies and not partake in them, but Nadia continuously

refused. However, they would both agree that my cleaning skills were even worse than mediocre. They would therefore assign me easy tasks such as doing the dishes, cleaning the stove, and putting the bedding away. They also both agreed that my sweeping skills, with or without water, were not good enough and far too slow. While I was always impressed by the speed and effectiveness of their work, I suspected that the real reason behind their insistence on doing most of the cleaning was simply kindness.

After the cleaning chores were done, the cooking started. This, along with the evening gatherings, was my favourite moment of the day. In addition to learning how to cook many Palestinian and Arabic dishes, it was also the only time that Um Muhammad and I had on our own to talk. I would often tell her of the people I would be visiting that day, or of the stories I had heard the day before. To my continual amazement, she seemed to know everyone in the camp, often correcting certain information I misunderstood, or giving me more background information into the family history of a certain person I would meet. Time always flew by before we could finish our conversation, as Mahmud would be back for his lunch break and food needed to be ready so he had time to eat before going back to work. Then, the conversation would invariably turn again to the shoe situation. After Mahmud's departure, Um Muhammad had a few hours where she could leave the house. She usually went to different NGOs if paperwork needed to be handed in, visited her sisters in the camp, or else stayed home to relax – or, more often, to wash laundry.

Um Muhammad's extended family was an essential component of the family's daily life. She had two sisters, Mariam and Fatima, who returned to Nahr el-Bared after the war and another sister, Najah, and a brother, Sami, who preferred to remain in Beddawi camp. Mariam was not married and Nadia often slept over at her house with her other female cousins. In actuality, Mariam never slept alone as far as I could tell: every day a different cousin would stay over with her. Um Muhammad, Mariam and Fatima visited each other almost daily. Their

children's work, education and study efforts would be discussed as well as everyone's health. News of new NGO or UNRWA programs would be spread and advice would be sought if needed.

In the early evening Um Muhammad would go back home. She liked to be home whenever her husband or children came back. In addition to making sure that they were eating well, by reheating the meal she cooked earlier in the day and making sure that it was enough for everyone, she also had the opportunity to hear about their day and get the latest news of what was going on. I suspect she also wanted to make sure that they were not facing any problems. I soon realized that she was the confidante of her children who always came to her with their worries and not to their father. Mahmud's schedule was the most erratic as he worked several jobs, but, Um Muhammad always knew when he would be coming home and always made sure that he had food ready to eat whenever he did, even if it meant that she would stay up late. Food, I soon realized, was a major cause of concern for the family.

### *Food (in)security*

During one of my mornings cooking with Um Muhammad, I learned that UNRWA considered them a special hardship case. I was helping Um Muhammad make a dessert by mixing milk powder with water in a saucepan on the gas stove and Um Muhammad explained to me that it was milk from UNRWA. She showed me the grey milk bag, which had the French flag on its upper half. She explained that the milk was bad quality and did not dissolve easily, which was why the water needed to be heated. UNRWA special hardship cases were considered amongst the poorest in the camp and they received food aid. Um Muhammad explained that it was dispensed every three months and that each person was entitled to: 2.5kg of rice (which Um Muhammad added was bad quality, as it required a lot of cooking time to become tender and it would then be sticky), 2.5kg of sugar, 3 liters of oil, 2 kg of milk powder, 2.5 kg of lentils, 2.5kg of

beans (also bad quality, according to Um Muhammad, as again it required a lot of cooking time and would still remain hard to eat). She added that they used to receive chickpeas, which she appreciated, however that had stopped for a reason unknown to her. Um Muhammad did not like grains that took a lot time to cook as that meant that they consumed a lot of cooking gas. Over the next few months I witnessed the family going to an UNRWA food distribution centre to collect the aid in carton boxes with stickers of the European Union flag. Individual food bags inside also often exhibited the donor country's flag.

A family needed to qualify to receive the food aid. This was done by proving that the main breadwinner, in this case Abu Muhammad, was not earning enough to feed his family. In Um Muhammad's case, she also had to justify the fact that Mahmud was working, as that usually meant that the family would be 'removed from the list' as Um Muhammad put it. However, in this case, Um Muhammad was able to convince the UNRWA social worker overseeing her case that Mahmud's income was essential to help pay for Ahmad's tuition. The social worker agreed but told her that as soon as Ahmad graduated they would be 'removed from the list.' In addition, the family was the target of annual surprise visits from that same social worker. Um Muhammad explained that she could run into her in the street and the social worker would still not tell her that she was coming over to visit. Soon I realized that they also received surprise visits from another UNRWA employee from the rent subsidy department. This employee came every three months, also unannounced. However, Um Muhammad did not like this particular worker. When she visited them, she would not take off her shoes, as was the custom. Camp roads and alleys were notorious for being dirty and muddy, residents and visitors would always remove their shoes upon entering a home in order to keep them clean. This was why Um Muhammad and Nadia cleaned the floors everyday in order to keep them spotless, as everyone walked barefoot. The UNRWA employee, who came from the camp, certainly knew this, but showed her superiority over the family by not abiding by the custom. Um Muhammad explained to me that not all UNRWA employees were

like that, but that some enjoyed being part of UNRWA 'to be able to control people' (*tayithakkamū bilnās*). The stated purpose of the surprise visits was to verify the information given by the family, such as who was living in the house, the size of the home, and the type of furniture in the house that could disclose that the family had an additional income.

However, the family's level of food insecurity was revealed to me when I attempted to buy supplies for the household. Living with them in their home, I was fully aware that I was an additional mouth to feed. I was concerned about the extra burden that I represented, especially since the family categorically refused any attempt on my part to help them financially. I therefore decided that I would just buy groceries for the house from time to time. I thought that I better purchase a few items at a time, hoping that they would go unnoticed. I started to be on the lookout for items that they might need and soon I noticed that they were running low on tea and oranges, which they had a big stack of when I first moved in. Therefore, on my next errand outside of the house I came back with a box of tea and some apples, thinking that maybe they would like some change from oranges. When I got home my actions were contested and I protested that I could not feel at home if I did not also contribute to the house. Um Muhammad looked unconvinced but she did not reprimand me for too long and I thought that I had done well. I did not want to offend the family by acting in a way that openly acknowledged the extent of their poverty, but at the same time I could not ignore the extra burden that I represented for them. I wanted to find a way to contribute without upsetting them, and I thought that I found it. A couple days later, Um Muhammad asked me if I liked apples. Her question took me off guard. I didn't know what to say, I thought we had settled the matter but I realized that there was something special about the fact that I got apples. I finally answered that I didn't like fruits in general. She nodded and changed the topic of conversation. On my next errand outside of the house I passed by a grocery store and noticed that apples were in fact more expensive than oranges. I realized that variety was a luxury that the family could not afford. I never got apples after that and I

became especially cautious to not only look for what they needed but also to learn which brands they bought to get the exact same items. This incident revealed to me just how precarious their situation was.

However, the biggest difficulty that the family faced, beyond their low income, was its unpredictability. I hadn't realized the full implications of that characteristic until a few months within my fieldwork. It came to my attention when I was talking with Um Muhammad and Nadia about their participation in *jam'iyyāt*, informal savings associations.<sup>48</sup> Nadia was telling me that she and two of her friends from school as well as their mothers and sisters made a *jam'iyat* where they would each contribute 500 LBP a day, the equivalent of 0.33 USD, and that each in their turn would get 10,000 LBP, the equivalent of 6.67 USD. Um Muhammad told me that she did not participate as she was unsure she could afford to pay 500 LBP every day, as Abu Muhammad did not work every day and that she might need the money to purchase food instead. I was taken back that Um Muhammad could not commit to such a small sum. The implications of a daily wage were suddenly clear to me. Although the signs were all around me, I hadn't put it all together until Um Muhammad put it plainly enough for me to hear. I now understood what initially puzzled me about Um Muhammad's daily routine. As I explained earlier, every morning Um Muhammad decided what would be the meal of the day and she would send out Ahmad to buy the required ingredients. They always purchased food items in small quantities, just enough for one meal. That surprised me since buying in small amounts meant that they would not take advantage of bulk prices and that Ahmad had to go on errands everyday. But now it made sense. Since income was unpredictable it meant that Um Muhammad could not commit a large sum to buy, for example, a large quantity of flour, since she could not be sure that there will be money made in the next days

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<sup>48</sup> *Jam'iyah* (plural *Jam'iyyāt*) is an informal savings association. Members of the association, linked by relations of trust, each contribute a fixed amount of money at fixed intervals and in turn receive a lump sum according to an agreed upon schedule. See Diane Singerman, *Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995) at 154-57.



to cover, for example, the price of bread. Um Muhammad had to purchase items on almost a daily basis, adjusting her expenditures to the immediate financial situation they found themselves in.

I realized the difference between her and her brother, Sami, who worked as a driver for a Tripoli businessman. Sami had explained that me that although his wage was lower than the other Lebanese drivers working for the same businessman, and although he did not receive a school aid for his children that the other Lebanese drivers got, he was grateful that the job was at least stable. Sami's wife could therefore plan her monthly expenses. She explained to me how at the beginning of every month she would buy all non-perishable food items for the month, taking advantages of bulk prices, and highlighted that she even bought the meat once a month - a package of 2kg, that she divided into ten smaller packets of 200g and froze individually so she could make ten different meat dishes a month. I could not help but remember how my mother taught me when I first went to university that whenever I cooked I should plan for 200g of meat per person per serving. Sami's wife would plan the same amount for a family of five. The difference astounded me.

Um Muhammad's occupation round the clock was to save money. No member of the family ate outside the home. The daily meal that Um Muhammad cooked would be the family's lunch and dinner. Breakfast usually consisted of tea accompanied by bread and *labna*<sup>49</sup> or sometimes eggs. Sweets were never bought but were always made at home. Soon I realized that fruit in general, not just apples, was a luxury. The stack of oranges I saw initially was probably purchased in my honour as I was just moving in. A one-cup bag of Nescafe, priced at 250 LBP, about 0.17 USD, was a special treat that Nadia saved for particular occasions, usually when her close friend visited her. The more usual hot drink was tea. One tea bag boiled with several cups of water for a few minutes could provide a hot drink for the whole family, so it was a much cheaper

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<sup>49</sup> Strained yogurt.

drink. The usual Arabic coffee was also made daily, but the used ground coffee was kept, mixed with fresh ground coffee, and reused. The family never bought fresh milk, yogurt, *labna* or cheese. Rather Um Muhammad would make yogurt and *labna* from milk rations she got from UNRWA, which always ran out a month before the next scheduled food aid distribution. They reused water bottles and when the plastic turned opaque from usage, Um Muhammad poured grains of salt in them with a little bit of water and shook them vigorously. This cleared the plastic bottles and they would be ready to be refilled again. The spending of children would be discussed and compared between family members. Stories told about anything and everything would be punctuated with details of the price of things. When Muhammad's first daughter was born, Um Muhammad visited him and wondered how he paid for the pistachio that he used to garnish the usual desert of *mughli* that was offered by new parents to their visitors. The importance of shoes was made clear to me again and again. It was not just an issue for Mahmud, but for most people in the camp. In the winter months, rain was common and with the lack of proper street drains, the camp alleys quickly accumulated water. In the absence of proper heating, wet feet would remain wet for the rest of the day, increasing the chances of getting a cold among children and adults alike. This explained why many parents worried about the distance that their children needed to walk to reach school. I realized how my waterproof boots were a marker of wealth in the camp. When I would go out on rainy days, Um Muhammad and Nadia always protested that I should stay home because of the rain. I was surprised. Um Muhammad had lived through countless Israelis bombings and the destruction of her home, not to mention the latest Nahr el-Bared war, and she worried about the rain? However, as often happened during my stay in the camp, my lack of understanding, and often my hasty judgment, was a reflection of my privilege.

Material necessity regulated every aspect of the family's existence: the structure of their daily life as well as the long-term options available to them. In the next section I recount the challenges and opportunities facing Mahmud, the

son of Abu and Um Muhammad. His experiences shed light on how young Palestinian refugees undertake the important decision between pursuing an education and searching for employment.

### **Starting a life**

Mahmud, the youngest son of the family, was a tall, skinny, and highly energetic young man. He was an outspoken and outgoing young man who was rarely home, but when he was, he usually created a festive mood, making his mother and sister laugh at his jokes. On paydays he would bring home a bottle of juice and some Nescafe 'one-cup' bags for his sister. He was also the one who used to give her pocket money. In this section, I trace the life choices and opportunities available to Mahmud as an example of how young Palestinian males 'make it'.

During the Nahr el-Bared war of 2007 Mahmud was studying Hospitality Management at a technical college in Tripoli. When the war started and his family took refuge in Beddawi camp, Mahmud stopped studying for his upcoming exams and instead volunteered with an NGO in the camp. He helped in the distribution of aid, and was an entertainer for children, organizing activities in the UNRWA schools where fleeing refugees had found shelter. This was not Mahmud's first encounter with NGOs. As I mentioned earlier, Muhammad, Mahmud's older brother, had been working with different NGOs for several years. He had introduced his younger brother to this line of work and Mahmud had already volunteered for several NGOs prior to the war.

Typically NGO volunteers were paid a nominal sum on a month-to-month basis, varying from 100,000 LBP (about 67 USD) to 100 USD. Volunteering was often a time when young Palestinians, men or women, attempted to prove themselves to the heads of NGOs that they might be capable of a paid position. They provided a lot of their time, and sometimes even put in a bit of their own

money on things such as transportation or phone calls in the hope that they would be made part of the NGO's permanent staff. Mahmud volunteered for a total of two years after the war and worked on several projects. However the experience left him bitter. He explained to me that towards the end of his two years and as he began to work on a new project, his superior told him that he needed to prove himself before they would hire him. Mahmud in response worked for two months without pay, organizing activities for other youth in the camp and even buying juice boxes for the participants from his own money. Following these two months, his superior told him that they did not have the funds to continue the program. Mahmud felt betrayed and left them.

Mahmud's efforts to search for employment were not confined to NGO work alone, he was active in seeking any type of occupation. He worked in Tripoli as a painter for a contractor and was paid 10 USD a day. He worked in a restaurant located across one of the main entrances of Beddawi camp where he made 40 USD a week working 12 hours a day from 2pm to 2am. He worked in a restaurant in Tyr, where his older brother lived, making 10 USD a day. At the time of my fieldwork he was working as a day labourer in the old camp, making 20 US dollars working from 7am to 4pm, with an extra 10 USD if he worked overtime from 4pm to 7pm, which he usually did. This made a total of 30 USD dollars for 12 hours of work and was certainly the best paying job he had had up until then. Additionally, he worked on a part-time basis with a new NGO in the camp entertaining children with clown activities and theatre and helping in the distribution of aid when available. Finally, he operated his own DJ business. Throughout his previous years of work, he saved some money to be able to buy a set of speakers, a mixing console, two microphones and a used laptop. This allowed him to begin operating his own DJ business and he performed at weddings, bachelor parties, engagement parties, as well as political protests and conferences. When I asked Mahmud what work he preferred, he explained that he most enjoyed being an actor and an entertainer for children but, at this point, the only thing he wished for was stable employment.

Um Muhammad disliked the fact that Mahmud was working. Although the family was in dire need of the additional income he earned, she wanted him to continue his studies. She believed that the war was to blame for his renunciation of an education as well as for his recent habit of smoking *narghile*. However, she was happy that he was now toiling in the hard work of construction, hoping that this experience would teach him that it was better to obtain a degree than to labour for a daily wage. She had therefore stopped arguing with him, and was patiently waiting for him to reach his own conclusions in due time. At the beginning of the next school year, Um Muhammad was almost proven right as Mahmud went back to college to continue his degree in Hospitality Management. However, a few months into the semester he quit again. His reasons for quitting were numerous. Firstly, he no longer believed that education would allow him to be more successful in life. While working on the construction of the old camp he met countless college graduates who, due to Lebanon's discriminatory laws, could not find proper employment and who, like him, had to work as day labourers in construction. Um Muhammad disliked this line of argument the most, as she felt it encouraged Nadia not to study hard to obtain her baccalaureate. Second was the ever-repressive issue of money. Mahmud was well aware that by going back to school, he stopped bringing an additional income into the household, and became a burden again on his parents, having them spend money on his expenses and tuition. Thirdly, the prospect of potential failure loomed hard on him. Failure in his exams would not only represent a personal disappointment but would also mean that the money spent on him would have been lost for nothing. That was a heavy burden for him to carry. Finally, he saw what his older brother, Ahmad, had to go through to obtain enough aid to cover his tuition. As I will explain in Chapter 7, Ahmad's tuition was paid for from four different sources: a Palestinian political faction, the Palestinian embassy, an international NGO, and finally the family itself. His tuition cost 2 million LBP, the equivalent of 1,334 USD. However at no point in time did the family know how much each party would be paying to know how much would be left over for them

to cover. Mahmud explained that he could not live with this type of uncertainty, preferring instead to live with the uncertainty of a daily wage.

## **Conclusion**

Prior to starting my research, I was well aware of the resilience of Palestinian refugees in the face of military attacks, such as the siege of Tal al-Za'tar camp, the Israeli invasion of 1982, and the War of the Camps. However, by living with the Talal family I was able to see how they also survived the daily struggle of life in Lebanon. In this chapter, I introduced the Talal family that hosted me in Nahr el-Bared camp and recounted the life course of Um and Abu Muhammad, highlighting the heavy price paid by Abu Muhammad and his family for his political engagement. I also showed how material necessity regulated all aspects of the family's lives, from the daily choices of which room to sit in and what food and drink to consume, to life-long decisions of pursuing an education or searching for employment. Um Muhammad's central role as the pillar of the family was also revealed; her contribution was essential not only to make sure that the family was well fed and well dressed, but also to make sure that they were all well balanced and standing on their feet. In the next chapter, I explore how and why Palestinians joined factions. I explain how their relationship with the factions does not resemble a relationship with a structure defined by its name and ideology, but rather a relationship with people.

## 5. 'WE DRANK THE *JABHA* WITH OUR MOTHERS' MILK'<sup>50</sup> 'JOINING FACTIONS'

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis/dissertation for copyright reasons“.

Woman cooking, Nahr el-Bared camp. (Photograph: Ali Alouch)

'Rotten,' 'traitors,' 'thieves,' 'merchants of death' (*tujjār damm*) - those were just some of the names Palestinians used to describe Palestinian political factions in Lebanon. Others went further, saying that 'they should be burned' or 'killed.' However factions were more often the subjects of jokes and ridicule than murderous fantasies. Khalil, a young man in Shatila camp explained to me that his father once gave him a list of the factions in the camp and told him to go and give them a try to see if he liked any of them. Khalil explained that he attended several meetings and upon hearing the different factions call each other '*wlād al kalb*' (sons of dogs), he concluded, with a poignant sarcasm, that 'All

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<sup>50</sup> '*Jabha*' meaning 'front' was the common Arabic diminutive for the PFLP.

Palestinians must be ‘sons of dogs’ then.’<sup>51</sup> He stopped going. Another young Palestinian recounted how his grandmother warned him that political work was about the pursuit of personal ambitions rather than the general good: “The Palestinian people are like a bag of garlic, no matter which one you pick out you always end up with a head.” Many young Palestinians recounted how their parents forbade them from approaching factions, often physically pulling them away from factional offices or activities when such associations were discovered. In the Talal household, such condemnations were also common, especially from Abu Muhammad: “They only care about their own interests,” he often repeated.

The popular dissatisfaction of Palestinian refugees towards Palestinian political factions has been highlighted in numerous studies (Frisch 2009; Kortam 2011; Peteet 1995; R. Sayigh 2001: 96; 2011, 2012; Suleiman 1999). They have been accused of factionalism (R. Sayigh 2012: 22), of corruption (Brynen 1995b: 25; R. Sayigh 2012: 22), and betrayal (Khalili 2004; Peteet 1995). In light of such heavy criticisms, a question arises: are Palestinian factions in Lebanon in danger of extinction? Nahr el-Bared camp had a popular committee comprised of sixteen members, one for every faction. It was notorious for its internal divisions and its subsequent inability to take decisions. Few Palestinians in the camp could actually list the different factions represented on the committee, which underscored the fact that a large part of these factions had little to no existence in the camp.<sup>52</sup> These factions were called ‘facades’ (*‘wājhāt’*) in the camp and they were in fact the subjects of even greater mockery. Um Muhammad laughed as she told me that the PPP had two members in the camp, one of whom sat on the Popular Committee and acted as the ‘head of the PPP’ in Nahr el-Bared camp.<sup>53</sup> The second member was his son-in law. These ‘facades’ often infuriated residents who felt that ‘the only ones who were sillier than those people were

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<sup>51</sup> ‘Sons of dogs’ is a widely used Arabic insult.

<sup>52</sup> One resident listed them to me: PFLP, DFLP, Fatah, Fatah al-Intifada, Saiqa, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, PFLP-GC, Palestine Liberation Front (split in two, one with the PLO and one with the Alliance (*Tahaluf*) – see chapter 1 p 23 note 4 for information about the Alliance), Arab Liberation Front (also split into two, one with the PLO and one with the Alliance), the Struggle Front (Jabhat al-Nidal) (also split into two), and finally the People’s Party (also split into two).

<sup>53</sup> Palestinian People’s Party



those who dealt with them' referring to UNRWA, NGOs and the Lebanese government who sometimes considered the Popular Committee a counterpart and occasionally involved them in decision making. However, it would be incorrect to assume that all factions were such shells. Of the 51 interviews I conducted with 'close' Palestinians, 43 individuals (22 of the younger generation and 21 of the *thawra* generation) had contact with factions while only eight Palestinians (six of the new generation and two of the *thawra* generation) had no relations with factions.<sup>54</sup>

In this chapter I look at how the initial contact with a faction occurs (I examine the evolution of that relationship and the nature of faction membership in the next chapter). How did Palestinians choose which faction to approach, whether it was for political, social, cultural or economic reasons? How were factions able to attract young Palestinians in light of such heavy criticisms? Were Palestinians ideologically motivated? Islamic factions in particular are often studied through their ideologies; their popularity is explained by the rise of Islamism, which is linked to the decline of secular nationalism (Israeli 2008; Rougier 2007). In short, Islamism is seen as "a useful tool that can be wielded to generate support from the Palestinian street" (Schanzer 2008: 10). Other work suggests that Palestinians act strategically in their dealings with factions in order to maximize the financial benefits of such relations. In other words, is economic patronage the main tool of mobilization? Moughrabi (1983) argued that Palestinian politics became "lebanonized" (212) whereby "each Abu has his system of patronage and his own budget" (214).<sup>55</sup> Or, are there other factors at play? Investigating this line of questioning allowed me to walk down another avenue of inquiry about the actual mechanics involved in 'joining factions.' Was

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<sup>54</sup> Results from my interviews with newly-met Palestinians corroborated those results. Out of 22 interviews 17 Palestinian (11 of the younger generation and 6 of the *thawra* generation) had contacts with factions while only five Palestinian (four of the younger generation and one of the *thawra* generation) had no relations with factions.

<sup>55</sup> Brynen also considered political patronage a major source of mobilization. See Rex Brynen, 'The Politics of Exile: The Palestinians in Lebanon', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 3/3 (1990a), 204-27, Rex Brynen, 'The Neopatrimonial Dimension of Palestinian Politics', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 25/1 (1995b), 23-36.

'joining a faction' a singular event? Could it be delineated in time and pointed to as the moment when a person crossed the line separating those 'outside' a faction from those on the 'inside'? These are the questions that this chapter attempts to answer.

What my research suggests is that Palestinians did not approach factions because they were secular nationalist, leftist or Islamic or depending on their regional or international alliances. In 51 interviews with close Palestinians, I found that only two people spoke of ideology when they discussed their initial contact with a faction (one from the *thawra* generation and one from the younger generation).<sup>56</sup> While many spoke of the financial pressures they faced and the lack of stable employment, those economic predicaments rarely determined which factional door they knocked on. Rather, the picture that was drawn was of people coming together because of trust relations built on a local basis: family, friendship, and neighbourhood ties were the main reasons behind factional contact. Therefore, contact was initiated based on personal relations. Additionally, 'joining a faction' was not a singular event occurring at a particular moment in time. This will clarify why I refer to the expression 'joining a faction' in quotation marks. While some Palestinians could point to a particular moment when they officially became members of a faction, that moment seldom represented the beginning of their involvement with it. The stories of how and why Palestinians 'joined factions' were as wide and varied as people's personalities were. My goal in this chapter is not to build a theory or a model that can predict or explain the behaviour of people, but to argue against the generalization that factions are defined by their ideologies. Indeed if Palestinians did not differentiate between factions based on their political platforms, if that was not what characterised them on a day-to-day basis, then defining factions based on ideology needs to be re-evaluated.

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<sup>56</sup> Results from my interviews with newly-met Palestinians corroborated those results. Out of 22 interviews (15 with the younger generation and 7 of the *thawra* generation) none spoke of ideology, and only one person referred to financial reasons to explain his contact with a faction.

In this chapter I explore the two main reasons why Palestinians ‘joined factions:’ family and friendship/neighbourhood ties. Out of forty-three interviews, with close Palestinians whose life stories featured relations with factions, twenty had developed their initial contact through family ties while twenty-two rested on friendship and neighbourhood ties. Finally, one young Palestinian joined a faction based on a desire to maximize financial rewards. It is interesting to note that the propensity of family ties was higher for the *thawra* generation (thirteen out of twenty) while the importance of friendship and neighbourhood ties was greater for the younger generation (fourteen out of twenty-two). My ethnographic methods revealed the importance of looking at life stories in order to better understand the dynamics that animated refugee and factions relations and whether we could even separate the two. The examples included below were chosen because they typified how initial contact with factions most often occurred and because it is, unfortunately, impossible to include all life stories. In the first section of this chapter I bring to life the process by which factions and families intersect, focusing on the Hamadan family rather than giving examples from individual refugees in different households. In particular, I explore the relationship of the father, Abu Ali, as well as two of his sons, Ali and Rabieh, with the PFLP. In the second part of this chapter, I look at the intersections of physical space, human bonds, and political affiliation through a wider range of examples. Lastly, I investigate the idea that Palestinians join factions in an attempt to maximize financial benefits.

### **Family ties**

My past, my upbringing, the passing of the years, my culture, my home environment, this is what contributed to my belonging to Hamas  
Wissam, young generation, Beirut, 2 Nov 2011

I was born PFLP, I don’t know why. What’s the story? What’s the issue?  
[Laugh] My siblings and parents were all PFLP, so I ended up PFLP.  
Nidal, *thawra* generation, Nahr el-Bared camp, 17 Dec 2011

I come from an original Fatah family... My grandfather ... was a martyr for Fatah ('*shahīd la fatah*') and my aunt was also [stops himself] a martyr for Palestine and for Fatah. We are an old Fatah family. But that's the issue, what should I believe in? If something was left, I would believe in it, but there is nothing left.

Faris, young generation, Beirut, 10 Oct 2011

It was common for Palestinian refugees to associate entire families with a given faction. Similarly to how Faris introduced his family in the above quote, the name of the faction would be added as an adjective to characterize the family, for example Palestinians would say, '*ayli fathāwiyyi*' (a Fatah family) or '*ayli jabhawiyi*' (a PFLP family). Additionally the duration of the association was sometimes added, '*ayli fathāwiyyi aṣīli*' (an original Fatah family). By adding this extra adjective the family emphasized that one of its ancestors was a founding member of that faction. Scholars of the Palestinian resistance movement in Lebanon (Petee 1991: 119-24; R. Sayigh 1994: 105-08) have noted that refugees in the 1960s and 1970s (the *thawra* generation) were most often mobilized through their kin ties. However the actual process of mobilization was seldom the focus of research. How is factional membership passed down within a family? Is it through a process of indoctrination and the inculcation of an ideology? How does it operate today, in the context of increasing dissatisfaction with existing factional structures?

In this section I aim to bring to light the process by which factions and families interacted. Such an argument could be seen as reinforcing the view that Arab politics is patrimonial (Bill and Springborg 2000: 112-29) which is seen as the blind following of kin ties. In its crudest form, patrimonialism is understood as people submitting "themselves as a flock unto a shepherd" (Hudson 1977 cited in Brynen 1995b: 24), where "those lower down the political hierarchy are not subordinates, in the sense of officials with defined powers and functions of their own, but rather vassals or retainers whose position depends on the leader to whom they owe allegiance" (Clapham 2004: 48). However the life stories I collected point to the contrary. In this section I show how dynamic and diverse

this process is. Far from resembling sheep following a shepherd, it was an unstable and non-linear process, which featured unexpected elements such as critical analyses of factions and the defiance of parental authority even when the person was inspired by family members to 'join a faction.' I illustrate this process through the example of the Hamdan family whom I have known for over seven years. The relationship of the father Abu Ali, as well as two of his sons, Ali and Rabieh, with the PFLP is a good example of how factional affiliation ran through a family, and how it was sometimes transmitted to the next generation. Indeed Rabieh formed a deep association with the PFLP where he became an armed guard for the faction, while his older brother Ali disassociated himself from the faction. This story gives us insight into several phenomena. Firstly, it allows us to see what it meant to be in a factional family. How were children affected by their parents' political affiliation and was that influence experienced? Secondly, this story illustrates the two different experiences from the time of the *thawra*, to contemporary times. Thirdly, it shows us how factions reproduced in spite of the vast criticism targeting them. Finally, it permits us to start the conversation, expanded in the next chapter, about the nature of faction membership by examining what appeared to be its 'beginnings'.

### *The Hamdan family*

Abu Ali was a charismatic, kind and well-spoken man in his mid-50s. He possessed a variety of skills and over the years worked in many trades. He was at times a welder whose job, as he put it, "was to look for a job," highlighting that he worked one day out of ten. On other occasions he was a fisherman, turning the camp's location by the Mediterranean Sea to his advantage. He was also an entrepreneur, who, over the years operated a thrift shop and more recently, a fresh-juice and grilled corn-on-the-cob stall next to the metal trailer he called home.<sup>57</sup> Finally, he was a playwright, a poet, and a chronicler of current affairs,

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<sup>57</sup> He explained that he had bought the bag of carrot for 2,000 LB. It was enough to make one and a half bottle of juice, which he could sell for 5,000 LB, making 3,000 LBP (2 USD) in the

constantly updating his Facebook page with stories, images and information about the situation in the camp. The common feature throughout all of these experiences was his poise. Abu Ali always impressed me with the calm demeanour he kept in the face of adversity, whether it was the indiscriminate shelling of his community, the destruction of the home he spent 35 years to build, his grandchildren's fits and fights in small and overcrowded spaces, or his inability to pay the 'satellite guy' knocking on his door to receive the 10 USD monthly fee.<sup>58</sup>

I initially met the Hamdan family in Beddawi camp where they were sheltering during the Nahr el-Bared conflict in 2007. Throughout the years I kept a relationship with the family, visiting them whenever I was in the camp. Following their return to Nahr el-Bared camp the family settled in UNRWA provided metal trailers, locally known as the 'Baracksat'. They were made of corrugated steel panels and had a window on each of the long sides of the trailer. Apart from the windows, the trailers resembled shipping containers. They were about three meters wide and seven meters long. A family of five people was allowed one container while larger families could claim two. They were placed in stacks of two, six in line for about twenty-four rows. Initially about 240 families lived in the 'Baracksat', as that neighbourhood came to be called. They were meant to be temporary but up to the time of writing, six years later, the Hamdan family was still living in them. Inside the trailer there was, on one end, an aluminium counter equipped with a sink, above it was a one wooden shelf, and a water heater. The family later added a two-burner stove for cooking. This was supposed to be the 'kitchen.' Next to it stood the bathroom: a small one-meter square stall in which were found a sink, a squat toilet, and a shower. The rest of the trailer was an open space that the family filled with mattresses that were used

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process. On the other hand, three corn-on-the-cobs cost him 1,000 LBP (0.67 USD), and he would sell each for 500 LBP (0.33 USD), allowing him to make 500 LBP (0.33 USD) for every three sales. At the beginning of his enterprise he had been popular making a net profit of about 45,000 LBP (30 USD) a day, but soon after the sales plummeted as the novelty of fresh carrot juice and corn-on-the-cob faded away and he had to move on to his next attempt to make ends meet.

<sup>58</sup> A local Palestinian who provided television satellite services to homes.

as beds at night and as a sitting area in the day, as was common in the camps. I was never quite able to figure out how many trailers the Hamdan family as a whole had, because the family was quite large: many of Abu Ali's children were married and had offspring of their own. However it seemed that one trailer was used as the common area for the extended family, and it was to it that I always directed myself. It was always packed with infants, toddlers, teenagers and adults. In fact, I seldom knew the family relations between the different people present at any time.

At the time of my research UNRWA provided rent subsidies and strongly encouraged people to leave the 'Baracksat' and I witnessed several visits from an UNRWA employee trying to convince the family to move out. However the Hamdan family found that the rent subsidy was not enough to be able to find housing in Nahr el-Bared which was short in supply and therefore more expensive. Additionally, water and electricity were available for free in the 'Baracksat' while they would have to pay for them if they were to rent a home. But more importantly, the family's daily survival was predicated on living close to each other, with collective cooking, shared care of young children, and many other forms of joint work and solidarity. This form of communal living was unlikely to be replicated if they were to rent apartments, which if they were lucky enough to find, would certainly not be neighbouring each other. It was precisely in such environments that familial bonds were solidified, stories were shared and new connections were made, as I learned from Abu Ali, Rabieh, and Ali.

### *Abu Ali*

"I drank the *Jabha* with my mother's milk' was Abu Ali's answer to my question of how his involvement with the PFLP began. We were sitting in a metal trailer further away from the family commotion. He continued by explaining that

his father, named Ali,<sup>59</sup> had been an early member of the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) and later became part of Revolutionary Youth Organization and then the PFLP.<sup>60</sup> Abu Ali remembered how, as a young child, he used to stand guard outside his family's home during meetings there. It was the era of the Deuxième Bureau, when gatherings at homes were forbidden.<sup>61</sup> It was common to have children watch guard, signalling to their parents when a patrol was passing by. Abu Ali emphasized that his association with the *Jabha* started from an early age and was something he was nurtured with. He remembered how as a teenager he used to go to the bakeries to collect donations for the fighters and women would sometimes give him their entire batch, stressing that, at the time, people trusted in each other and in the *thawra*.<sup>62</sup>

Abu Ali highlighted how his father talked to him about Palestine, how he taught him 'to love it,' and to fight for it, insisting that he 'drank the *nidal* (struggle)' from his father. He continued by explaining that "our household was all *Jabha*, we were raised in the *Jabha*." Abu Ali was replacing 'family' – where a person is usually raised – with the '*Jabha*.' This stressed that no clear line could be drawn between them: his family was the *Jabha* and the *Jabha* was his family. The *Jabha* was something very personal and it was not just encountered in offices or in political events but also and more importantly at home. The *Jabha* for Abu Ali was first and foremost people, not an ideology.

At school he became part of the PFLP student movement and then in his first year of high school, he heard that the PFLP was organizing training sessions for future guerrilla fighters. He dropped out of school and registered. His mother and uncle were against his decision to stop his education. He said that at the

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<sup>59</sup> Typically, parents named their first-born son after the name of the paternal grandfather, therefore Abu Ali, would typically have his father and oldest son named Ali.

<sup>60</sup> See Frances Hasso, *Resistance, Repression, and Gender Politics in Occupied Palestine and Jordan* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005) at 7-10.

<sup>61</sup> The Lebanese military Intelligence bureau that controlled the camp from 1959 to 1969. See Chapter 3.

<sup>62</sup> Bakeries were communal at the time and women used to prepare their dough at home then go to the bakery to bake it.



time he understood their motives and that he was aware that, as a Palestinian, getting an education was paramount. He added that he actually enjoyed school, especially Arabic literature, of which he was still fond. He boasted of being one of the best students in his school in that particular subject. However, at that time, his love for Arabic literature and his belief in the importance of an education could not compete with the excitement of fighting for his country. Political protests were common in the camps and Abu Ali explained how he could never stay away from them. "Resistance was in my blood," (*al-nidāl bi dammī*) he explained.

In 1972 he went to the training camp, but within a few days Israeli warplanes bombed the camp early one morning, killing eleven people, including his friend, Ibrahim Rabieh, who was also from Nahr el-Bared camp, and injuring twenty seven others.<sup>63</sup> Abu Ali explained that the training camp had few defences; he remembered that they only had one heavy Soviet machine gun, which was useless against warplanes. He hid behind rocks. Following the destruction of the training camp the survivors returned to their homes. Abu Ali became a full-time member of the PFLP (*mutfarrigh*). Although Abu Ali's father had been placed in charge of armaments (*mas'ūl al-tislīh*) in Nahr el-Bared, he explained that he did not receive special treatment due to his father's position. He stressed that he started like anyone else as a member of a cell, and that due to his own merit he was elected and became a cadre. He was then put in charge of political guidance (*mas'ūl al-tawjīh al siyāsi*) for the PFLP in the north of Lebanon.

Abu Ali considered his participation in PFLP training to be the moment he officially joined the PFLP. He explained that it was at that time that he 'filled out a form.' However, by recalling how Abu Ali first spoke of the PFLP, as something

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<sup>63</sup> Israeli artillery fire and commando raids in Lebanon were common in the early 70s. They intended to cause casualties, destroy guerilla bases and coerce the Lebanese authorities to stem the rise of Palestinian militarism, see Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993* at 292.

he drank with his mother's milk, it seemed that Abu Ali's relationship with the PFLP did not really have a start date. The official moment when Abu Ali 'filled out a form' did not correspond to the time when he moved from being 'outside' the faction to being 'inside' it; he appeared to have been 'inside' all along. This is the first reason why I always put quotation marks around the phrase 'joining factions' as that expression seems to imply an action delineated in time (the second reason will be explored in the next chapter where I recount the subsequent evolution of Abu Ali's relationship with the PFLP and examine the concept of political membership and the possibility of defining its end). In this chapter I am interested in providing an example of how factions and families blend into each other and I will expand upon this point by looking at the experiences of two of Abu Ali's sons, Rabieh and Ali.

### *Rabieh and Ali*

Rabieh was a sensitive young man and six years younger than Ali. During the 2007 Nahr el-Bared conflict he worked with an international NGO in Beddawi camp delivering relief aid. The NGO's emergency relief operations ended once the Lebanese military allowed the residents of Nahr el-Bared to return to the camp, and Rabieh was subsequently unable to find stable employment. Occasionally, he helped journalists and filmmakers make contacts in the camp and in the process heard several Palestinians from the camp recount their stories of torture in Lebanese jails. He was profoundly affected by these accounts. His work with journalists later caused him trouble with Lebanese military intelligence, who began to question him. At the time of my research he was unemployed and had lost all hope of finding work. In his mid-twenties, he was significantly depressed and felt he had few prospects for his future. He explained:

*Rabieh:* When I go to cafés and I hear the guys, of course it is going to bother me, because they are living what I am living. There is no work, there isn't anything. There is no future; everything is lost. My ambitions are

broken. We don't know how to dream; even dreaming we don't know how to do it anymore.

[He lights up a new cigarette]

...

[Prior to the war] there wasn't an hour of boredom. Now the whole day is like that. There isn't anything. A person like me should be doing something.

*Perla*: What was different?

*Rabieh*: Everything was different. I was studying. I would leave school and go home. Our home's atmosphere was nice. Our family is big. We were six apartments but we all shared one door. Our homes formed a circle; we were all next to each other. If you were bored you would go sit in the courtyard and you would forget the world. My time was full, I had a lot of work, I worked in the *shabibe*, I had workshops, scouting trip, and my guard duties. The *shabibe* was my second home (*al bayt al tani*).<sup>64</sup> I never felt any emptiness.

The interior courtyard that Rabieh described and the form of collective living that the Hamdan family worked hard to replicate in the 'Baracksat,' was central to how the different generations of the Hamdan family interacted. Rabieh highlighted this point and as we will see later on, so did Ali. In particular, Rabieh had strong memories of his grandfather to whom he was very close to. In fact, it was his grandfather's stories that affected Rabieh and made him want to 'join the PFLP' and later become a fighter. Rabieh recalled:

*Rabieh*: We always used to sit and talk. I used to ask him, where did you go in the past? Where did you fight? Where did you serve? He would tell me: I would take them to the mountains, to Tyre, Saida. He would tell me which battles in Lebanon he'd taken part in. I was trying to figure out how nice the *Jabha* is, how much did it engage in resistance? I was still discovering, until today [I am discovering] ... I was liking it, I wanted to be in the *Jabha*, I was loving it, I wanted to be a fighter, that impacted me a lot, a whole lot, I wanted to go to Palestine to fight. And I told you I had a group of friends and we had a room in the [PFLP] office and we asked to have military training.

*Perla*: And did your father tell you stories too?

*Rabieh*: No just my grandfather. My dad and me, our relationship was of a father and son, not that of a friend. With my grandfather I would tell him everything, even if I liked a girl I used to tell him. I would tell him I like this girl, what do you think about her? And he would tell me, well, she's from a good family. [Laugh]. He was considerate of my age.

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<sup>64</sup> The *shabibe* was the youth organization of the PFLP.

We can see how Rabieh's conversations about the PFLP with his grandfather were mixed with other casual discussions such as Rabieh's affection for girls. The discussions were informal, non-ideological and interwoven with everyday life. They did not aim to indoctrinate or politicize Rabieh, but were tied up with everyday social and familial practices. Later in our conversation, Rabieh labelled his affinity to the PFLP as 'hereditary.' He highlighted that as a child it was very 'natural' to him (*ṭabīrī*) to say that he was part of the PFLP. However, when I asked Rabieh what the PFLP meant to him, this is what he had to say:

What makes me love the *Jabha* are the people, it is not because it is the *Jabha* and that my parents are *Jabha*. Of course if I had joined and didn't like what I saw, it would be different, I wouldn't be convinced. But what I liked was the people in the *Jabha*. The cadres. There is no hierarchy; it is not a leader and member's relationship, but a friendship. It is like a family. I would be in the youth centre, [my supervisor] Faris would come and we would talk of things. I liked him a lot. I felt that he was the *Jabha*. I felt that he should be a leader. I often talk to him on facebook and on email; I call him 'Sir.' I love him a lot. He is the one who pushed me to open up, to discover how much energy I had, what I am capable of. He wanted to make something out of me.

It is revealing that when talking of the PFLP, Rabieh spoke of the people of the PFLP. In particular, he mentioned Faris, his mentor, who left a strong impression on him. This highlights that while it was often family ties that brought young Palestinians to factions, it was personal relations developed with other members that kept Palestinians 'inside' the factions. Rabieh felt that Faris 'was the *Jabha*.' Rabieh went on to explain that his chance to become a fighter for the PFLP came in 2006 when following the July war with Israel the PFLP decided to organize training sessions for young fighters. Similarly to his father, Rabieh halted his education and signed up. Being a 'fighter' in the early 2000s meant something very different from the 1970s when Abu Ali had opted for the same option. Palestinian military operations from Lebanon against Israel had halted and following the end of the Lebanese civil war Palestinians could no longer carry arms outside of the camps. Being a 'fighter' in Lebanon basically meant being an armed guard for the factions' offices. By the 2000s, arms within the

camps had become controversial even amongst Palestinians themselves. While Palestinians continued to feel threatened and in need of armed defence, they also often saw guns in the camps as a source of insecurity (Abou-Zaki 2013). Rabieh highlighted to me that his family was opposed to his decision to carry arms for two reasons. Firstly, they opposed his decision to forego an education and secondly they worried about him getting involved in an armed confrontation in the camp. Abu Ali explained that he wanted Rabieh to continue his education especially since he himself had been unable to go to university. He explained that he used to beg Rabieh to continue his education and after a long pause he continued:

*Abu Ali:* I used to dream when I was in school that I would go to university and study Arabic literature because I liked it, I was in love with it. This is why I write short stories or poems from time to time. I may not be good at it, but I like it and this used to be my ambition. If I could go back in time, I would study. At times I think of studying at home, even if I am 56 years old. I think of getting the baccalaureate books and studying on my own, but there is no time ... You feel that your youth was wasted, 15-20 years went like that, you didn't do anything.

*Perla:* But you tried to do something

*Abu Ali:* Yes but if you see what it is being used for today, how it is being marketed and sold, in a very different way from what you believed in or wanted. You feel that your dream became smaller. Your dream used to be big, now it is just 8% of Palestine. If we knew that then, maybe all those martyrs wouldn't have had to die, and there would have been no need for all the injured and all the widows. Believe me, maybe no one would have sacrificed anything. What am I going to sacrifice anything for? If it is not for Nahf or Acre, which is where I am from, am I going to sacrifice myself for 8% of the West Bank? It is depressing.

Abu Ali's objection to Rabieh's military training was directly linked to his own experience as a fighter and his anger at the leadership's subsequent betrayal of the principles he fought for. He was highly critical of the current Palestinian political leaders and did not want his son to forego the possibility of forging a future for himself as self-sacrifice would lead nowhere. Additionally, his family also worried that he would get entangled in armed confrontations in the

camp or that the PFLP may call on him in case of fighting. Abu Ali expressed his concern by saying the following:

There is a total loss of trust, in all these people, the sixteen factions.<sup>65</sup> I am not telling you that one is better than another. All of them are problematic. All of their lies have become apparent after 40 years of the beginning of the *thawra*. When I used to see each day in Nahr el-Bared factions go on military alert against each other. For what? (*istinfār min tanzīm ‘ala tanzīm, ‘ala shū?*) This is what made us lose trust. I remember we used to run after the *fidā’ī* just to see his boots.<sup>66</sup> He was something amazing, a symbol, like an angel. We imagined him as an angel when we were children. Just say *fidā’ī*: a camouflage uniform and a pair of boots. We would follow him just to look at him. He represented something important to us. Unfortunately they erased this image from our mind with their politics and their actions.

Rabieh’s father was highly critical of the Palestinian factions, not only in terms of their positions during negotiations with Israel and their abandonment of the ideals he fought for, but also in terms of their local behaviour in the camp. In particular, he insisted that his criticism was directed at all factions, which therefore included the PFLP. He lamented how the higher cause of fighting Israel had given way to internal fighting in the camps. In 2007 when Rabieh became a guard for the PFLP there were two armed incidents in the camp involving Fatah al-Islam. On those two occasions, his parents sent Rabieh’s oldest brother, Ali, to bring him home from the PFLP centre. Rabieh explained that he had refused to leave and that Ali had had to drag him home on both occasions. Rabieh explained that when there was a situation of heightened military alert in the camp he would wonder if this was what his father and grandfather used to experience. He explained:

*Rabieh*: I wanted to live something of what I was hearing. You know when there were military manoeuvres I would wonder, is this what used to

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<sup>65</sup> Abu Ali was referring to the sixteen factions that had a seat on the popular committee of Nahr el-Bared camp.

<sup>66</sup> *Fidā’ī* is the person who sacrifices himself for a cause. This was how Palestinians referred to freedom fighters.

happen with my grandfather or with my dad? I was longing for this experience.

After a pause he continued:

*Rabieh*: I like my tea strong because of that, because the revolutionaries (*thuwwār*) liked it strong.

*Perla*: Really?

*Rabieh*: In the training camps, you can't go to the kitchen all the time to get tea. The kitchen has a guard, so you can't keep going asking for tea. You can go once a day to get tea, and they put it in the pot and boil it all day long, so it turns black. [Laughed and then sipped his tea]

Rabieh's desire to be a fighter was directly linked to what he perceived to be the experiences of his father and grandfather in particular and of the revolutionary (*thā'ir*) in general. His detailed knowledge of their mundane practices, such as how they prepared and drank tea, reiterates that the process of the transmission of factional affiliation is not an overtly political or ideological process intended to indoctrinate or inculcate. Rather, it was the natural product of daily interactions with family members and was mixed with discussion of girls and tea drinking habits.

Rabieh was not the only one influenced by the tight-knit family environment in which he grew up. Ali also remembered his grandfather's accounts, but explained that he was a lot more interested in the tales his great-grandmother used to tell. He reminisced how he, as a child, would gather with his siblings, cousins, and sometimes even the neighbours' children, and sit on the ground in their interior courtyard, while the adults formed a semi-circle around them. He explained that the tales would last three days "like a television series." Similar to the tactics used by modern-day television editors, his great-grandmother would interrupt her stories just before the climax and tell the children that it was time to go to bed. Screams, and sometimes even tears, would follow and his great-grandmother's response was always the same: "it's for tomorrow" (*labukra*). This left Ali with a strong sense of anticipation for the next evening. He added that he could barely sleep those nights, waiting for the next

day to pass in order to hear the remainder of the story. Ali emphasized that she was the one who taught him the meaning of *turāth* (cultural heritage) as she often accompanied her chronicles with real artefacts such as old keys and pictures from Palestine. It was in that same spirit that he later formed a *dabka* group.

Ali's interest in cultural productions did not mean that he was not interested in experiencing the *thawra*, like his younger brother had been. However, Ali's friends had a greater influence on him. At the age of fifteen he joined his friends in attending political meetings with *Jabhat al Nidal*, another faction in Nahr el-Bared camp. However his involvement did not last long as once his father became aware of his association, he physically pulled him out of a meeting and forbade him to return. Ali then began going to the PFLP youth centre but he soon lost interest, explaining that he did not feel a strong sense of belonging (*mish zyādi*). He highlighted that by the time he was an adult the situation of Palestinian factions was different from that during the *thawra*, that he had lost trust in them. He also explained that most of his friends were 'outside' the PFLP and that he preferred to form a *dabka* group with them. He added that one of his friends was in a leadership position in a local NGO and the organization ended up adopting the troupe and provided them with costumes and musical instruments, as well as the opportunity to travel around Lebanon performing at different events. However his friend soon left the NGO over a dispute with the new director and the entire troupe left the organization in solidarity with their friend.<sup>67</sup> This example highlighted the power of friendships and how Palestinians valued personal solidarity over institutional fidelity.

Ali soon married and started to concentrate on income generating activities. At the time of my research, Ali had two young sons and an infant daughter. He was working as a driver for a vegetable wholesaler, transporting fresh produce from the fields of Akkar to Tripoli. His pay was minimal but he

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<sup>67</sup> The story actually repeated itself, as the troupe ended up associating themselves with another NGO but a few years later they end up leaving as a group once problems arise between the head of the troupe and the head of the NGO in Nahr el-Bared camp.



rejoiced over the fact that he was often given fresh fruit for his family, which as I explained in the previous chapter, was a luxury many families could not afford. Ali's younger son soon joined us in the trailer; he had just showered and was ready to be put to bed. Ali took the opportunity to explain that he used to send his children to the Ghassan Kanafani kindergarten. The kindergarten was run by Annie Kanafani, the wife of the late Ghassan Kanafani, a famous Palestinian writer, artist and one of the founders of the PFLP.<sup>68</sup> He explained that he liked their style of teaching as it was closer to his "home environment" (*jaw al bayt*). However the nursery was too far away from the 'Baracksat' and Ali could not afford the 10 USD monthly bus fees, so he sent his two sons to the closest nursery, an Islamic facility run by a local mosque.

Recounting both Ali and Rabieh's stories in conjunction is valuable as their differences and similarities can be contrasted. Both Ali and Rabieh were raised in the same environment yet their political trajectory was different: Rabieh felt a deep association with the PFLP while Ali did not. Despite their divergence, the stories point to the common conclusion that what linked these two Palestinians to factions was personal relations; their relationships with the factions was mediated through people and not through an ideology. This was true for Rabieh who was inspired by his grandfather as well as Ali who was influenced by his friends. This however did not mean that Ali and Rabieh blindly followed their friends or family members. On the contrary, Ali attempted to disassociate himself from the PFLP and Rabieh defied his father's desires. Indeed Rabieh's desire to become a fighter with the PFLP was challenged by his father, and Rabieh believed that his grandfather – who had initially inspired him – would have probably opposed him too if he had been alive at the time. What transpired out of these stories was that trust relations, developed on a local basis, exemplified by Rabieh's relations with his mentor and Ali's relations with his *dakbe* friends, determined the strength of their relations with organizations, whether factions or NGOs. Finally Rabieh

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<sup>68</sup> He was assassinated in 1972 by a can bomb planted by the Mossad, the national intelligence agency of Israel

helped us understand how ‘illegitimate’ and ‘unpopular’ factions continued to exist and reproduce regardless of the condemnations directed at them, while Ali’s choice of daycare gave us a glimpse of how geographical proximity helped establish new ties and connections. I elaborate on this last theme in the next section.

### **Friendships, neighbourhoods, and space**

I joined because of a girl, I was 10 years old and I used to pass by the [DFLP] hall on my way back from school and I was looking at the girls singing with kids. I saw a beautiful girl and I thought I should join. I didn’t want to go to Fatah [where my father was], the girls were not pretty in Fatah [laughter]... I used to always go and watch them. At the end I was convinced of the idea, I needed to enter. So I entered this organization and I liked it so I continued with them.

Sami, young generation, Saida, 6 Dec 2011

[The PFLP youth centre] was a very nice centre [prior to its destruction in the 2007 conflict]. There were a lot of activities; there was football, music, the scouts, and theatrical plays. The centre was always full; it would never empty, not like now. Now the centre is sometimes closed, there isn’t anyone. The centre in the past wouldn’t close; it was open 24h a day. If we were inside preparing something we would lock it so no one would come in, if we were preparing for a summer camp or an activity. People loved us.

Rabieh, young generation, Nahr el-Bared camp, 13 Oct 2011

Just as particular families came to be associated with political factions, so too did particular quarters of the camp. During the *thawra* it was common to refer to neighbourhoods as *lqlīm Fatah* (Fatah quarter) or *lqlīm al-dimuqrātiyyi* (DFLP quarter) (R. Sayigh 1994: 92). However, this was not always the case. When Palestinians first settled in the refugee camps in Lebanon they organized themselves according to their village ties, with camp quarters taking on the names of villages in Palestine (Peteet 2005: 110-24; R. Sayigh 1994: 59). These village bonds were a system of support and survival in difficult and daunting circumstances (R. Sayigh 2007: 109). It has been pointed out that these village ties gave way during the *thawra* to an organization based on factional affiliation,

with each faction 'controlling' a part of the camp (Khalili 2004: 13-14; R. Sayigh 1994: 92). In this section I reveal how neighbourhoods came to be associated with a specific faction by outlining how neighbourhood ties, helped develop friendships, which in turn led to factional associations. This phenomenon was clear for both the *thawra* generation as well as the younger generation.

However, before I begin my exposition, it is important to note that my choice of Nahr el-Bared camp as the site of my fieldwork affected how I conducted my research into the importance of space in understanding factional affiliation. The destruction of the camp in 2007 meant that I could not witness those dynamics first hand. The majority of its residents were no longer living in their original homes and factional offices and centres had been destroyed. While some factions were able to rent new spaces to act as offices and youth centres, not all were able to. The interplay between neighbourhoods, friendships, and factions was to be found in the stories that Palestinians told about themselves and about their involvement with factions.

The physical location of factional offices, centres, or NGOs mattered for the simple reason that Palestinians often developed friendship ties with their neighbours and the physical closeness of these centres made them more convenient for parents to send their children to. Ahmad, the youngest son of the Talal family with whom I lived, began his association with the Islamic Jihad in a similar fashion. His mother explained to me that when Ahmad was young they lived next door to Abu Fayeze. Abu Fayeze was a member of Fatah in his youth who left the party during the internal fighting of 1983 because he refused to participate in the battle.<sup>69</sup> He stayed away from politics until he met Dr Fathi Shaqqaqi, the founder of Islamic Jihad, who was visiting Nahr el-Bared after he was exiled from Gaza. After their meeting, Abu Fayeze decided to start a scouting group for children in Nahr el-Bared camp. Um Muhammad explained that she

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<sup>69</sup> This information was obtained from Abu Fayeze's son whom I met in Beirut. It was corroborated by Um Muhammad.

sent her three boys to the scouting group, which basically consisted of religious classes and occasional outings to a nearby river. However, Ahmad was the only one who enjoyed the group and made several friends there. Ahmad continued to participate in their activities over the years and once he began his studies he became a member of the student group named *al-Rabita al-Islamiyya*, which was referred to as just *al-Rabita*. Ahmad went to the *Rabita's* centre every day. He had the key and was responsible for opening and closing the centre, which had a computer and a television set. This was Ahmad's only social outing outside the family home other than visiting other relatives in the camp.

One of the reasons why young Palestinians joined their friends in going to factional spaces was to partake in the activities that were offered to, and created by, them in those spaces. I often heard about the old PFLP centre by the sea from Palestinians in the camp. Muhammad, the son of the head of Islamic Jihad in Nahr el-Bared, told me that he used to go to the PFLP centre to use their library as it was one of the few quiet places in the camp where he could study. Herein lies the importance of these spaces in the camp: their rarity. Young Palestinians had a limited number of locations in the camp where they could gather and take part in activities such as *dabka* practice or singing, or just hang out. The available places usually belonged to either factions or NGOs. They provided a breathing space for many young Palestinians; a place to go to during the day or in the evening.

These spaces were not always to be found in faction offices, but were sometimes located in people's homes, especially during the time of the *thawra*. Um Nabil, who was a young toddler when the revolution started, remembered how her affiliation with Fatah started when she and her friends started going to their neighbours' home. Her neighbour, Jamileh, was affiliated with Fatah and had turned her house into a youth centre. There were political meetings, sports activities, English classes and, sometimes, trips. "I really miss those times, it was great," she said. They were about twenty to twenty-five girls all from the

neighbourhood and she “started to get attached to Fatah”. She explained that she felt that she was discovering herself through Jamileh. Factions often had student centres close to universities with computers where students could meet to talk, play games, or surf the Internet. For many Palestinians who lived in the camps, going to university was the first time that they had actually left the camp and lived in a Lebanese neighbourhood. This moment was often scary and stressful to them. A student centre offered them a space where they could meet fellow Palestinians, discuss their problems, find solutions, and feel more at home. Some factions even had dormitories for students where they rented out beds for the semester for a fraction of the market price.

The factions also organized outings several times a year. For many Palestinians who lived in the camp it was rare for them to leave. While there were no legal restrictions that limited their exit from the camp, financial pressures kept them inside. It was common to meet young girls in their 20s who had left the camp only a few times in their lives and those times were generally outings to the sea or the river. The situation was different for the camps in Beirut, but for the camps further away from the Lebanese capital this situation was rather common. Therefore outings organized by factions or their associated NGOs were welcomed by the youth. They often spoke about them for several days before and for a long time after. Factions also often organized summer camps where youth gathered for several days and attended speeches of the leadership of the factions. But what these summer camps were more known for was the long nights where the youth gathered, smoked narghile, chatted, danced, and had fun together, far away from the suffocating confines of the camps.

It is important to point out that what often determined the strength of the relationship with a faction was the strength of the friendships developed in these spaces. Fouad, the PFLP football coach, was a good example of this. Fouad’s father, a falafel salesman, was a prominent Fatah military figure. In fact I had heard about his father from different people in the camp. He was well respected

as he had remained in Lebanon following the departure of the Fatah forces from the north of Lebanon in 1983. He therefore lived under the constant threat of being arrested and detained by the Syrian authorities. He had passed away a year prior to the 2007 conflict and Fouad highlighted that his only comfort was that his father did not live to see the camp bombed into annihilation. He showed me a short video on his cell phone of his father in military fatigues walking along with other colleagues. He was very proud and grateful that he still had this video as all of his other possessions had been destroyed in the war.

When I asked Fouad how his relation with the PFLP began, considering that his father was such an important Fatah figure in Nahr el-Bared, he answered that he liked the PFLP since he was 12 years old. They had a big centre close to his home in *Hay al-Madāris* where he and his friends used to go.<sup>70</sup> He explained that most of his friends were from his neighbourhood and that they all used to go to the PLFP centre to play games, work on the computer or just enjoy each other's company. His friends would talk of George Habash who sometimes visited the homes of his neighbours.<sup>71</sup> He explained that they would later show him where George Habash sat.

As Fouad was talking to me about his links to the PFLP he right away and on his own started to talk to me about his friendship with Shadi, his best friend for over ten years. Fouad started recounting how, in the war that destroyed Nahr el-Bared, he had left the camp on day 15, leaving behind Shadi, who remained until day 25. He told me that those ten days apart were the only time they had ever separated from each other. He blamed himself for what he saw as the abandonment of his best friend and remembered how he had cried when he saw Shadi again, even though his friend was alive and well. For Fouad, his friendship with Shadi was an integral to his sense of belonging to the PFLP, and once

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<sup>70</sup> *Hay al-Madāris* was an area in the old camp of Nahr el-Bared.

<sup>71</sup> Founder and Secretary-General of the PFLP from 1967 to 2000.

Shadi faced problems with the PFLP leadership, Fouad's own links with the PFLP were strained.<sup>72</sup>

For Ahmad, Um Nabil, and Fouad, friendship ties, neighbourhood ties and factional ties were all linked together. The physical location of these centres played an important role in determining which factional space a young Palestinian went to. Again ideology did not play a role, but rather it seemed that friendships, often developed on a neighbourhood basis, had a greater impact. However, I am not arguing that if a Palestinian lived next to a faction's office then he or she would necessarily become affiliated with that particular faction. Instead, I aim to show how factional ties always begin with personal ties involving family members, friends or neighbours. Indeed, when looking at how Palestinians 'joined factions' we see how the factions no longer appear as structures defined by their respective ideologies but a group of people coming together on the basis of personal relations. In the last part of this chapter I dispel the idea that Palestinians 'joined factions' in order to maximize the financial benefits such relations could engender.

### **'Revolution until the end of the month'**

A very common joke in the Palestinian camps was that Fatah's new motto was *thawra ḥatta ākhir al-shahr* (revolution until the end of the month). This referred to the payroll that came at the end of the month, insinuating that people 'joined Fatah' for the money. This was told in contrast to Fatah's actual motto *thawra ḥatta al-nasr* (revolution until victory).<sup>73</sup> This was said as a criticism addressed not only against Fatah but all factions. Another common condemnation was to point out that in the past *individuals* used to pay membership fees to the factions, that people used to contribute to the factions, while, at the time of my research, the *factions* had to pay people for them to 'join.'

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<sup>72</sup> Shadi's relationship with the PFLP will be related in the next chapter.

<sup>73</sup> This joke was mentioned to me early on in my fieldwork as I recounted in the Introduction and it was to be retold several times to me.

While it was certain that being part of a faction could have financial benefits, my research suggests that financial incentives alone were not enough to explain how Palestinians chose which faction to 'join.' If money was the major reason behind factional affiliation then we should expect Palestinians to 'join' the richest factions, which was not the case for the grand majority of the Palestinians I interviewed (42 out of 43).

Being part of a faction could have several benefits. It increased the person's network in the camp, it could lead to a job opportunity in one of the faction's NGO, youth or women's organisations,<sup>74</sup> and it meant that they were eligible for aid in case the faction was distributing any.<sup>75</sup> While this could explain why people 'joined factions,' it did not explain how they chose which one to 'join.' Fatah was often seen to be the richest faction. For example, at the time of my research a university student who was part of Fatah received 40 USD a month, while a DFLP student received 200 USD a year (which breaks down to a little less than 17 USD a month) and a PFLP student didn't receive any compensation. A socio-economic survey conducted by a team of AUB researchers found that 66.4% of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon were defined as 'poor' in 2010 and 6.6% as 'extremely poor' (Chaaban et al. 2010a: 27).<sup>76</sup> Consumption expenditure was found to be on average about 170 USD per refugee per month (28). By this measure, the Fatah contribution of 40 USD a month for a university student was substantial, representing about 23% of the average monthly expenditure. Yet, as

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<sup>74</sup> Factions had many organizations in the camps, some were legally registered with the Lebanese government as an NGO while others were not. For example, the DFLP has a legally registered NGO named Najdeh, which was active in relief, social care, health, education, cultural activities and vocational trainings, and they had the Ghad organization (focusing on youth) and Tadamon (focusing on women). For more information about the development of NGOs in Lebanon and the challenges they faced see Jaber Suleiman, 'Palestinians in Lebanon and the Role of Non-Governmental Organizations', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 10/3 (1997), 397-410.

<sup>75</sup> It is worthy to note that at the time of my research, and due to the de-militarization of Nahr el-Bared camp following the 2007 war, the factions could not employ paid guards for their offices as they did in other refugee camps in Lebanon.

<sup>76</sup> The poverty line was set at 6 USD/person/day or 182.6 USD/person/month, which reflected the cost of minimal food and non-food livelihood requirements see Jad Chaaban et al., 'Socio-Economic Survey of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon', (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 2010b) at 25. The extreme-poverty line was set at 2.17 USD/person/day, equivalent to 66 USD/person/month, which reflected the cost of basic food needs see *ibid*.



shown in this chapter, many Palestinians created links with other factions. In some of these cases Palestinians did reap benefits from their association with a faction but their choice of which faction to approach was not based on a calculation that sought to maximize it.

This point can be further illustrated through the example of Ahmad's relationship with the Islamic Jihad. Ahmad was the youngest son of the Talal family with whom I lived. As I elaborated in the previous chapter the family faced severe financial hardships, which made them vulnerable to food insecurity. There was no doubt that Ahmad benefited financially from his relationship with the Islamic Jihad and that this assistance was vital to the family. They provided him with a monthly stipend and contributed to his tuition fees. Um Muhammad often said that if it were not for the Islamic Jihad, Ahmad would not have been able to go to college. However, it would be wrong to assume that Ahmad initiated a relationship with the Islamic Jihad in order to obtain such assistance. In actuality, the financial benefits that Ahmad received were the reflection of his long-standing relation with them. As we saw in the previous section Ahmad's relation with the Islamic Jihad was based on neighbourhood ties. At the age of twelve his mother sent him to their scouting group, which was led by their neighbour. This relationship continued over the years and was entering its eleventh year at the time of my research. When Ahmad was young there were few monetary incentives to this relationship. The stipend and tuition help that the Islamic Jihad provided Ahmad only began once he attended college. The financial assistance they provided him can only be seen in this context; it could not explain why the relationship was initiated; rather it was the longevity of the relationship that justified the financial assistance. Other members of the Islamic Jihad received different stipends. Um Muhammad always reiterated the fact that Ahmad had been with the Islamic Jihad for eleven years and that the relationship was therefore superior to other members. I further examine the process by which Ahmad obtained the aid in Chapter 7 when I inquire into the aid distribution process in the camp. What is important to realize for now is that while Ahmad no

doubt benefited from his association with a faction, these benefits could not explain his choice of faction.

Furthermore, the role that Islamic Jihad played in Ahmad's life exceeded just a financial transaction. As highlighted in the previous section, Ahmad's participation in the Islamic Jihad's student group provided him with a crucial social outing. Ahmad went to the youth center everyday. He often returned in the evening with many stories of the latest news in the camp, which his mother always listened to attentively. I would therefore be wrong to qualify Ahmad's relation with the Islamic Jihad as being purely financially motivated.

## **Conclusion**

Rabieh described to me the official method of joining a faction. He explained that once he had decided that he wanted to be part of the faction, he had to fill out a form, which to his knowledge was sent to Palestine, where it had to be approved. It was only after that process that he was considered a fully-fledged member, was allowed to participate in factional meetings, and became a member of a cell. It was this process that was characterized as *dakhalit tanzim* by Palestinians, loosely translated to 'I entered an organization.' Three points can be inferred from this two-word expression. Firstly, it evokes the image of crossing a line as the person moved from the 'outside' to the 'inside' of the faction, which was characterized by Rabieh's ability to now attend party meetings. Secondly, it implies that this crossing of borders occurred in a moment delimited in time, which was the moment when Rabieh's application was approved in Palestine. Thirdly, it confers order; it classifies people by giving them an organizational rank; Rabieh was now the member of a particular cell in Nahr el-Bared camp. These three points all work to build the appearance that factions were structures that organized people.

However by examining the stories of how and why Palestinians ‘joined factions’ we realize two points. Firstly, that Palestinians encountered factions in the form of people and not in the form of an ideology; those individuals could be parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, friends, or neighbours. It was no accident that kin and neighbourhood ties formed the backbone of factions as those two networks formed the basis of Palestinian endurance and survival since the *Nakba* (Rosenfeld 2004; R. Sayigh 1994, 2007; Taraki 2006). This is not to say that a person’s kin ties and geographical location in the camp would solely determine his or hers political affiliation; this was most generally not the case. Rather, I showed how that process was non-linear, non-ideological and interwoven in everyday practices, such as hearing grandparents’ stories to joining friends to play games on the computer. This process also featured instances of opposition to parental authority, as illustrated by the case of Rabieh, as well as volatility, as shown by the different trajectories followed by Rabieh and Ali, two brothers raised in the same environment.

Secondly, I highlighted how ‘joining a faction’ was not an action that could be delineated in time. It was not a matter of entering a structure that was defined by its ideology; it was about connecting with family and friends. Indeed, if we stop looking at factions as structures that a person entered or left, as a bounded entity with lines separating those on the ‘inside’ from those on the ‘outside’, but look at factions as a group of people coming together because of trust relations, we realize that a person’s affiliation with a faction cannot be understood as ‘affiliated’ or ‘independent,’ but rather we notice that such a relationship was much more complex as it was a continuously unfolding story of human relations. It is to the examination of such relationships that I turn to next.

## 6. 'WE ARE THE FACTIONS'

### POLITICAL FACTION MEMBERSHIP

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis/dissertation for copyright reasons“.

Protest in Beddawi camp demanding to return to Nahr el-Bared, 29 June 2007.  
(Photographs: Ismael Sheikh Hassan)

*Perla:* During the [2007 Nahr el-Bared] conflict you were with the PFLP-GC?

*Um Jihad:* Yes. No, no!

*Abu Jihad:* We were taking aid from the PFLP-GC

*Um Jihad:* We had a sort of superficial relation (*kunna hayk ya'nī innu fī 'ilāqa sathīyyi*)

*Abu Jihad:* A relation, a relation

*Um Jihad:* I used to be in the 'Progressive women association' [the PFLP-GC women's union]

*The sister of Um Jihad:* It was a belonging [to a political organization] (*intimā*). You know how everyone has a political belonging? Each person had to have a belonging.

*Perla:* I can't keep up with the three of you!

Conversation between the author and Um Jihad, her husband and sister who were of the *thawra* generation, Beddawi camp, 20 July 2011

When I first asked Mahmud, the second oldest son of the Talal family, about his political affiliation, he answered that he was 'in theory' (*mabda'iyyan*)

with the DFLP. His choice of the words 'in theory' seemed to imply that there was potentially a different answer 'in practice'. Yet, when I inquired further in an attempt to obtain the 'real' answer, I was left dissatisfied. Mahmud just recounted how he had volunteered with the Najdeh NGO during the 2007 Nahr el-Bared conflict.<sup>77</sup> He explained that he then found himself invited to meetings and 'became DFLP.' It seemed that Mahmud was not willing to self-identify as a DFLP member, but was just telling me that 'officially' he was a member. It was rare for Palestinians to declare a clear and direct affiliation to factions. From the 51 close Palestinians with whom I had in-depth conversations, only eleven refugees openly claimed an affiliation to a faction (six of the *thawra* generation out of 23 and five of the younger generation out of 28) and eight claimed no contact with factions (two of the *thawra* generation and six of the younger generation). The rest seemed to fill a grey area that did not fit any conventional definition of factional membership. Some maintained that they were not affiliated to factions, but I would later see them at faction events and offices, which seemed to shed doubt on their earlier statements. Others used vague language to define their relationship, such as 'superficial,' 'not deep,' or, similarly to Mahmud, they would qualify it as 'theoretical.' A few would describe their affiliation as a form of 'colouring' (*sabgha*).

In her study of women's involvement in the *thawra* in Lebanon in the 1970s and the early 80s, Peteet (1991) identified three different levels of mobilization within the factions. Palestinians could either be 'organized' (*munazzam*), or 'friends'. 'Organized' Palestinians were considered members of factions and were divided into two other categories: cadres (*mutafarrigh*) and members (*anāsir*). Cadres were usually employed by the faction on a full-time basis. They could be active in the political, military, social or administrative sectors of the faction. Regular members were Palestinians who paid their dues to the factions and were expected to attend party meetings, carry out assignments and had an organizational rank within the faction (143). Peteet highlighted that

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<sup>77</sup> Najdeh is a DFLP affiliated NGO which Mahmud had volunteered for in the past.

“there is no affiliation without action” (146), implying that the key to factional membership is active participation. Finally, ‘friends’ were considered supporters of factions but not official members. They may identify with the factions and attend factional events but cannot participate in factional meetings (145). This classification became the conventional way of looking at factional membership in the literature and was adopted by numerous scholars (Brynen 1995a; Hasso 2005; Roy 2011). It implied that it was possible to separate factionalized Palestinians from independents, as highlighted in studies of ‘independent’ and ‘grassroots’ initiatives in the Palestinian camps of Lebanon (Abou-Zaki 2012; Kortam 2011; R. Sayigh 2011).<sup>78</sup>

The formal classification of factional commitment in terms of cadres, members, friends, and independents did little to help me navigate the confusing terrain of factional affiliation that I found myself in. My initial reaction was two-fold. I became anxious and suspicious. Were Palestinians honest with me about their political leanings? I started to behave like the *mukhābarāt* (the intelligence services) asking the same person the same question over and over again. ‘Are you part of a faction?’ ‘Are you politically affiliated?’ ‘Are you close to a faction?’ These repeated questions were meant to establish whether an individual was always giving me the same answer. It was a sort of ruse to bring out people’s ‘true political leanings’ out into the open, as if membership status was a factual truth. Two questions occupied my mind: Why did Palestinians join factions? Why did they hide their affiliation?<sup>79</sup> However, I soon noticed that this inability to clearly define a person’s relationship with a faction was not just something I experienced; Palestinians themselves often had discussions regarding their political affiliations. Those discussions were especially common in organizational meetings where people needed to openly declare their association. This was a relief; I was not alone in my confusion.

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<sup>78</sup> Refer to Chapter 1 for a detailed discussion of the 2005 Shatila popular election, which was portrayed in the literature as having resulted in the election of ‘independent’ candidates.

<sup>79</sup> These two questions later turned into the two main sections of a chapter I wrote in the middle of my fieldwork.

The difficulty in defining Palestinians' relationships with factions was only resolved once I began to question some of the assumptions that underlie conventional thinking about faction membership. The official classification of friend, member, and cadre implied that the relationship between a Palestinian and a faction was a relationship between a person and a structure with different degrees of commitment. It drew faction membership as a person's relative position vis-à-vis the *faction* seen as an entity. Palestinians often used this classification to characterize their relationship with factions as it reflected their official position. However, as the first part of this chapter will demonstrate, through my immersion in daily home life it became apparent that this classification missed the complexity and ambiguity of their actual relationship. Factional affiliation should not be seen as a snapshot of a person's present position in relation to a structure, rather it should be seen as a continuously unfolding story of human interactions. It is these stories, with all their diversity and intricacies, that I seek to highlight in this chapter. Through them we realize two important points that form the second and third sections of this chapter. Firstly, we recognize that factional membership should not be looked at as the fulfilment of a contractual agreement but rather carries with it an important dimension of self-identification, which was independent of whether a person was meeting his obligations within the faction or not. I highlight this point by contrasting the stories of two young Palestinians: Shadi who deeply identified with the PFLP while his official membership was in doubt and Lina, who did not consider herself factionalised even though DFLP regulations indicated the contrary. Secondly, through an examination of what it meant to end factional associations, I demonstrate that the relationship of a Palestinian to a faction was not a relationship of a person to a structure that he or she 'entered' or 'left,' but a relationship between people. As we have already seen in the previous chapter, Palestinians' initial contact with factions was mediated through personal relations, and it is an extension of that same argument that the relationship between a person and a faction was a relationship between people. It was about personal associations and those carry different grades of closeness and distance that

could change according to time and context which was not accounted for if we expected factional membership to fit into ready-made categories.

### **A lateral view**

I begin this chapter with Mahmud's story of his relationship with the DFLP, which was the impetus that led me to rethink the nature of political membership. Living with the Talal family I was privy to the mundane micro-interactions that textured political membership. In this section I show how my interactions with him over the course of several months were instrumental in helping me better understand people's relations with Palestinian political factions.

As we have already seen, Mahmud initially characterized his relationship with the DFLP as 'theoretical.' About a month later I referred to him as a DFLP member at which point he burst out: "I already told you I am not with anyone, I am with my own interests" (*maslaḥti*). This sudden burst of dissent surprised me. I wondered whether I had misunderstood him earlier. Mahmud was responding to the common criticism of the factions in the camp that they worked for their own interests rather than the people's general good. Mahmud was underscoring that he was not a fool and he knew that he had to protect himself. It was early evening. Mahmud had just returned from working in the old camp and had to shower and eat quickly before heading out again to disc jockey a bachelor party on the roof top of the house across from us. His cousin soon came over and helped him carry his four speakers down the three floors of our building and back up the three flights of stairs of the building across from us. There was no time to continue our conversation and Um Muhammad and I took two of the kitchen chairs out onto the balcony to watch the party.

It me took about a week to be able to catch Mahmud and learn the details of the incident that infuriated him that evening. He was home for his lunch break



and after eating the daily meal of *muḥammara*<sup>80</sup> he took a longer than usual break and sat down to enjoy a mid-day *narghile*. He explained to me then that the DFLP's yearly anniversary was approaching and they were planning, like every year, to have a celebration, which consisted of a series of speeches by its leadership and some Lebanese politicians in a hall in the camp. Mahmud's immediate supervisor in the DFLP, Abu Mustapha, asked him to provide the sound system for the event and told him that they would pay him 70,000LB, about 47 US dollars. Mahmud refused and handed in his resignation through a text message to Abu Mustapha stating: *kul 'ām wa antum bikhayr wa la'ilkun ghayr*. The closest, but still inadequate translation, as the Arabic sentence actually rhymed, would be 'Happy Anniversary and you better find someone else.' When I asked Mahmud why he refused the job, he told me that he knew that the previous year they paid 100 US dollars for the sound system as last year's DJ was his friend and he had shown him the receipt. He thought this was unfair: they should pay him as much as anyone else - or even more, as he was starting up his DJ business and could use their support. He said that he wanted to leave the DFLP, that he didn't like the factions anyways. His mother agreed, "They are no good." He then got up and went back to work.

About a month later, as we were riding back together from Beirut to Nahr el-Bared, Mahmud told me of a romantic relationship he was having with a girl in the camp. He explained that he had met her in one of his NGO activities and they were sending each other text messages. As the conversation proceeded, I learned that the girl's father was Abu Mustapha. I was taken back; his ex-supervisor in the DFLP, the person to whom he sent his daring text message a month earlier, was now the father of the girl he liked. It seemed his relation with Abu Mustapha was entering a whole new level. However, the story did not end there. Several months later, at the beginning of the school year, Mahmud decided to go back to technical college to complete his degree in hotel

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<sup>80</sup> Chicken, potatoes and a heap of onions all cooked together in the oven with a special homemade sweet red pepper sauce. The entire meal is then eaten with bread.

management. He told me that he saw Abu Mustapha and they agreed that the DFLP would give him the yearly stipend of 200 USD that they usually gave their students.

Mahmud's tumultuous story was the initial drive that made me begin to question the way we imagine faction membership. Trying to define Mahmud's position as being 'inside' or 'outside' the DFLP would have not only been impossible but would have also missed a lot of the complexity of this relation. This story underscored the importance of following an ethnographic approach to the study of factional membership. As we saw, faction interactions such as 'joining' or 'leaving' merely consisted of sending a text message or having a conversation. They were informal practices that were not confined to offices or political events, but were interwoven with everyday activities such as meeting girls or deciding whether to continue an education. By following Mahmud's relation over several months we realize that faction membership was not about determining a person's present classification as a faction member or not; rather, faction membership represented an evolving story of personal interactions. To properly understand factional membership, we therefore need to investigate people's life histories.

Mahmud's story also highlights the two main points I make in the next two sections of this chapter. Firstly, it revealed that there was a difference between a contractual understanding of factional membership and a personal sense of belonging that was fostered (or not) in trusting environments. Indeed it was Mahmud's direct experience of corruption in the form of reduced pay which made him eager to distance himself from the DFLP. I explore this process in more depth in the first section of the chapter. Secondly, it illustrates with forceful clarity that the relationship between a person and a faction was mediated through interactions with people with whom we may have non-political relations. Factional relations and personal relations intermix; it is difficult to separate the two. This is not only highlighted by the fact that Mahmud's supervisor in the DFLP was also

the father of a girl he had an interest in, but also by the fact that once Mahmud needed the DFLP again – in this case to help him through his education – he was able to get that help, no matter how minimal it was. This meant that his relationship with them was not over, as ‘leaving a faction’ would imply. Although Mahmud’s ‘return’ to the DFLP was financially motivated, it was obvious that it was more complicated than that as he could have gone to Fatah who paid their students twice the amount.<sup>81</sup> Choosing not to go to Fatah but to go again to the DFLP showed that the relationship was still ongoing even if he had ‘left’ them.

**‘It was a belonging [to a political organization] (*intimā*). You know how everyone has a political belonging? Each person had to have a belonging’**

I can’t see myself in a *tanzim* other than Fatah, but I cannot go back to Fatah, therefore I stay outside.

Fatima, *thawra* generation, Saida, 3 Dec 2011

Young Palestinians often explained to me that being part of a faction’s youth club did not necessarily entail membership in the faction. In particular, they highlighted that they could not attend party meetings as those were confidential and only fully-fledged members could participate in them. However upon looking at people’s own understanding of factional affiliation we get a different picture. Factional affiliation could not be limited to an evaluation of whether a person was officially a member or a friend but it was also about how a person identified himself or herself and how other people perceived their political affiliation. It was in that sense that Palestinians sometimes referred to their adherence to factions as a sort of belonging, an *intimā*. This was a self-assigned label which some chose to take on while others, like Mahmud, did not. I explore this process by recounting my interaction with Shadi, one of the rare young Palestinians who openly self-identified with a faction. It is ironic that it would take a committed young Palestinian, whose factional belonging would therefore not be in question, to highlight how official ways of looking at factional membership were lacking. I

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<sup>81</sup> As seen in the previous chapter Fatah paid its students about 40 USD a month, amounting to 480 USD a year, while the DFLP paid 200 USD a year.

then recount the story of Lina who, as opposed to Shadi, did not consider herself a member of a faction - even though she would attend closed party meetings.

### *Shadi*

A young man in his thirties, Shadi was a well-known PFLP figure in the camp, which was rare for his age and for any Palestinian faction. Trained as a nurse, his notoriety increased during the 2007 conflict when he remained in the camp, along with a doctor, for several weeks. Shadi became an important mediator for the Red Cross as well as a main contact for the media. Reflecting upon that time he once explained to me that he felt he “was living life and death at the same time.” Shadi was highlighting that this new phase in his life, when he began to play a more prominent role in the community, was ushered in as destruction and death had befallen them. Shadi also linked his activism and his interest in community work to both his parents. His father was a prominent PFLP figure, and his mother a much-loved nurse who inspired him to take up nursing himself. Following the refugees’ return to Nahr el-Bared, Shadi was recognized by the local PFLP leadership for his organizational and mobilization abilities and was asked to lead their efforts in establishing a new NGO in Nahr el-Bared camp.

Throughout the next few years I often visited the NGO and always found it bustling with children and young adults. The NGO lacked any sense of visible hierarchy. It occupied a one-floor house with a caged-in dirt strip that was used as a football training ground. The center had a kitchen, four rooms and a large open hall at the entrance of the house. Shadi’s office door was always open, but I actually seldom found Shadi there; many young Palestinians would sit at his desk and use his computer. The couch and armchair, situated across from the desk, were often overcrowded with young people jostling each other in order to fit more people on them. The rest of the rooms were used in a variety of ways. There were tutorials, *dabka* practice, musical rehearsals, photography and film workshops, as well as football training. The many tables and chairs were

constantly moved around to create the spatial layout desired by the participants. There was also a large terrace that looked onto the football strip, which was also full of children and teenagers chatting, doing homework or playing games. Many European activist groups would come in the summer and participate in events and over the years Shadi developed an important network of international support and funding.

It was therefore with great surprise that I heard in the summer of 2011 that the administrative committee of the NGO had relieved Shadi of his responsibilities and brought a different person to head it. Shadi believed that the leadership wanted to control the funding he was bringing in, while the official version was that he was no longer following orders and acting too independently. It seemed that the two versions corroborated one another. Subsequently, I went to see Shadi to discuss the situation with him and see how this had affected his relationship with the PFLP. I asked him whether he was thinking of leaving the PFLP. Below is an extract from our discussion. While it is long, it is useful to relate in its entirety as it shows how Shadi and I had two different understandings of what faction membership was; consequently, we had difficulty understanding each other.

*Perla:* You didn't think of leaving the PFLP?

*Shadi:* No

*Perla:* Why?

*Shadi:* If there is something wrong, we should not ignore it but fix it.

...

*Perla:* So you want to fix the PFLP like you want.

*Shadi:* You can say not my way, but the *Jabha* way, but not with these people. Before the leaders of the *Jabha* were role models for the people, and Ahmad Saadat is still a good example for leaders inside the *Jabha*. If we look at the *thawra*, of course many factions gave a lot, but if we look at the *Jabha* - Leila Khaled, Ghassan Kanafani, Wadih Haddad, Che Guevara Gaza - it has many people who left an important legacy, so I am proud of these people and I would like people in the *Jabha* today to be like them.<sup>82</sup> So I am disappointed when I see people in the *Jabha* who are not like that.

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<sup>82</sup> 'Che Guevara Gaza' was the nom de guerre of a major PFLP figure in Gaza.

*Perla:* You are attached to the *Jabha*.

*Shadi:* Yes of course.

*Perla:* You wouldn't accept an alternative?

*Shadi:* Of course I would, I am with anyone who works right. Now if Hamas proposes something new, something good, of course I would support them. I would stand with them.

*Perla:* And you would leave the *Jabha*?

*Shadi:* What? No! Why would I leave the *Jabha*? If Hamas wants to do something good, something that is to the benefit of the people, will they refuse the help of someone because he is with the *Jabha*? For example.

*Perla:* No, of course you can help but I mean if you want to join them.

*Shadi:* I can work with them even if I am with the *Jabha*.

*Perla:* Forget about Hamas. Suppose a new group forms and wants to do military work. If you want to work with them you need to join them, you need to leave the *Jabha* and join this new group.

*Shadi:* Why?

*Perla:* You can't remain *Jabha* in the new faction.

*Shadi:* I remain *ibn Jabha* [the son of the *Jabha*] and I do everything in the new faction, but as *ibn Jabha*.

*Perla:* But the logic of a faction is that you become part of it.

*Shadi:* No.

*Perla:* Can you be Fatah in the PFLP?

*Shadi:* I can do something with Fatah.

*Perla:* But you can't be leading a military operation in Fatah if you are with the PFLP.

*Shadi:* You are correct.

*Perla:* So forget about Fatah or Hamas, something new is starting and you figure out that they are working right and in the way you like.

*Shadi:* I would go along with them.

*Perla:* But you need to leave the *Jabha*.

*Shadi:* Who needs to leave the *Jabha*? Me?

*Perla:* Yes.

*Shadi:* OK, I accept that I would stop going to *Jabha* meetings and not to participate in their events or anything factional. But I can't leave the *Jabha* as *Jabha* because I will remain *ibn Jabha*. I will participate in the new faction, and go to their meetings and I will become a member and do everything that is required, to work, but I would still be known as *ibn Jabha*.

Shadi's last sentence is quite revealing. Shadi was laying out a scenario where he would no longer be a member of the PFLP by any official criteria. He would no longer attend meetings nor participate in their events, and would basically 'leave' the PFLP, but still insisted that even in that case he would remain *ibn Jabha* (the son of the *Jabha*). Shadi simply could not envision a

situation where he would not be linked to the *Jabha*, regardless of what the official membership regulations specified. I could not initially understand this point. In my conversation with Shadi I was insistent on envisioning a situation where he would have to leave the *Jabha*, for example if he had to lead a military action with another faction, but Shadi was always surprised at my assertion that he would then need to disassociate himself from the *Jabha*. “What? No! Why would I leave the *Jabha*?” was his answer. While he could not understand why I was implying that he needed to quit the PFLP to join another faction, I could not understand how that precise implication was not obvious to him. The reason for our mutual puzzlement was that we each had a different understanding of factional affiliation. For me it was about being a member according to the official regulations of the faction, while for Shadi it was something personal and was not related to whether he was an official member or not.

My conversation with Shadi also highlighted the use of the word ‘son’ (*ibn*), or ‘daughter’ (*bint*) in reference to a person’s relationship with a faction. Shadi was not the only Palestinian (whether male or female) I met who chose to use those terms. Shadi’s use of the word *ibn* highlighted that he considered the *Jabha* family, that the membership of a faction resembled the membership of a family. This reminds us of Rabieh, the young Palestinian who liked his tea dark because it brought him closer to the *thuwar*’s experience. Just like Rabieh, Shadi was also born into a PFLP family. As I mentioned earlier, Shadi’s father was a prominent PFLP figure in Nahr el-Bared camp. When I asked his father whether he believed he had influenced his son in choosing a path similar to his, he did not seem sure. “God knows!” was his immediate answer as he waved his hand in the air. He continued: “I used to encourage [my children] to do the right things, but then they stopped listening to me!” We were in his home at the time, sitting in his living room and he pointed to a rather uncommon red Bob Marley poster hanging on the wall. “Who is this?” he asked with obvious disapproval. This seemed like an attempt to illustrate to me that not only had his son stopped listening to him, but that he, the father, could no longer even control what hanged on the walls of

his own home. Shadi answered back laughingly, “Doesn’t he look like me? It’s my picture” pointing of his own curly long hair. His father brushed off his answer, “No really, who is he?” “We got used to having Che Guevara as a symbol of the left, this person also sang for freedom” Shadi replied. His father seemed unconvinced, at which point Shadi asked me to back him up. I answered that it was Bob Marley and that he did sing for freedom and that he would probably like his music. “I see, so like Sheikh Imam then” Mustapha exclaimed, which made Shadi and I laugh. Shadi’s father realized that he had unintentionally made a joke and laughed with us.<sup>83</sup>

Shadi added that his father was rarely home when he was a child; he was either travelling or residing in different bases around Lebanon. While he used to be afraid of his father, he was also proud of him, as “at that time a fighter was a good thing, I was proud, it was about sacrifice.” Shadi mostly saw him in the PFLP summer camps that he attended as a child. “A small organized army (*jaysh mnazzam ṣghīr*)” was what he felt they were. He added that the camps were quite rigorous and that punishments “actually meant something.” They had to crawl bare-chested on thorns as a form of reprimand. He liked it though, as he could then brag about his scratches to his friends. I later realised that his early fear of his father was linked to the severe punishments that he used to deliver to his children. Shadi added that they also used to sing revolutionary songs, learn about Palestine and perform plays. “We used to see the *fidā’ī*, he was the main picture, so whatever we could do to be like him made us happy” he explained. Shadi’s childhood was typical of young Palestinians who were raised in a faction family. However his self-identification with the PFLP was unusual for Palestinians of his age. I asked him to elaborate:

*Perla:* It’s incredible how attached you are to the *Jabha*.

*Shadi:* Yes of course, I am proud of being in the *Jabha*. For its principles, for its history, for its ideas. ... It is great! Honestly, it educated me. It is one

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<sup>83</sup> Sheikh Imam (1918-1995) was a famous Egyptian singer known for his songs for social justice.



of the factions that made me hold on to the cause and made me love Palestine more than anything else.

Here lies the double meaning of '*ibn.*' For Shadi the PFLP was not just a family, something that was personal and close to him, but it was also a learning centre that taught and educated him. He was in a sense the 'offspring' of the PFLP, its descendant. Shadi later explained to me that his involvement in the PFLP increased in high school as he participated in a sit-in with many of his friends in Beirut aimed at pressuring UNRWA to open a secondary school for Palestinians in Tripoli.<sup>84</sup> Once the sit-in succeeded, Shadi became active in developing a PFLP scout troop and PFLP youth group in Nahr el-Bared. He explained that he had begun by enlisting his close friends who were from PFLP families as well as non-factional families. With time their activities increased: they had summer camps, musical groups, and political meetings with Palestinians of the *thawra* generation who would discuss their experiences. They started visiting the martyr's cemetery, commemorating national events, and organizing traditional Palestinian weddings. The PFLP youth centre had a computer room, a library and an exhibition of Palestinian heritage. It was these activities and the human relations that they fostered that cultivated in Shadi a sense of belonging and a feeling of being forever related to the PFLP. His association with it could not be described as the satisfaction of internal regulations. It was an identification as strong as any family identification.

Identifying oneself as a son or daughter of a faction was rare among young Palestinians. For the older generation it was more common, as during the *thawra* the factions were much more active and people often felt a deep and close association to them. For many, their identification with factions was so strong that they felt they would betray it by joining another faction. Such was the case of Fatima, quoted at the beginning of this section. Fatima left Fatah after experiencing firsthand the corruption of officials stationed in Beirut; she

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<sup>84</sup> Up until that time, Palestinians in the north of Lebanon had to either pay for secondary schooling or stop their education

highlighted to me how she could never get affiliated to another faction and that as a result she remained 'outside.' This behaviour was contrasted with the younger generation, whose sense of belonging was less deep. This was also the case with Lina, to whose story I turn next.

### *Lina*

Lina was a university graduate in her late 20s with an infectious smile. I quickly formed an affinity for her as she was highly inquisitive and always keen on partaking in group discussions but would, nevertheless, always second-guess herself. As I got to know her more I realized that she had vast experience working in the camp and was highly knowledgeable in community affairs. However, she remained humble and held other people's opinions in high regard. She was a good listener. I first met her, and would regularly see her, in the Nahr el-Bared Reconstruction Commission compound where she worked.<sup>85</sup> Located next to the Lebanese Army checkpoint that marked the entrance to the old camp, its premises consisted of several air-conditioned metal trailers painted in white. Lina and her colleague Rania usually sat in an inner room lined with filing cabinets while colleagues would come in and out handling different tasks.

Lina often stated that politics was a 'headache' in which she was neither interested nor involved. She added that her dislike of factions, which for her were synonymous with 'politics', did not mean that she was indifferent to the Palestinian cause. On the contrary, she just "didn't care about being in a faction." Her co-worker Rania, sitting with us, interceded and added that Palestinians needed to be part of a faction to have a 'back' (*dahir*), evoking the image of factions as edifices that encompassed their members and protected them. However, later in our conversation Lina explained that she was in the DFLP

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<sup>85</sup> The reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared camp was a complex joint endeavor from UNRWA and the Nahr el-Bared Reconstruction Commission (NBRC) whose analysis lies outside the scope of this study.

student union. This came as a surprise to both Rania and I. She explained, “I entered the DFLP student union because it was the closest to me, and I knew the most people in it, they are in the same area where I live and my friends are there too.” Rania voiced her surprise “I didn’t know this and I don’t like these things at all.” Lina continued by explaining that she was still in the student union “until now I am in the union but I don’t consider myself to be politically affiliated (*munazzami siyāsiyyan*).” Confused by how she did not consider herself a member if she was technically a member, I asked her to elaborate.

*Lina:* Each faction has a student union. They say that this is separate from politics when you first join, so you imagine yourself getting into something that works for students, for student goals. ... and it is supposedly separate from politics, and I don’t like politics. ... [But] when I started to learn more, I started to see that things are not separate at all. It is true that their main goals are the students and the universities and when we want to mobilize about a topic it is all about scholarships and university matters ... but there is still a link to their political ideology that you may not believe in.

...

*Lina:* I support their general political demands, the right of return and the refusal of naturalization in Lebanon (*tawṭīn*). These are not just slogans, they really work on this. They have meetings and they go see members of parliament and ministers. They are not silent. But I am not with their internal political goals.

*Perla:* Which are?

*Lina:* Now I am talking about these things? [Laughter]

*Perla:* Please continue.

*Lina:* I am not with their internal politics, which is secularism, political secularism. They separate religion from politics. Now I studied social science and I read a bit of philosophy, so I know how those people they talk about think, they follow Lenin and I am not too convinced of these things. I am wary of them. But on matters related to students and Palestine I am with them.

This discussion with Lina was revealing. Lina believed that the DFLP student union was actively and effectively trying to improve the situation of students. She later told me of a new project they were working on about establishing a Palestinian university in Lebanon. She enjoyed attending those meetings as the topic interested her and she “liked to know what was going on.” However Lina was not convinced by the ideology of the DFLP and was uneasy at

how the DFLP student union had attempted to disguise that connection in order to get her to participate in their meetings. This increased her general dislike for factions, which was always something 'suspicious' (*mashbūh*). She explained:

I feel like [politics] is confusing and a lot of talk and talk and talk, and now politics is more like problems and the goal is no longer the country, or the people, but the goal is to destroy someone or someone take authority. So I don't spend my time on this, I don't care who is in charge or who his deputy is or who is in control. I really don't care. I think that they [the factions] are all the same.

Lina's dislike of factions was related to her lack of trust in 'politics' in general. It was related to how factions were perceived in the Palestinian camps and she worried about how her participation might be viewed by the community. She explained, "as soon as you talk to someone people consider you to be affiliated with this someone. And I told you I don't like political factions and I will be considered a member of them." Her personal involvement in local meetings was not enough for her to counter the general feeling of distrust she felt. She therefore did not want to appear to be affiliated, which explained why her close friend and colleague did not know of her involvement. Additionally, she did not feel a sense of belonging to the organization although according to the DFLP's internal regulations, she was a member. This raises the question: was Lina a member or not? We may want to say that she was a member since the DFLP considered her to be so. However, if she did not see herself as a member could she still be counted as one?

The official membership regulations were about drawing lines, lines that separated those on the 'outside' from those on the 'inside.' However a closer examination revealed that it was impossible to draw that line in practice. Looking at how individuals spoke of their own involvement in factions added another layer of complexity. Political membership cannot be seen as the fulfilment of a contractual agreement as it was also about a sense of belonging that was nurtured over time through personal and trusting relations with other faction

members. The examples of Shadi and Lina were constructive in their opposition. Shadi felt he belonged to a faction to the point where he identified himself as its offspring, regardless of whether he was technically a member or not, while Lina, who believed in the work that the DFLP student union was doing and was attending their meetings, did not feel she was politically affiliated. Lina expressed her desire to leave the DFLP, as she felt she could not be with them “one-hundred percent.” I asked her if she could simply stop attending meetings. She explained that that was not enough, she needed to make sure that her name was “crossed-out” otherwise they would always consider her one of their own. It is to a discussion of ending factional affiliations that I turn to next.

### **‘I used to be in the Progressive Women Association:’ Leaving factions**

You say you are independent but really you are with the DFLP!

Half-serious, half-joking accusation hurled at Dr. Salah who smiled in return as he was signing up as an ‘independent’ for the media committee of the 15 May 2011 march to the southern Lebanese border.  
Beirut, 10 April 2011

Being part of a faction has become a crime!

Ghassan, young Palestinian, Beirut, 12 Oct 2011

Investigating the process of ending factional membership is particularly interesting in light of the current premium attached to ‘independent’ and ‘grassroots’ initiatives. Many of the ills in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon were attributed to the incompetence and disunity of Palestinian factions. It was in light of such criticisms that being factionalized became an indictment and many scholars (Kortam 2011; R. Sayigh 2011; Suleiman 1999) point to ‘grassroots’ organizations as being in opposition to factions. In this section I look at one such grassroots initiative whose rise and fall I witnessed during the Nahr el-Bared battle of 2007. *Rajjiin* (‘We will return’) was a group of young Palestinians from Nahr el-Bared camp who regrouped in Beddawi camp, where they were taking

shelter.<sup>86</sup> They attempted to make their voices heard to the Lebanese government and to their leadership. It was through their activities that I initially came to meet the Hamdan family, whom I introduced in the previous chapter. I explore this initiative to highlight how difficult it was to draw a distinction between ‘factionalized’ Palestinians and ‘independents’ through an examination of my own understandings of and reactions to Abu Ali and Rabieh’s involvement with *Rajjin* and their subsequent rapprochement to the PFLP upon their return to Nahr el-Bared camp. Finally, I show how my understanding of factional membership was later qualified once I delved deeper into their lives and listened to their stories.

### *Rajjin*

Walking into the garden of the Ghassan Kanafani nursery of Beddawi camp, I saw a group of young Palestinians sitting and chatting together. Several plastic chairs had been brought outside and everyone was seated in the shade underneath a vineyard facing a deserted children’s playground painted in blue. It was the second week of the Nahr el-Bared battle and many Palestinians had fled and sought shelter in Beddawi camp. A friend introduced me to the group, which went by the name of *Rajjin*. Compelled by the ongoing destruction of their camp they wanted ‘to do something.’ A discussion was in progress about the need to organize a sit-in in the school’s courtyard to demand the end of the fighting. Having escaped from Nahr el-Bared a week earlier, the only form of mobilization they had witnessed from different organizations, whether the factions, UNRWA, or local and international NGOs, was the distribution of food, blankets and T-shirts. While relief assistance was needed, they worried that everyone’s focus rested solely on delivering immediate relief aid and not on halting the destruction of their homes. They wanted to make clear that what they needed was not cardboard boxes (*karātīn*), which epitomized relief, but a return to their homes. Ali was one of the more vocal activists in the group and following several

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<sup>86</sup> *Rajjin* was chosen instead of *ā'idīn* to stress that the demand for return to Nahr el-Bared camp should not be confused with the greater goal of return to Palestine.

meetings he introduced me to his family, who were living at the time in the corridors of the UNRWA school.

Ali explained to me that after fleeing from Nahr el-Bared camp they first sought shelter with friends, and only came to the school several days later. By this point the school had already been occupied, with at least three different families in each classroom. He then noticed that they could claim the space that extended from the end of the hallway, which was lined with windows, to the first classroom door, without interfering with anyone else's private space. They marked their space by hanging a blue tarpaulin across the corridor next to the classroom door, which gave them a personal space of about five by eight meters. Our discussions during those days revolved around who Fatah al-Islam was, the fear that the onslaught on Nahr el-Bared was a pre-planned campaign to destroy the camp and render its residents permanently homeless, and the role that factions played (or, more accurately, did not play) during the battle.<sup>87</sup> In particular Ali's younger brother, Rabieh, was highly critical of the factions, arguing that they should have intervened militarily to disarm Fatah al-Islam. "What's the point of having arms if we do not use them to protect our camp?" he often repeated. He explained that he was a trained fighter in the PFLP and was on guard duty during the beginning of the battle, but he left the PFLP and handed in his weapon when his supervisor told him on the third day of the battle that 'the battle does not concern us' (*mā ilna bi hal ḥarb*). He felt betrayed and departed from the camp with the first wave of refugees.

Rabieh was not the only one disappointed by the inaction of Palestinian political factions. A general sense of frustration could easily be felt and it was what contributed to the making of *Rajjin*. While they began to organize sit-ins they soon decided that they needed to increase their visibility and called for a protest on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, about six weeks after the fighting in Nahr el-Bared

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<sup>87</sup> Several Palestinian camps were destroyed during the Lebanese civil war (Tal al-Zaatar and Jisr al-Basha camps) and by Israeli aerial strikes (Nabatieh camp) and were never rebuilt.

broke out. That day the school courtyard filled with thousands of refugees, well beyond the expectations of the young organizers. Soon the march started out along Beddawi's main road. As the leading group turned left into one of the camp's alley, other protesters continued along the main road and exited the camp. They were marching towards Nahr el-Bared, which was still fifteen kilometres away, when they encountered a Lebanese military roadblock. From frontline eyewitness reports that I gathered that same day, I learned that the people in the front sat on the ground, implicitly indicating to the army that they neither aimed to storm the roadblock nor were they willing to go back to Beddawi camp. However, after firing warning shots in the air, the army began shooting at the protesters.<sup>88</sup> As a result, two young Palestinian men were killed and several were injured. This experience was particularly traumatic because protesters were not only attacked by the army but also by local residents who wielded knives and sticks, attacking fleeing protesters who had sought refuge in the hallways of buildings adjacent to the protest.

Following the march and the death of the two protesters, the Palestinian ambassador to Lebanon, Abbas Zaki, condemned the protest and declared that Palestinians should respect the army and should not "cause disruptions" or "cause any further strain on the army" (as quoted in Ghazal 2007). In another statement Zaki referred to the protesters as "*fawdawiyyn*," loosely translated as anarchists (Nahrelbared 2007). Abbas Zaki's statement became famous among the young men and women of *Rajiin*. To them it reflected the distance that existed between them and their leadership as they were risking their lives to return home and their official political representative was calling them 'anarchists'. But more importantly, they feared that these statements were a signal to the Lebanese army that the Palestinian leadership would not object to their arrest. A

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<sup>88</sup> For more information see Amnesty International, *Lebanon – Amnesty International Report 2008: Human Rights in Lebanese Republic*, (Beirut: Amnesty International, 2008). Available at <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/lebanon/report-2008>>, accessed March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2013 and *Human Rights Watch*, Lebanon: Investigate Army Shooting of Palestinian Demonstrators, [Press Release] July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2007. Available at <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2007/07/03/lebanon-investigate-army-shooting-palestinian-demonstrators>>, accessed March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2013.



few days later Fatah released a statement, referring to the organizers as “reckless young men” (*shabāb ṭāyshīn*) who sought to destroy Beddawi camp. At that point the young refugees felt that they not only had to worry about the Lebanese army but they also had to fear the political factions. They continued to meet with each other, and to assist activists and journalists visiting the camp, however they refrained from organizing further direct action. These events clearly situated the *Rajjin* initiative as an ‘independent’ grassroots initiative and positioned its organizers as being ‘outside’ the factions. However, as we will see upon closer inspection no such line could be drawn. I will illustrate this point through an exploration of the evolution of Abu Ali and Rabieh’s relation with the PFLP as they were both main organisers of *Rajjin*.

*‘It was not your average friendship’*

When I first met Abu Ali, as part of the *Rajjin* activities, he explained that he was a ‘friend’ of the PFLP. This meant that he was not an official member of the faction but a supporter who attended events periodically. It was a few years later that I heard the entire story of Abu Ali’s resignation caused by a political disagreement. He explained that in the early 90s he was outraged by the mass emigration of Former Soviet Union Jews to Israel, which was the result of the perestroika reforms, which led to the revamping of the Soviet exit visa policies.<sup>89</sup> He believed that the leaders of the Soviet Union, and subsequently of Russia, were encouraging this mass immigration to Israel. He went on to explain that he had a meeting to discuss the issue at which time he raised his opposition. In his words:

In the meetings we had, I was against the perestroika; I was the only one against it. I registered my opposition and my reaction was nervous (*aṣabī*).

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<sup>89</sup> For more information see Majid Al-Haj, *Immigration and Ethnic Formation in a Deeply Divided Society: The Case of the 1990s Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union in Israel* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004) at 83-84.

In one of the meetings in the office, there was a Lenin statue on the table; from my anger and frustration I hit it with my shoe.<sup>90</sup>

[Laughter]

....

What infuriated me; what made my blood boil, was that, I adopted your ideas, I, as a Palestinian with a rightful cause. And now I see the Soviet Jews immigrating to Palestine and you are allowing them and providing them with the means to go to my country that was stolen from me and that I am fighting to return to. Look at the contradiction! ... Honestly my mind could not handle it. Maybe my actions cannot be understood, maybe my colleagues could not accept them but in my opinion they were justified. I have a cause (*sāhib qadiyyi*) and to see those who considered themselves my allies [help my enemies]. So yes my reaction was strong, maybe I should not have acted like that, maybe I should have communicated my position in a more civilized way.

After hitting the bronze Lenin statue with his shoe, Abu Ali was sent to the PFLP correctional committee and then demoted. At that point he decided to leave the organization. He explained that he handed in his resignation, which was discussed and accepted. He then returned his weapon, became a civilian, and opened a thrift shop. This was a decade and a half prior to the Nahr el-Bared conflict.

Upon the Hamdan family's return to Nahr el-Bared camp, after the end of combat, Abu Ali starting working with the head of the PFLP in Lebanon on increasing the media coverage of the camp. By that time the head of the PFLP in Lebanon was also the official liaison between the Palestinian Embassy and the Lebanese government on the reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared camp. Abu Ali was highly qualified for this position. He was a seasoned writer, an active member of his community, and a person with substantial relations with journalists in Lebanon. However, this job opportunity made me wonder if he had 'returned' to the PFLP. When I inquired he answered that no, he was not a member of the PFLP and that the position was not with the PFLP but with the PLO. This was

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<sup>90</sup> The shoe was considered the lowest and dirtiest part of the body and any association with it was considered insulting and degrading see Sharif Kanaana, 'Palestinian Humor During the Gulf War', *Journal of Folklore Research*, 32/1 (1995), 65-75 at 67. Abu Ali later connected his incident with Muntadhar al-Zaidi's action of throwing his shoe at the then-President of the United States George W. Bush. To Abu Ali 'life is about taking a stand.'

technically correct. However, others in the camp pointed out to me that it was the PFLP who provided him with a computer and an Internet connection, which seemed to implicate him in the 'internal' workings of the faction. I had operated under this assumption for quite some time and was suspicious of Abu Ali whenever he told me that he was not a PFLP member.

Around that same time I began seeing Rabieh at the PFLP youth center. When I asked him whether he had returned to the PFLP, he explained that while he was still upset at the leadership's decision to stand idle during the battle, it was impossible for him "to deny his origins" (*yinkur aslu*). This was a surprising statement following the scathing denunciations he had directed at the PFLP leadership just a few months earlier. He expanded "it is difficult, I would be upset at them, I witnessed a lot of things that I was unhappy with and I say that I don't want to be [with them], but after that, without even realizing it, I go back, I return and I enter the *markaz* (center)." At first glance, by using the word 'origins' it seemed that Rabieh was implying that what he described as an almost involuntary return to the PFLP youth center was the result of a longstanding family association with the faction. However upon further discussion it became clear that 'origin' did not refer to his family but rather to the strong personal ties he had built with other people in the faction. In his words:

Most of my friends are in the *Jabha*. [My brother in-law] I met him when he was very young in the *Jabha*, through him I met other people. I was the oldest among them and they respected me. I felt we were friends, like am their older brother. We would think together; work together; do things together.

...

We were friends not just in the *Jabha*. We would sleep over at each other's homes at night; we would decide today we are all staying at Muhammad's; tomorrow we stay with Ali. We spent our nights and days together. For example, my friends called my mother, mother and I called their mother, mother.

We have already seen in the previous chapter that the strength of a person's relation with a faction really reflected the strength of that person's link

with other comrades. In this case, we see how those personal ties should also alter the way we look at 'ending' factional memberships. What Rabieh was highlighting was that even if he disagreed with a particular political position of the PFLP, which in this case was their stands during the 2007 conflict, it did not mean that he could or would cut his links with his friends. Trying to determine whether Rabieh was 'factionalized' or 'not' was simply impossible. It was this precise point that I had missed in my earlier understanding of Abu Ali's new work opportunity. Abu Ali's association with the head of the PFLP was not the reflection of a 'covert membership' in the PFLP; it was quite simply the reflection of a long-term trusted friendship, the strength of which was eloquently related to me by Abu Ali himself:

[I am still friends] with everyone [in the PFLP]; we visit each other, things are normal between us. What joined us together was something big, not a small cookie (*Yalli kān yirbutna shi kbīr, mish ḥabbi*). It was not your average friendship. We were comrades in struggle, comrades in arms (*rafiq nidāl, rafiq silāḥ*). We eat together; we slept together in the cold and in winter. We guarded together. We did a lot of things together. You can't forget that. We shared one tent, one blanket.

Through Abu Ali's description of his relationship with his comrades we get an idea of the strong ties that he developed with his peers. What linked Abu Ali to his comrades was a lifetime of shared experiences in what were sometimes life-threatening circumstances. These ties were not going to end just because he had 'left' the PFLP. This did not mean that he could 'infiltrate' the PFLP by having a close friendship with its leadership. Assuming so was based on looking at factions as bounded structures where only members were allowed 'inside'. Rather, this served to highlight how difficult it was to separate the 'faction,' seen as an entity with a life of its own, from the personal relations that were its basis. When the head of the PFLP chose Abu Ali as his media consultant he was not only looking for someone with proper qualifications; more importantly he was looking for someone he could trust. After all, mutual trust was paramount when

working on raising the visibility of a camp that was declared a military zone and that required journalists to obtain special military permits to access it.

Examining the process of ending factional membership was fruitful as it highlighted how a relation with a faction was not a relation with an impersonal framework defined by its ideology but was rather a relation between people. Rabieh and Abu Ali's examples showed us that attempting to classify Palestinians as being 'factionalized' or 'independent' was not appropriate to properly understanding the dynamics that animated factional politics in Palestinian camps. For both Abu Ali and Rabieh, their relationship with the PFLP was not just a relationship with an ideology but more importantly it was the product of long-lasting and trusted friendships. As a result, we realize that looking at factional membership as a classification that defined a person's relative position vis-à-vis a structure is no longer appropriate. Factional affiliation could not be separated from the personal relationship that brought it into being; it was impossible to delineate the political associations from personal ones.

The stories of Palestinians' relations with factions did not all feature deep friendship ties like those experienced by Abu Ali and Rabieh. While some did, others included personal disputes over non-political issues, such as a disagreement over the location of a new cafeteria, which then was a cause to terminate factional affiliation. Individuals implicated in such behaviour would label it as 'tribal' (*ashā'irī*). This served to highlight that Palestinians themselves viewed the intermixing of political and personal relations as non-desirable and that it reflected, in their view, a 'backward' form of political behaviour that should be eradicated in 'modern' times. However what these stories really point to was the importance of trust in building political associations. Indeed if individuals had personal disagreement and felt wronged by each other, it was unlikely that they would then collaborate in political work regardless of whether they espoused a similar world-view or not.

In the context of repeated forced expulsions, wars, severe political oppression, as well as social and legal discrimination, it was not surprising that Palestinians placed a high value on their personal relations and on trust. The image we get of factions from examining people's life histories was that of a network of people coming together with varying degrees of cohesion, which could change with time. Factions lost the appearance of bounded entities defined by ideology. A friend made this point to me early on in my fieldwork but I could not grasp it as I was still looking at Palestinian political factions as entities with boundaries. I was sitting with him in his home asking him how do factions destroy so many 'grassroots' initiatives, he answered that the factions were not something outside this community; that 'we are the factions.'

## **Conclusion**

Reinscribing the agency of Palestinian refugees into accounts of factional (re)production highlights that factional membership should not be looked at as the evaluation of a person's position in a present moment vis-à-vis a structure, but rather needs to be seen as an evolving story of human interaction. Factional adherence was not about the respect of internal regulations but was also about how Palestinians identified themselves. Additionally, we saw how the relationship between a person and a faction should not be imagined as the relationship between a person and a building that a person 'entered' or 'left,' but rather it was about personal relations and those carried a lot more complexity and ambiguity which was not accounted for if we expected them to fit into ready-made categories.

The findings of this chapter, building on those of the last, serve to question three assumptions that underlie much academic work on Palestinian political factions. The first assumption is that factions are defined by their ideologies, that they are bounded and that they have a life of their own. In the previous chapter we saw that 'joining factions' was not a matter of joining a structure based on an

ideology; it was about joining family and friends. In this chapter we saw that factional membership should not be seen as the measurement of the distance that existed between a person and a faction. Rather it put in question the very notion that factions were entities that stood outside people, and that observers (such as myself) could measure the distance separating Palestinians from factions. Factions had no independent existence; they were quite simply people coming together with varying degrees of trust relations rather than ideological positions.

The alternative view I presented, in the present and previous chapter, was precipitated by the different methodological approach I took, which consisted of approaching factions not from the top or bottom but laterally, through the immersion in the daily life of homes. In light of these conclusions, a new line of questioning arises. Palestinian refugees were well aware that personal relations underlined factional relations; however the everyday terminology they used still reflected an imagination of factions as buildings with 'walls' and 'ceilings' that they 'entered' and 'left'. Could a lateral view help me elucidate this puzzling observation? In the next two chapters I look at the practices of aid distribution, physical representation and factionalism and show how they served to inscribe a distance between people and factions; the very distance that disappeared by looking into people's life stories. The central question that the next two chapters seek to answer is: how do people coming together appear to create the effect of a structure with a life of its own?

## 7. AL-FAṢĀ'IL ZAY AL-DAKĀKĪN: 'FACTIONS ARE LIKE SHOPS'

### AID, DISCIPLINE, AND THE STRUCTURAL EFFECT



Jars of red pepper paste distributed by an NGO in Nahr el-Bared. (Photograph: Perla Issa)

Now [the factions] are all *dakākīn* [shops]. Meaning now a student gets 43,000LB [30 USD]. He doesn't give the money to his parents anymore; he goes and buys cigarettes. They bring him to the protests, it's not that he goes of his own will; no they bring him. If he doesn't come to the protest, he doesn't get paid the next day. Payday is always after the protest. And when they started giving him 100 USD he stopped working or trying to get an education. He just goes and guards the offices for a couple hours. He lives by night and sleeps in the day, smoking all the time.

Abu Rashid, *thawra* generation, Shatila camp, 7 December 2010



*Al-faṣā'il zay al-dakākīn* (factions are like shops) was a common expression in the camps in Lebanon. While it seemed initially puzzling, with time I came to see the points of similarity. A *dukkāni* (singular of *dakākīn*) was not just an average shop; it alluded to a hole-in-the-wall, small, broken-down, dusty, and old shop - just the image that Palestinians wanted to associate with factions nowadays. But there was more to the metaphor. Shops carried advertisements marketing their goods; factions carried posters publicizing their martyrs (*shuhadā'*). Shops were sometimes deceptive about the quality of their products; factions' self-proclaimed martyrs were sometimes people dying of old age. Shops engaged in fierce contests with their competitors; factions engaged in heated confrontations with their opponents. Shops had owners; factions had leaders. Shop owners unilaterally directed business; faction leaders unilaterally decided on policy. Shop owners controlled finances; faction leaders controlled funding.

The simile, however, seemed to have its limits. In particular I felt there was one glaring contradiction: the type of relations that was assumed to govern both entities. Shops were impersonal; a customer could enter into one, not find what he or she wanted and then move on to the next. Yet, as we saw in the previous two chapters, those were not the type of relations that seemed to take place 'inside' factions. Indeed we saw how Palestinians had contact with factions based on *personal* relations, which stands in sharp contrast to a customer's relation to a shop. Additionally, the image of shops conferred an edifice with walls and a ceiling that a person 'entered' or 'left.' Again we saw how that imagery did not correspond to people's relations with factions. Can these two images, of an impersonal building and a personalized network, be reconciled? Looking for an answer, I found my first clue in Abu Rashid's description of factional shops quoted above. The clue also helped me answer another pressing question I had, mainly what did factions sell? That was after all a shop's defining activity: trade. The answer seemed to be 'money.' What factions were selling, according to Abu Rashid, was dollar bills. This may seem counter-intuitive as usually a customer pays money to receive a good; in this case it seemed individuals 'paid' with their

presence at protests to receive financial benefits. While I did not initially give this metaphor much attention, I later realized its sharpness in highlighting how practices of aid distribution served to draw factions as impersonal structures with particular spatial characteristics, those of a perimeter and a ceiling.

This chapter examines how factions transmute from personal networks to disembodied edifices through the provision of care. I elucidate this mutation through an ethnographic examination of how Palestinian refugees obtained aid in the Palestinian camps of Lebanon. Palestinian political factions, along with local and international NGOs, as well as UNRWA, provided a wide range of services whose central concern was the welfare of the population. These included health, educational, relief, development, economic, and cultural programs. These activities illustrate well how the goal of political power in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon was the administration of life in all its details, or governmentality, as Foucault termed this modern form of government (Foucault 2006). In this chapter I look at practices of aid distribution from the perspective of aid receivers, not aid givers, through my immersion in the daily life of homes as opposed to being embedded in the bureaucratic apparatus of factions or NGOs. In particular I examine the efforts the Talal family exerted in order to cover the tuition fees of their second son, Ahmad. This endeavour exemplifies how Palestinians navigated the web of factions and NGOs in a desire to better their lives. Through this example I make four interrelated points.

Firstly, I show how in the name of distributing aid fairly, a whole series of surveillance and monitoring techniques have been brought to bear on the population. I draw parallels between these methods and what Foucault (1991) calls discipline and highlight how aid distribution processes worked in a similar way generating a form of productive power. I also show how these practices served to embody a hierarchy with an above that was in control and a below that lacked it. Secondly, building upon Ferguson and Gupta's (2002) notion of the 'spatialization of the state', I examine how these disciplinary practices imbued

factions with particular topographical dimensions. Factions lost their appearance of networks and took on the cloak of an overarching and encompassing reality, which existed 'above' and 'surrounded' the people it cared for. Thirdly, I argue that it would be wrong to end our analysis with a description of factions as a hierarchical organization, with a 'top' that had power and control over those 'below.' Following Mitchell (1988, 1990, 1991), I show how these particular practices served to draw factions as impersonal entities, as containers that existed prior to and separately from the very people and practices that brought them into being. Finally, I underline how this very process also created the conditions under which the provision of services increased mistrust in the community, breaking it down and hindering collective political action.

### **'Ahmad birakkid'**

My day started with hot, delicious homemade *za'tar* and cheese *mana'ish*.<sup>91</sup> It was a ritual: every week or two all the young girls of the family, sisters and cousins, would congregate for an all-girl sleepover at the house of Mariam, Um Muhammad's unmarried sister. The most eagerly anticipated moment was, however, the morning when Mariam would sit on the floor with a gas powered oven to her left, a large green plastic basin brimming with risen dough to her right, and a small wooden table between her legs. Taking a lump of dough between her hands, she would roll it into a compact ball and then flatten it into a perfect circle. She would then top it with either cheese, a mixture of *za'tar* and olive oil, or upon request she would make a 'cocktail' as they called a mixed cheese and *za'tar man'ushi*. When several had been made she would place them in the oven while piercing the dough from time to time to prevent them from puffing in the heat. The rest of us would anxiously wait, teacup in hands, while the sweet scent of freshly baked bread worked our appetite to unbearable levels. Mariam was always the last one to eat as she was always determined to make

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<sup>91</sup> *mana'ish* (*man'ushi* in singular form) were traditional Arabic flatbreads topped with a variety of ingredients but most commonly with cheese, a mixture of thyme and oil, or ground meat with tomatoes and onions.

enough *mana'ish* for herself, her three married sisters, as well as their entire families; everyone, present or absent, was accounted for.

Congregated around Mariam, her sisters were engaged in a conversation comparing their children's daily expenses. Who was willing to take a homemade sandwich to school or college with them instead of purchasing one? How many teas did they consume from the cafeteria? How much did they spend on cigarettes and on tobacco for the *narghile*? Fatima, Um Muhammad's younger sister, was the driver of the conversation, as she seemed to be frustrated the most about her youngest sons' expenses. After accounting for transportation, cafeteria expenses and smoking habits he appeared to be the highest spender by about 2,000 LBP per day (1.33 USD). In contrast, Ahmad, Um Muhammad's son seemed to be the role model. He was not only a careful spender but also, and much more importantly, he had honed a vital skill. Um Muhammad explained: 'Ahmad *birakkid*'. '*Birakkid*' literally means 'runs around.' In this context it referred to the unending labour involved in applying to different organizations for aid. That labour was time-consuming and took a lot of effort from Ahmad, as well as his family. It involved a lot of physical displacement to different NGOs, factional offices, government bureaus, embassies and UN agencies, which was required at all levels of the process from obtaining information, to applying and following up.

I had experienced this 'running around' from my first days living with the family, especially as it pertained to securing aid to cover Ahmad's tuition fees. This aid was obtained from a Palestinian political faction, the Palestinian embassy, and an international NGO. However at no point in time did the family know how much each party would be paying to know how much will be left over for them to cover.

The uncertainty of how the family was to cover Ahmad's tuition fees dominated the family's daily conversations. My attention was first drawn to it on

my second week with the family. Ahmad had just returned from a workshop on 'youth empowerment' with an international NGO.<sup>92</sup> He and his mother began discussing how much aid the NGO would probably give him as a form of help towards his tuition fees. Ahmad had just heard from the workshop leader that the minimum would be 250 USD but he was hoping that he would receive at least 350 USD as the college he was attending was more expensive than the public Lebanese University where most of the other workshop participants were studying. Ahmad was majoring in Business Administration in a technical college and his tuition was of two million Lebanese pounds (about 1,334 USD). This was a considerable sum, the equivalent of almost nine months of expenditure for an individual refugee.<sup>93</sup> Ahmad was significantly distressed as his exams were two weeks away and the family needed to pay an upcoming tuition instalment without which Ahmad would not be allowed to take the assessments. He explained that on examination day he had to present a receipt to be able to enter into the classroom. He had highlighted the urgency of the matter to his workshop leader, a fellow young Palestinian from Beddawi camp who was a recent graduate from the Beirut Arab University, but the workshop leader had responded that 'the matter was not in his hands' and that usually these things 'take time.' Time was a luxury the family did not have. They began weighing their options.

Ahmad had also applied to the Palestinian embassy for financial assistance, but had not received an answer from them. The embassy had recently started a new fund for students, the President Mahmud Abbas Fund.

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<sup>92</sup> I put quotation marks around the expression 'youth empowerment' as Ahmad felt frustrated rather than empowered by the program. He explained that the workshop leaders had asked the participants to select a project, which they would help them campaign on. The girls chose to work on schoolteacher violence against students in UNRWA schools while the guys chose to work on regaining access to the camp's football field, which had been appropriated by the Lebanese military. However, the workshop leaders ended up discouraging the boys from working on regaining their right to play football in the camp's field, arguing that it would be too confrontational to campaign against the army. While Ahmad agreed with that assessment he nevertheless thought that the workshop title needed to be amended. At the end, the guys worked with the girls on school violence, with the condition that they address all school violence, from teachers to students as well as from students to teachers.

<sup>93</sup> This estimate is based on the average monthly expenditure for Palestinian refugees living in camps in Lebanon, see Chaaban et al., 'Socio-Economic Survey of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon', at 28.

However the fund's mandate was unclear. Ahmad believed it only helped first year students and it had, indeed, helped fund his education the previous year. He heard from other students in the camp that it wouldn't fund his second year but his parents had insisted that he should apply anyway. When Ahmad's father had handed in the application several months ago, the embassy's employee did not provide him with a clear answer as to whether the application would be accepted or not. He explained that 'the decisions come from Palestine.' Um Muhammad added that the prior year the embassy's contribution did not even cover the entire sum and that the family had to pay an additional 600,000 LB (400 USD), which was raised with the help of Ahmad's brother Mahmud.

Another source of assistance was Islamic Jihad. Ahmad was part of their student group and they usually contributed to his education.<sup>94</sup> I already knew that Ahmad received a monthly stipend that was slightly higher than other comrades as he also had more responsibilities. He was entrusted with opening and closing the apartment they used as a youth centre, distributing salaries to the other members of *al-Rabita*, and sometimes paying the bills. Ahmad had already asked his supervisor if they could provide him with their contribution at this time but he had replied that 'matters were not in his hands' as the decision, of how much aid would be given and when, 'came from Palestine.'

Having exhausted all options, Um Muhammad tried to reassure her son that 'everything will work out in the end' since 'everyone knows our situation.' This seemed to calm him for the moment and he brought his books out to study. Ahmad was a serious young man interested in any opportunity to increase his knowledge and skills. He had attended a vast number of workshops in the different NGOs in the camp, ranging from English classes, to courses on computers and conflict resolution. His mother once showed me with pride all the different certificates he had accumulated over the years. While studying business

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<sup>94</sup> See chapter 5 p 147-148 for more information about how Ahmad's relationship with Islamic Jihad developed.

administration, his real passion was politics and he acted like the official news broadcaster to the family, always entertaining his mother with the latest developments. He spent many hours on the Internet, browsing through different websites and blogs pertaining to Nahr el-Bared camp and other camps in Lebanon and on Facebook and was also constantly informed of what was happening in Palestine, where the latest Palestinian protests were and where the Israeli bombings, incursions, arrests, demolitions, or assassinations were.

The following day Ahmad returned from his college even more frustrated. He had gone to the administration to explain his dilemma, that three different parties were offering him help: an international NGO, the Palestinian embassy, and a Palestinian faction, but that he did not know when the assistance would be provided. The administrator just shook his head and said there was nothing that he could do; Ahmad needed to pay the current instalment to be able to take the exams. That night a heated discussion occurred between Ahmad and his father. Ahmad was anxious and worried which at the time translated into anger towards his father who had not been able to find a solution to his problem. When his father told him to concentrate on studying and that he will take care of the situation, it only inflamed Ahmad more who wondered why should he care about studying when all his efforts would be thrown away if he could not take his exams. Mahmud, present at the time, looked at his mother and sarcastically asked her if she still wanted him to stop working and continue his education.

The next day Abu Muhammad, called his contact in the Palestinian embassy, which was an expensive endeavour for the family, to explain to him the bind that the family found itself in.<sup>95</sup> Again the employee answered that 'matters were not in his hands' as the decision 'came from Palestine' and that he did not know how much the aid will be for, nor when it would be given. The situation was getting desperate. After several nightly discussions that went nowhere, Abu

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<sup>95</sup> Calls to or from a cell phone in Lebanon cost at the time of my research 0.36 USD a minute (as much as two Nescafe one-cup bags per minute).

Muhammad finally decided that he would go personally to the embassy to have a face-to-face conversation. Travelling to Beirut was not only time consuming, as it took on average two to three hours to get to Beirut and then an equal amount to get back, but it was also a costly endeavour. In addition to paying for transportation to reach Beirut and back, being a daily labourer, Abu Muhammad had to forgo the possibility of earning money that day. He explained that he would use this opportunity to pass by UNRWA's headquarters to try to convince them to update the file of his daughter-in law, Latifa, to reflect her marriage to his oldest son. It should have been a routine bureaucratic procedure, but up to that point UNRWA had been unwilling to make that change because the relevant Lebanese government ministries were refusing to legalize his son's marriage certificate due to the fact that Muhammad was a non-ID.<sup>96</sup>

Abu Muhammad returned that night with one promising and one bad piece of news. The promising news was that he was one step closer in finding a solution to Ahmad's conundrum. He was able to convince his contact in the embassy to provide a verbal guarantee to Ahmad's school certifying that they would be covering Ahmad's tuition fees. However the embassy's employee refused to call the school himself, insisting that the school needed to call him. The bad news was that UNRWA again refused to recognize his son's marriage certificate and to change Latifa's personal status from 'single' to 'married.' This was a sore point as Latifa was six months pregnant. The rejection of this one-word amendment meant that she not only had to face disproving looks whenever she went to health clinics and had to present her UNRWA card, which then had to be followed by a long explanation of her situation, but that she was also often denied free health services based on the fact that she was 'single.'

The next morning, Abu Muhammad went to Ahmad's college in Tripoli and was finally successful at convincing the administration to accept the embassy's verbal guarantee. He then called the embassy himself, using Ahmad's cell phone

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<sup>96</sup> See chapter 3 p 92.



which he had borrowed for the day, and had the school administrator speak directly with the embassy. At this point the college gave Abu Muhammad the most precious receipt. From now on, Ahmad could concentrate on studying and passing his exams, that is until the next instalment would be due.

The above example is just one small glimpse into the never-ending process of qualifying for, applying to and obtaining aid. I recounted this story not only to highlight the anxiety and uncertainty that the process added to refugees' chronically insecure lives but to make a point about how individuals experienced aid distribution and how it created a particular imagination of what factions were. The family's lack of knowledge of how much and when the aid would be given altered the way they viewed factions and NGOs, turning them from personal networks to powerful impersonal structures. In the next section, I examine this process in more detail by breaking it down into four parts. Firstly I juxtapose the aid distribution process with the modern disciplinary techniques that Foucault labelled as 'discipline,' and show how they worked to embody a hierarchy. Secondly, following on Ferguson and Gupta's discussion of the 'spatialization of states' I show how this structure of command served to draw factions with particular spatial dimensions, with a 'perimeter' and a 'top.' Thirdly I argue that this hierarchy did not mean that the 'top' was in control; rather the system resembled more a container and worked analogously to Timothy Mitchell's structural effect by creating the impression that factions were containers that existed separately and independently from the people and practices that brought them into being. Finally, I show how these processes served to build mistrust in the community and diminished the chances of concerted political action.

### *Hierarchical observation*

Um Muhammad's assertion that "everyone knows our situation" was very accurate and an important part of how the aid distribution process was experienced and practiced. Indeed, aid providers needed to obtain information about the economic situation of camp residents. The impetus for this was the principle that aid needed to be distributed fairly. Camp residents needed to be ranked according to their respective miseries in order to be able to distinguish between them. Therefore Ahmad and his family's financial precariousness needed to be rendered visible for Islamic Jihad, the Palestinian embassy and the international NGO. In the following section I examine the different methods that were employed to guarantee that transparency and highlight how the legibility of people's lives thereby produced was not translated into an openness into the aid distribution process. The transparency was one-way. This unequal access to information seemed to embody a hierarchy with an above that was in control and a below that lacked it.

Islamic Jihad's ability to examine Ahmad and his family's lives was rooted in personal and neighbourhood ties. As we have already seen in chapter 5, Ahmad and his family used to be neighbours with Abu Fayez, the head of Islamic Jihad in Nahr el-Bared camp. At the age of twelve Ahmad started participating in their scouting activities and over the years became part of their student group. Um Muhammad used to emphasize the length of their relationship, which spanned over eleven years. However the closeness of the relationship was revealed to me when I met Fayez, the son of the leader of Islamic Jihad in Nahr el-Bared camp. Fayez had been living in Beirut for several years, yet he knew the details of the family's life. He had been a schoolmate of Muhammad, Ahmad's oldest brother. He knew that Abu Muhammad was a day labourer; he was familiar with his past political engagement and with the fact that they were non-IDs. While he was not living in Nahr el-Bared any more he was up to date on the more current news that Mahmud was working to help support the family. He

further explained to me that ‘they,’ - Islamic Jihad - were sensitive to Ahmad’s situation, revealing that he knew that Ahmad received a higher salary than other members. It was quite obvious that if Fayez, who lived in Beirut, knew this much, that his father, the ‘head of Islamic Jihad’ in Nahr el-Bared would know at least as much.

The nature of the Talal family’s relation to the Palestinian embassy was less personal than their relationship with the Islamic Jihad, as it was based on an official application with supporting documents. However, it was nonetheless not entirely impersonal. It was in fact the embassy that issued Abu Muhammad and his children (and later grandchildren) the only piece of identification they possessed. It was an A4 sized letter with the PLO letterhead that stated the person’s name, as well as the father and mother’s names, date of birth, place of birth, sex, and place of origin in Palestine (*al-balad al- ašlī*).<sup>97</sup> The embassy was therefore well aware of the family’s situation and Abu Muhammad often joked with them that they could obtain a copy of the ID themselves, since they were the ones to provide it to him; he should not have to travel to Beirut to hand it in as part of the application process.

Finally, the evaluation and selection of Ahmad as a self-motivated and disadvantaged young student in the ‘youth empowerment workshop’ was also based on personal ties rather than an impersonal selection process. The international NGO had operated through a local Palestinian NGO, using their offices and asking them to select young participants for the workshop. The local Palestinian NGO, in turn, asked other local Palestinian NGOs to each select two participants for the workshop. One of those NGOs had selected Ahmad. Ahmad’s two brothers, Muhammad and Mahmud, had in fact both worked for this particular NGO and the person in charge of selecting the candidates was a close

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<sup>97</sup> When Muhammad’s first daughter was born the family obtained a similar A4 paper as the only form of identification for the newborn girl. Um Muhammad laughed on the occasion saying that her granddaughter’s ID was larger than the baby girl’s own body, and that they could almost swaddle her in it.

friend of the family, often visiting them. She therefore had intimate knowledge of the family's situation and of the level of commitment that Ahmad usually exhibited in group activities.

Information into the lives of aid recipients was gathered in all cases of aid distribution. People's respective levels of misery needed to be calculated and measured. While in Ahmad's case this was accomplished through personal ties, surprise homes visits were also a hallmark of such practices. Through visiting families, unannounced social workers could literally see the financial situation of residents by looking at the size of the home compared to the number of people living in it, the family's possessions, and the quality of the furniture. As we saw in chapter 4, UNRWA had two social workers who conducted surprise home visits to the Talal family's home, examining every room in the house. One worked for the special hardship cases department while the other was employed by the rent subsidy division. There were many additional examples. Um Muhammad's sister Mariam explained to me that when she applied for an electric heater from an international NGO she received a surprise home visit from one of the organization's employees. The social worker, a camp resident herself, went through all the different rooms in the house to make sure that Mariam did not already own an electric heater. Mariam added that she even knocked on the neighbour's door to confirm the information. She also recounted how another organization, this time a local one, wanted to compensate women who had run businesses prior to the war. Mariam was a seamstress who owned two sewing machines prior to the destruction of her home. She therefore applied for the aid. Again she received a surprise home visit from an employee making sure that Mariam had indeed lost her sewing machines in the war and had not recovered them.

This capacity to demand the visibility of people's lives and homes was justified in the name of distributing aid fairly. However this total visibility that was expected from aid receivers was not matched by a reciprocal transparency of the

aid distribution process. In Ahmad's situation, he did not know who decided on how much aid would be dispensed, when the decisions would be made, or based on what criteria. Similarly, Mariam, did not know how many electric heaters the international NGO had or how it decided whom to give them to. Nor did she know how much funding the local NGO had to compensate self-employed women or how they would divide it between all those who qualified.

Foucault's discussion of discipline can help us further understand these practices of aid distribution and the effects they give rise to. For Foucault discipline referred to the meticulous organization of space, movement, position, and time sequences and the systematic methods of surveillance and inspection that were developed around the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in factories, schools, prisons, hospitals, and government offices (1991). Foucault argued that disciplinary power is productive and not restrictive; it worked not by constraining behaviour but by fostering desired conduct. Discipline "arranges things in such a way that the exercise of power is not added on from the outside, like a rigid, heavy constraint, to the functions it invests, but is so subtly present in them as to increase their efficiency by itself increasing its own points of contact" (1991: 206). Foucault argued that to produce the proper behaviour disciplinary techniques used simple instruments, what he called hierarchical observation and normalizing judgment. These two techniques can be seen at work in the Palestinian camps of Lebanon.

Hierarchical observation referred to "the minor techniques of multiple and intersecting observations, of eyes that must see without being seen," (1991: 171). While Foucault concentrated on certain architectural designs that allowed "a single gaze to see everything constantly" (1991: 173), the same process was at work in aid distribution processes. We saw how Ahmad and his families precarious situation was visible for all the different parties promising them aid and we saw how that transparency was not reciprocated. It was like a beam of light was illuminating their lives, uncovering every detail, yet that same light was

blinding them, preventing them from looking 'up.' It was a one-way visibility that established and demonstrated hierarchy. Um Muhammad highlighted this point when she referred to the UNRWA employee who refused to abide by local custom and remove her shoes prior to walking around the house as a person who liked her job 'to be able to control people' (*tatithakkam bilnās*).<sup>98</sup>

Normalizing judgment referred to the small penal system that was present in disciplinary practices. The function of this penal system was not to repress but to train, to reduce gaps. In that sense it was "essentially corrective" (1991: 179). Again this was evident in our case and a short example can be useful here. Several months after the workshop on 'youth empowerment' had begun the organizers contacted Ahmad and told him that he had applied too late. Ahmad was upset. He protested that they were incorrect and he was then told by the workshop leaders to be patient. With no alternative recourse, Ahmad waited. It was not until the end of the school year that Ahmad was finally granted the aid but only after he was reprimanded yet again for not respecting the deadline. Ahmad was categorical that he had applied on time, pointing out that other participants had submitted their paperwork after him. Both Ahmad and his mother were furious about how the international NGO had treated him, but the lesson learned was that it was better to always apply early. This exemplified what Um Muhammad meant when she told her sisters that 'Ahmad *birakkid*.' It was not told with a sense of pride; rather it was meant to underline that Ahmad had developed a particular behaviour that was viewed to be appropriate for successfully obtaining aid. Ahmad had the capacity, and willingness, to follow, any and all leads to potential aid as well and spending the required time gathering the required documentation, applying, and following up. He was also willing to accept to live with the uncertainty that came with it. In contrast, his brother Mahmud was not, preferring to forgo his education and live with the uncertainty of a daily wage.

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<sup>98</sup> It was customary for people to remove their shoes upon entering a home in an effort to keep the house clean. Camps' streets were notoriously dirty as they lacked proper drainage; see chapter 4 p 118-119 for more details.

### *Spatializing factions*

Ferguson and Gupta (2002) added to Foucault's study of discipline by pointing out that practices of surveillance did not just work to discipline individuals but also created "a taken-for-granted spatial and scalar image of the state that both sits above and contains its localities, regions, and communities" (982). This is what they referred to as the 'spatialization of the state.' The 'spatialization of the state' should not be confused with the social construction of space, with the way that states act to structure space and influence the social experiences and relations that unfold within them, rather it refers to how states themselves are spatialized; how individuals come to perceive that states are imbued with particular topographical characteristics.

In particular Ferguson and Gupta examined the everyday workings of a child's development project in India. They related how social workers experienced the state as an overarching organization through surveillance techniques such as the keeping of registers and surprise visits by project officers who travelled to local centres. The project officers' mobility over the Indian territory, their "sudden swooping 'down'" (987) into the social workers' spaces established their control over the geographical area and enacted a hierarchy. Echoing Foucault, they argued that it "was a demonstration of the inequality of spaces" (987) where officers 'higher-up' in the hierarchy could enter 'local spaces' while social workers could only visit supervising officers at prescribed times. An obvious parallel with our case can be made when we realize that social workers could enter a home at any time and look into any room they wished. On the other hand, aid receivers could not go to the offices of the NGOs, factions, or UNRWA and wonder in their workplaces. Whenever they did visit their offices, they were confined to specific areas where they were allowed at predetermined times. This unequal access to space exemplified how those 'higher up' seemed to encompass the people below them. Social workers' mobility around the camp and inside people's homes produced the imagination that they engulfed the

geographical area under their control. In other words this system of surveillance did not only create the imagination of an 'above' that was in command but also an 'above' that enveloped those below it, that surrounded it like the walls of a building.

Ferguson and Gupta further argued that the state's encompassment was achieved through positioning social workers as 'locals' who were then associated with particular communities and interests. They explained that the "localization of the [social] worker is precisely what enabled those overarching institutions [the Indian state and the multilateral aid agencies] to disavow the particular, and to claim to represent the 'greater' good for the 'larger' dominion of the nation and the world" (988). Again a similar process was at work in our case. By acting as caregivers, providing tuition aid, electric heaters, and compensation for destroyed property, factions and NGOs positioned themselves as looking out for the wellbeing of the entire community, surrounding the population within their reach through their care. While the claim to represent the greater good was strongly contested, with camp residents continuously critiquing factions for looking out for 'their own' rather than the overall community, the idea of encompassment itself was not. By highlighting how factions just helped 'their own' rather than all camp residents, Palestinians were just restricting the area that a faction appeared to encompass, from that of the entire community to the people it considered its 'members.'<sup>99</sup> This observation brings me to my last point about how factions now appeared to have a boundary that separated its 'members' from those on the 'outside.'

As we saw in the previous chapter, the question of whether an individual was part of a faction or not did not have a yes or no answer. Through looking at people's life stories and the way they spoke of their relation with factions we realized that factional membership was better understood as a continuously

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<sup>99</sup> Since their inception Palestinian political factions have been accused of just helping their own members see Sayigh, *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* at 169.



unfolding story of human interactions and self-identification. There was no clear line that separated faction members from non-members. Yet the provision of care was redrawing that very line. Palestinian refugees obtained a personal identification number from factions just when they would be receiving monetary contributions. It was called the financial number (*raqm māli*). This number was needed for logistical reasons as the disbursement of funds needed to be recorded and accounted for. However this number, had an additional effect, it could now be pointed to as a marker of factional membership. The adherence to a faction could now be understood as having a name on a list: the list of aid recipients. This transformed the relationship between a person and faction from a complex and dynamic relation to one defined by a financial transaction. In short, it helped build the impression that factions did not only have a 'top' but also a 'perimeter.'

### *The structural effect*

Nonetheless, it would be wrong to stop our analysis with an image of factions as an organization controlled by those 'on top.' Firstly, 'those on top' often had other people above them. This was clearly visible when the Palestinian embassy employee told Abu Muhammad that he did not know when Ahmad's aid would be dispensed as 'the decisions came from Palestine.' We can imagine that 'the people in Palestine' themselves were not in complete control either and were dependent upon others, such as their funders. Similarly, heads of factions and of NGOs had to themselves answer back to their funders.<sup>100</sup>

Secondly, the positions in the hierarchy were interchangeable. When Mahmud, Ahmad's brother, was distributing aid for an NGO he often visited families to make sure that the aid distribution happened fairly. It is easy to

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<sup>100</sup> Jaber Suleiman notes that over 80% of the NGOs funding is obtained from foreign sources see Suleiman, 'Palestinians in Lebanon and the Role of Non-Governmental Organizations', (at 401.

imagine how for other families, Mahmud would suddenly appear to them as being 'on top.' As we saw from the previous example, factions, local and international NGOs, and UNRWA relied on local camp residents for the dissemination of aid. They would visit each other's homes and use their knowledge of the local community in making assessments as to who was more deserving of the aid. This meant that an individual's position would change from sometimes being on 'bottom' to being on 'top.'

This lack of a discernible top and constantly changing hierarchy transformed a process which depended on personalized and close relations for its day to day operations into a disembodied machine that controlled people's lives. It made the highly *personal* aid distribution process *impersonal*. Going back to Foucault's analysis of disciplinary practices can illuminate this point. He argued that

Although surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is that of a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally; this network 'holds' the whole together and traverses it in its entirety with effects of power that derive from one another: supervisors perpetually supervised. The power in the hierarchized surveillance of the disciplines is not possessed as a thing, or transformed as a property; it functions like a piece of machinery. And, although it is true that its pyramidal organization gives it a 'head', it is the apparatus as a whole that produces 'power' and distributes individuals in this permanent and continuous field" (1991: 177).

The functioning of disciplinary practices did not rely on a specific person for its functioning; it was the whole apparatus that was responsible for its effect. Every person was interchangeable and this made the entire process very impersonal. Additionally, it was impossible for the family to identify the person responsible for the decision on how much or when aid was dispensed. The family could only say that it was Islamic Jihad, or the Palestinian embassy, or the international NGO dispensing the money. It was impossible to say it in any other way. The lack of visibility back into the aid arbitration process meant that it could

not be attributed to a specific person; it could only be associated to a structure that was called by its own name. I was bound by the same logic while writing this chapter: I myself could not write in any other way. I had to say, for example, that “Islamic Jihad contributed to Ahmad’s education.” By virtue of dispensing money, decided in unknown places by unknown people, using unknown criteria, at unknown times the faction gained a sense of separation and remoteness compared to the family and it became an entity that can be called by its name.

Mitchell helps us develop this idea even further. Mitchell contends that modern disciplinary practices served to create the appearance of a framework, of a container that appeared to exist separately from its content. Mitchell demonstrated this point through several examples ranging from military discipline, techniques of urban planning, organized schooling, and the development of the printing press. One example is particularly relevant for our case. In the context of the transformations brought about by the expansion of capitalist agriculture in Malaysia in the 1970s Mitchell (1990) examines how these transformations affected the way that land was rented. While in the past rent was determined at the end of the season and paid as a portion of the harvest, more recently rent changed to be set ahead of the season and paid in cash. This transformation not only decreased the peasants’ ability to bargain the price of the rent depending on the quality of the land’s yield but it also changed the way they related to the rent. In the past rent was directly linked to what was being grown in the field, and the peasants qualified it as being ‘alive,’ while the new rent was disconnected from the harvest, it was essentially ‘dead.’ It was now disassociated from local practices. Mitchell further elaborated that “this disconnection makes the rent into a scale that stands apart, an absolute measure against which the success or failures of the harvest must now be measured. The measure is unaffected by what it measures, like a container holding a certain content” (1990: 570).

This line of thinking is very fruitful and explains not only why factions gained the appearance of an organization that was overarching and

encompassing but also how it became impersonal and appeared to have a life of its own; how it appeared as a building that existed separately from what was occurring 'inside'. As we have seen, knowledge into the lives of aid recipients was achieved through either personal relations or through surprise visits carried out by local camp residents. In both cases high degrees of visibility was expected and achieved. However the distribution of aid was anything but transparent, it seemed to operate by a different set of rules. It was opaque, inaccessible, and evaded scrutiny. In that sense the logic of the aid distribution seemed disconnected from the social relations that underpinned its everyday workings. For example the international NGO had delegated the selection process for its 'youth empowerment' workshop to a local NGO and Ahmad was selected due to a long-term relationship with a social worker who knew the family and their situation well. However this local knowledge was deemed irrelevant once Ahmad was accused of applying too late. In order to get the aid, Ahmad had to be judged based on an impersonal application process, with its own rules and deadlines.

The same process was also at work with Islamic Jihad. Ahmad had initiated his relation with the Islamic Jihad through neighbourhood ties and it was clear that his own understanding of his relation with the faction was based on personal fidelity, which was seen to increase as the number of years went by. However again Ahmad was treated like an anonymous applicant whose fate was decided upon in Palestine by people he had no relations to. The disembodiment of the distribution aid from the personal relations that determined its very eligibility created the impression of a container that was separate from its content. The 'faction' seen as an entity was now the one responsible for the distribution of the aid and not the personal relations that had joined its people together. This is what Mitchell refers to as the structural effect. He explains,

The precise specification of space and function that characterize modern institutions, the coordination of these functions into hierarchical arrangements, the organization of supervision and surveillance, and the marking out of time into schedules and programs all contribute to

constructing a world that appears to consist not of a complex of social practices but of a binary order: on the one hand individuals and their activities, on the other an inert structure that somehow stands apart from individuals, precedes them, and contains and gives a framework to their lives (1991: 94).

The strangeness of these taken for granted methods and the effects they give rise to can be brought to light through an examination of an alternative, and much more widespread, model of aid distribution that was present in the camp: the way that family members helped each other. The crucial role that family played in sustaining everyday life in the camps has been highlighted in many studies (Rosenfeld 2004; R. Sayigh 1994, 2007; Taraki 2006). However, these studies do not inquire into how family solidarity materializes and do not juxtapose it with factional or NGO aid. I illustrate this process through the most common and by far the largest enterprise that any family in the camp ever undertook: the construction of a home. It required a concerted effort from everyone's time, effort, and financial resources. I will examine this process through the example of Nesreen. A young woman in her late 20s, Nesreen was a social worker for a local NGO in Nahr el-Bared camp. One day, while I was visiting her in her half-demolished home, she explained to me how she along with her family had initially built it.

Growing up, Nesreen's family shared a two-floor house with her uncle's family. The ground floor consisted of a kitchen, a bathroom and a single room, which her parents along with her younger siblings occupied at night. The second floor had two rooms. Her uncle, along with his wife and younger children slept in one of the rooms, while the grandmother and the older children of both families used the second one. This meant that Nesreen shared one room with her siblings as well as her cousins. As she grew up this arrangement began to trouble her as she slept in the same room as her male cousins and she felt that she was not therefore a 'real *muḥajjaba*;' that she was not abiding by her own

understanding of what Islam required of her.<sup>101</sup> Nesreen went on to study nursing and unable to find employment upon graduation, she worked in her uncle's clothing store in the camp making 100,000 LBP (about 67 USD). She told her parents then that she wanted to use her salary to start renting a home of their own. They thought she was crazy but she insisted. Her younger brother, who was still in school, also began working and he contributed an additional 50,000 LBP. Their joint efforts allowed the family to rent for the first time a two-room apartment. Over the next four years she changed employment over four times, each time earning a slightly higher salary, which culminated at 300,000 LBP (200 USD). Her brother had also completed his schooling and began working on different construction jobs in the camp. While his earnings were a lot more irregular, Nesreen explained that he too saved money and after four years of renting they were able to buy a small parcel of land in the new camp. Her brother then began the physical labour of constructing the house often offering his services for free to different workers in the camp, such as masons, painters, and tile layers, who would then reciprocate and help him build the family home.

Throughout her narration of the story Nesreen was careful to specify how her situation and her brother's were changing with time and how that affected their respective contributions. This clarity and transparency was a feature of many narratives I heard in the camp. When people would tell me how other family members had helped them attain a certain goal, whether securing an education, obtaining medical help, immigrating, or building a home, there was always a description of the 'giver' too. The helper's personal situation was always described and it served to qualify how much his or her contributions could be. A sister could help raise her nieces and nephews until she started a family of her own, an uncle working in the gulf helped pay tuition fees until he lost his job, brothers working in Germany helped pay for the pouring of a concrete roof in accordance with their respective jobs. Information was a two-way street: aid receivers knew as much about the economic situation of aid givers as the other

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<sup>101</sup> *Muhajjaba* means veiled

way around. Certainly this did not mean that all family members helped each other: there were numerous examples of 'rich uncles' who did not care about a sick young niece. However, my point is to highlight that regardless of whether a family member helped or not, information was flowing in both directions - allowing the 'uncles' themselves to be blamed in this case. There was nothing that stood outside of those relations. There was no framework. While the disconnection in the aid distribution process between the personal relations that formed the backbone of factions and the dispensing of aid that was secretive, impersonal and out of reach created the effect that factions existed outside of those personal relations, like a container that stood separately and independently from what it contained. What happened 'inside' factions, the activities that fostered human interactions were suddenly irrelevant. Factions appeared as a distinct actor, autonomous from the social forces that brought it into being. They appeared as immaterial entities, as stores that people entered to shop for aid. In the next section we will see how the particular metaphor of factions as shops was even more relevant by exploring how factions were not only perceived to be impersonal structures but were also seen as businesses interested in making a profit.

### *Open pockets*

During the [2007] war, some people got richer and some got poorer. The factions and NGOs made money off of our misery. They get funding because of our situation. They give twenty-five percent and they take seventy-five percent.

Um Nabil, *thawra* generation, Nahr el-Bared, 29 November 2011

It is impossible to end this discussion of aid distribution practices without also pointing out what should be obvious at this point, which is that the lack of control and transparency into the decision-making process built mistrust between what now appeared as the refugees on one hand and factions and NGOs on the other. When aid receivers had little visibility back into the aid distribution process

they could never be certain whether aid was distributed fairly or, even worse, whether aid was distributed in its entirety. It was therefore possible to hold a distrustful relation with factions and NGOs seen as entities that existed separately from the local trust relations that kept them together. The same way that personal relations became impersonal, so did trust relations become distrustful. This in turn did not dissuade Palestinians from attempting to obtain the aid that they saw was their right, but it did make them reticent about joining any type of mobilization organized by those 'entities.'

Palestinians were well aware that factions and NGOs were receiving funding from third parties. Additionally, they knew full well that factions and NGOs were only obtaining this funding because of the misery and injustice that the refugees faced. In other words, aid receivers were well aware that these organizations were just intermediaries between the donors and themselves. However being kept in the dark about how much aid was available and how it was disseminated they could only wonder if indeed the aid was being distributed fairly.

An example is useful here. Lina, whom I introduced in the previous chapter,<sup>102</sup> told me about an NGO project she worked on. It was called 'Money for Work' and was executed through a partnership between a local NGO, an international NGO and a European funding agency. Here is how Lina described the project she herself worked on for three months as a surveyor who registered different project participants. She told me the story in the presence of Abu Ziad who worked as an office clerk for UNRWA and who lived in the metal barracks and of Rania, Lina's friend and work colleague. While the quote is long, it reveals how Abu Ziad and Rania reacted to the story, and shows how Lina would always highlight what she knew versus what she did not know.

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<sup>102</sup> See chapter 6 p 170-173.



*Lina:* There is funding coming. Honestly, I don't know what its goal was. Was this funding destined for a project or was it funding that was intended to be distributed straight to the people and they turned it into a project, I really don't know. What I know is that there was an idea, I am not sure if this was their idea or the funder's idea, but the idea was that instead of giving the person money and get him used to laziness and to get him used to just receiving money, I will give him the money but in exchange for work, so that he feels that he received the money because he exerted an effort. That he didn't take the aid as a charity so that he gets used to working to get money.

*Abu Ziad interferences:* I will tell you! This is funding coming for the people. We make the people work a bit and we put in our pockets a little.

*Lina:* Now the issue of the pockets, pockets are open everywhere.

*Rania:* Well I didn't dare say that, but turns out it is true

*Abu Ziad:* No I say it! What is this work? What did I gain from this work? What do I gain from trees? Am I going to go sit under the tree? They got pickles to give to people.

...

*Lina:* Now how the money came, how it got distributed I don't know. But this was the idea. So they started inventing projects because they needed projects for the people to work on. So they considered that there were women and men, some were educated and others were not. So they created projects for all the different categories. For example, for uneducated women, who could not work on anything educational, they invented cooking projects. They would get them to prepare different types of pickled vegetables. They would get them to clean, cut and prepare the vegetables. ... They made projects just to make the people work, not to be real projects.

*Rania:* I wish they made real projects so that people could work for the long-term.

Lina continued to explain that the pickled vegetables produced were not sold, but distributed free to camp residents. I remembered at that point that I had seen one of those jars at home. It was a plastic jar with a label featuring the local and international NGOs' logos as well as the funder's. Lina continued to list me the different projects. They made the uneducated men plant trees to create small 'gardens' in the camp, but as Abu Ziad mentioned this was considered of little value to locals. I often passed one such 'garden' with a broken bench; it was right on the edge of the camp, facing barbed wire and a military post. They asked the 'educated men and women' to tutor young children, when their involvement in the program was limited to a single month. The tutoring program was therefore not

very useful to students, as they “didn’t have time to start learning that their tutor changed.” Lina finished the story by saying that “of course connections were active. Those who knew people worked for more than a month, and those who don’t know anyone would not work.”

This mistrust induced by the lack of visibility into the aid distribution process explained why camp residents, whether or not they worked for NGOs or were part of factions, often declared that factions and NGOs ‘profited from their misery.’ It reflected the frustration they felt, expressed well by Abu Ziad, that the funding was meant to reach the people, however they could never be certain if they had indeed received it, even if they themselves were working on a given project. What is important to realize though is that this did not prevent them from attempting to obtain the aid even if they distrusted the ‘structure’ that was distributing it.

Again an example is useful here. In March, news went around the camp that Hamas was paying the application fee for the Baccalaureate exam for all high school students in Nahr el-Bared. However Um Muhammad and her sister Fatima feared that it was going to Hamas ‘members’ only as both had children taking the matriculation exam and they were not contacted. One day Um Muhammad came back home from her afternoon visit to her sisters and proudly told me that she and Fatima saw a ‘Hamas guy’ in the street and reprimanded him that they only helped their own and that they did not care about all Palestinians. The next day Ahmad received a call from the same individual telling him to meet him to give him the payment for the examination fees. Um Muhammad and her sister were very proud of themselves, recounting this story to their friends. They explained that they were proud of themselves not because they were able to get 50,000 LB (33 US dollars) each from Hamas to pay for the exam fee, although that certainly helped, but because as they explained, they had openly challenged Hamas and had gotten what they perceived as their right and in the process they minimized the corruption of Hamas. They added that if they did not obtain the aid, then it would have gone to the ‘official’s pockets.’

Looking at aid distribution from the perspective of an aid receiver, it was better to get aid from a corrupt entity as that prevented it from becoming even more corrupt. However what this meant was that individuals who distrusted certain parties would not answer their calls for political actions. This led certain individuals to refer to the people of Nahr el-Bared as ‘the people of the carton boxes’ (*sha‘b al-karātīn*). This was meant as a criticism that looked down upon a behaviour where camp residents would show up at a faction or NGO only when they were distributing ‘boxes of aid’, but not when they were calling for action. Looking at it from this perspective, residents appeared to be solely interested in getting ‘free’ aid and not in working towards the betterment of their situation and that of the camp. Meanwhile, camp residents believed they were getting what was rightfully theirs and preventing factions and NGOs from profiting even more from their misery, which was the reason why the NGOs and factions had funding in the first place.

Lastly, it is important to note that this effect of mistrust did not necessarily happen in every instance. It depended on the level of knowledge or transparency into the aid distribution mechanism. Many camp residents knew certain heads of factions or NGOs personally and would see for themselves how they lived and could deduce the level of income that they earned. While this did not always mean that they were familiar with the details of the aid distribution process, they could at least evaluate whether the concerned individual was profiting at their expense or not. This meant that through personal relations those individuals would get some visibility back into the fairness of the aid decision-making process, infusing trust back into the relationship and breaking down the appearance of structure.

## **Conclusion**

My daughter needed an operation and we needed 1,000 USD. I asked an NGO for help and the social worker told me 'Is it worth it to ask for a 1,000 USD?' [Implying that I should be able to cover the cost.] I told him 'those who make 300,000 LBP [200 USD] a month and have young children, can they save 1,000 USD?' Anyways I wished that God may preserve his health and left while carrying my daughter in a cast. I did not enter another organization. I had expected something different. I thought that once I told them [about my daughter's condition] they would say come on in.

Um Fathi, *thawra* generation, Buss Camp, 9 December 2011

Two main topics dominated the Talal's family everyday discussions: their lack of legal documentation in Lebanon and Ahmad's tuition fees. While the former was particular to non-ID families, the latter was generalized across camp residents. The process to obtain aid from factions and NGOs was pervasive in nature, not only in its penetrating gaze into the lives and homes of people but also in the amount of time it took camp residents to acquire it. While factions and NGOs had numerous aid programs, they were always minimal in impact, barely making a dent in people's lives, but constantly keeping them busy with the qualification, application and following up processes. The lack of NGO coordination only worsened the problem and turned a process that was supposed to be of assistance into an aggravating one that was particularly painful and humiliating for families searching for medical assistance.

My aim in this chapter was not only to highlight the frustration and insecurity of the aid distribution process but to also show how it turned networks built upon close, personal ties into impersonal and suspicious bureaucracies, how the provision of services which depended on highly personalized and intimate relations for its day-to-day operations suddenly metamorphosed into a disembodied machine that controlled people's lives. I demonstrated how in the name of distributing aid fairly a pervasive system of surveillance was put in place to monitor, evaluate, and compare refugees' different levels of misery. This system of surveillance served to establish and demonstrate a hierarchy with a 'top' that could see below it and a 'bottom' that was blind. This sense of hierarchy, the impersonal and secretive nature of the decision making process and the

redrawing of the line between those who were deemed faction members from independents through the dispensing of aid, led to the creation of an imagination where the factions appeared as structures. They appeared as a container that stood outside and separately from the people contained inside of them. And although there was a head, like the head of the faction, of the NGO, or of the PLO, the structure and the functioning of the aid distribution process did not depend solely on them. The factions resembled a building that existed separately from the very people that it contained demarcating them from those outside, and while trust sometimes thrived through personal relations on a local and individual basis, there was a great level of mistrust with these 'entities.'

In the next chapter I look at two other sets of practices, that of factionalism and the physical representation of factions through emblems, flags, and anniversary celebrations. I show how these practices served to give life to factions through the creation of a novel position, the position of an observer. This serves to highlight that practices that produce the effect of structure do not only work from what appears to be the 'inside' of factions, through aid receivers and givers, but also from what appears to be the 'outside.'

## 8. 'FACTIONS ARE FORCED HUSBANDS'

### PHYSICAL REPRESENTATIONS, FACTIONALISM AND IDEOLOGY



Watching a faction's parade. (Photograph: Perla Issa)

[Following the beginning of the *thawra*] the splits started. So a faction became four. The Arab front, the PFLP became some ten fronts. Even once we joked: What is this? They should give them birth control pills. They became too many. [Laughter]. They don't know how to stop. Each day they give birth. [Laughter]. Fatah also became several Fatah.

Um Jihad, *thawra* generation, Beddawi camp, 12<sup>th</sup> July 2011

Don't you hear the expression 'your husband is chosen from god'? ... The factions are forced husbands *ghasbin 'an al-dunia*. ... The international community recognizes [the PLO], it's not me who recognizes it.

Abu Firas, *thawra* generation, Nahr el-Bared camp, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2011

Imagining factions as living beings was a common feature of how Palestinians spoke of factions. The PLO was sometimes referred to as a 'sick child' and factions as 'forced husbands.' These images pointed to how gender discourses (about masculinity, femininity, and family relations) served to naturalize the existence of factions. Indeed factions' control over people's lives was linked to a husband's control over the life of his wife or to the obligations that parents needed to assume towards their sick children. However these expressions also highlighted two other important points. Firstly, factions appeared to have a life of their own. They were pictured as actors who could have a particular medical condition and could even spawn other beings. Secondly, it highlighted that refugees felt they had little choice in choosing their representatives; as if they were forced upon them by some greater power.

This chapter examines how the existence of factions becomes naturalized not only to those considered on the 'inside' of factions, but more importantly to those who appear to be on the 'outside.' In the previous chapter we saw how the provision of care created the effect of structure, of an impersonal edifice that stood outside and independently of the personal relations that formed its backbone. In this chapter I highlight how the appearance of structure comes into being not only through what may appear as 'internal' practices, such as the distribution of aid, but how it creates an 'outside,' how it brings into being a position from where we can observe, judge, study, and critique factions.

Scholars (Abrams 2006; Migdal 2001; Mountz 2004) have often written about the strange nature of the state which appears to be a unitary entity from a distance but which disappears when examined up close. In particular, Ringmar (1996) writes:

When viewed from afar – either in time or space – the state appears unified and purposive, yet when viewed close up it somehow loses both its unity and its sense of purpose. Yet if this is the case we have surely hit upon an entity of a very strange kind. It seems we need to take the state

for granted in order to be able to analyze whatever goes on in world politics, yet the very same state mysteriously disappears once we start looking for it. The state simply vanishes somewhere in between the moment when we posited it as necessary and the moment in which we started investigating it. (443)

The parallels with Palestinian political factions are glaring. We already saw how an examination of refugees' life stories and the way they spoke of their involvement with factions broke down the idea that factions were entities with a life of their own and that encompassed their members. Rather the picture that was drawn was of people coming together with varying degrees of trust relations rather than ideological positions. Yet we have also seen how the provision of care served to build the appearance that factions were structures with a life of their own. This indeed is a puzzling observation; from a distance factions appeared to be structures yet once examined up close and personal they seemed to disappear. In this chapter I suggest that the way this duality is achieved is by creating the very position of an 'observer,' of someone standing 'outside' looking 'in'. What is peculiar I suggest, is not the fact that factions metamorphose depending on the distance we observe them from, but that we are made to believe that we observe them. It is this ability, of making us imagine that we stand 'outside' looking 'in' that creates the appearance of structure. It is not that the structure simply appears when we step 'outside.'

This chapter explores how this position of an 'outside observer' is created through the examination of two sets of practices, that of physical representation and factionalism. In the first part of this chapter I examine how the abstract idea of factions take material form through the process of representation. Emblems, flags, posters, pins, stamps, and letterheads, all became the physical embodiment of factions. In particular I look at anniversary celebrations and underline how they enacted a distance between people and factions, a distance that was vital in creating the position of 'spectator.' As we will see, anniversary celebrations were criticised and few people ever participated in them. They were rather pathetic displays of the demise of factions. However, to dismiss them



would be to ignore the powerful way in which they consolidated the image of factions as autonomous entities. In the second part of this chapter I look at factionalism - the way through which factions compete with each other at times violently - through the testimony of Um Fadi a veteran of the PFLP and one of the few Palestinians who told me that she joined the faction based on ideology rather than personal ties. Through an examination of how she spoke of the death of her husband and of her relationship with the PFLP I reveal how joining through personal ties or through ideology were not opposites, but how they appeared to be due to a particular modern rendering of subjectivity where a person is believed to exist outside and prior to power relations. This in turn will highlight how our modern understanding of subjectivity as autonomous agents was vital in creating the effect of structure where factions appeared to be structures defined by their ideologies.

### **Physical representations**

We wrote a statement. I remember, we read it in a shelter. We declared that we [Fatah al-Intifada] made a Women's Union of our own. ... The shelter was the only place we had available and we used to be afraid of the army. That day journalists came and they published it in newspapers. From that day on we had our own union.

Hanaa, *thawra* generation, Saida, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2011

This is an invitation, an invitation from the PFLP. They gave it to us a few days ago. [It states] 'The lighting of the torch (*ish'al al-shu'li*). The forty-fourth anniversary of its great launching! The PFLP is proud to invite you to the annual commemoration of the martyrs who fell defending the Palestinian people and cause. Rashidiyeh camp, *Dayr al-qāsi* hall, Friday 3pm. Transportation is provided.' If we went to these people and told them that someone is sick and needs an operation and it costs 5,000 USD and we need your help, they would tell you we don't have the means. But here it says that transportation is provided. How are you paying for transportation? They provide transportation so that the 'responsible' can make a speech and scream. And it's actual screaming.

Abu Ahmad, *thawra* generation, Rashidiyeh camp, 8 December 2011

Palestinian political factions had a foundation date, a date by which they came into being. In Arabic, this date was referred to as the *inṭilāqa*, which meant the launching. A faction launched itself by declaring its own birth in a public statement. The *inṭilāqa* of each faction was then commemorated every year to mark the number of years the faction had existed for, its age. In the Palestinian camps of Lebanon these celebrations took the form of marches or rallies and featured political speeches, Palestinian music, and sometimes *dabka*, the Palestinian dance. These celebrations were often the subject of criticism from camp residents who viewed them as unnecessary spending. While it is easy to dismiss such actions as an additional indication of the corruptness of factions, I argue that these practices played a vital role in bringing factions to life.

At first glance, the process by which factions came into being through anniversary celebrations appears to be straightforward. After all, an anniversary by definition is the celebration of a birth. Birthdays denote life. Having and celebrating a birthday annually is a practice associated with living beings. When I celebrate a friend's birthday, I am celebrating the number of years my friend has been alive for. My friend exists and is breathing regardless of the practice of celebrating his or her birthday. He or she exists outside and prior to the ceremony. Indeed, the practice of birthday celebration only exists because my friend is alive in the first place. Associating that practice with Palestinian political factions was one way to imbue them with life, with an existence that could be calculated in a precise number of years. Additionally, this life appeared to exist outside and prior to the anniversary celebrations, just like my friend's life was. The faction appeared as having a life with a given number of years and the annual anniversary celebrations appeared to be just that, celebrating the number of years the faction had existed for. However I contend that anniversary celebrations worked in a much more subtle way by creating the very position of an 'outside,' a position from which a person could even be criticising factions and appear to be in opposition to them. Far from being pathetic displays of the irrelevance of factions, the practice of anniversary commemoration perpetuated

and guaranteed the imagination that factions were entities with a life of their own which was the crucial technique through which they came to represent 'the people' regardless of 'the people's' desires. I begin by describing the two forms taken by these ceremonies: marches and rallies, and then discuss the implications of these practices for the way we view and treat Palestinian political factions.

### *Marches*

I attended several marches commemorating the birth of factions during my stay in Nahr el-Bared camp. The first one I experienced was the twenty-ninth anniversary of the Palestinian People's Party (PPP). It was established on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1982 when it split from the Jordan Communist Party (JCP) by publishing its "Founding Statement and the Provisional Internal Statutes of the Palestinian Communist Party" (Y. Sayigh 1997: 477). On Sunday the 6<sup>th</sup> of February 2011 the Nahr el-Bared branch of the PPP commemorated its anniversary with a march through the camp that ended in the martyrs' cemetery.

It was a sunny Sunday. I stayed mostly home that day, as Sunday was the only day of the week when all family members would be home at the same time. After a joyful family lunch, Mahmud left to prepare for the march. Being at the time the head of the DFLP scouts, he said that this was a good opportunity for the youngsters to practice being in a marching band in preparation for the DFLP's own anniversary some twenty days away. Ahmad, who was also planning on joining the march, stayed a little longer at home with us, leaving just a few minutes before the march's starting time.

While I was trying to decide if I should join the march myself, Um Muhammad convinced me to watch it from the kitchen balcony. She told me that they would start the march on the street right below us and then walk towards the camp's martyrs' cemetery. When I asked her how she knew the route, she

explained that they always go the same way. Being on the third floor, the balcony did indeed give me a perfect view of the march from above. Um and Abu Muhammad decided to join me. I took three of the kitchen plastic chairs onto the balcony while Um Muhammad made tea and Abu Muhammad prepared his usual Sunday afternoon *narghile*.

Mahmud soon appeared walking down the main street with his marching band. Um Muhammad explained to me that the marching band was coming to join the rest of the participants who started to gather below our building. The band was already in formation. Three young girls, probably around eight or nine years old, led the band holding up the Palestinian and the DFLP flags. Following them were about five children, slightly older, probably in their early teens, playing drums and two girls holding clash cymbals. Behind them were three young boys holding again a combination of the Palestinian and DFLP flags. Most of the children, whether boys or girls, veiled or unveiled, were wearing black berets. With the exception of the head attire there was little resemblance in their clothing. Mahmud walked between the children trying to get them to walk in three straight lines, stopping every few minutes to give them a chance to get back in formation. They walked in this fashion until they reached the level of our building at which point they stopped. Ahmad soon joined them with a group of about five young men. Another group of about ten men also walked towards the meeting point. Um Muhammad mentioned that these men “are Fatah.” And soon the march was in formation.

The DFLP scouts led the march. Next came two young men holding a PPP banner that consisted of the PPP emblem reproduced in triplicate. Behind them were a group of about twenty young children holding a mixture of the Palestinian and the PPP flags. Following them were two young men holding another banner stating on top in red ‘29<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Palestinian People’s Party;’ below it was written in black ‘National unity is the way to liberation, independence and return,’ finally it was signed by the

Palestinian People's Party in red. The youth in this initial portion of the march were well separated from each other, making this section of the march the longest, consisting of about twenty meters. The second portion of the procession consisted of the adults. About forty men stood behind the young children. The men at the forefront of the group stood in a well-formed line. The rest of the men followed behind them with the younger men grouped towards the back. About twenty women were a few meters behind. Some were carrying infant children in their arms, others were holding their toddlers by their hands, and two women were carrying the PPP flag. Finally, behind the women were two young men holding another banner consisting of the PPP emblem reproduced in triplicates. That completed the procession. They soon started marching and we could hear the beating of the drums. The march then took a right turn towards the martyrs' cemetery, at which point I could no longer see them. Ahmad came back home not long after that. I looked at my watch; forty minutes had elapsed from the time he left the house to the time he came back.

I was surprised at how small the procession was and how quickly it all ended. In total there was about one hundred people, a third of whom were young children, even though at least four different factions participated in this march: the DFLP, Islamic Jihad, and Fatah, in addition to the PPP. Few people watched the march from their balconies or windows, with people in the street giving them little attention, sometimes stopping for a few minutes to watch but no one joined. I thought that the whole event was indicative of the PPP's inability to mobilize people. I wondered why would the PPP want to display their unpopularity to us. Um Muhammad and Abu Muhammad sitting next to me did not give the march much attention other than pointing to their children when they first appeared on the street on their way to join the march. They were more interested in speaking of their fears for their children. In particular Abu Muhammad expressed his fear that his children would make the same mistakes as him. I could feel a mixture of pride but also regret at his previous life choice of joining the *thawra*. He explained

that his siblings who did not follow his path were in a much better legal and financial situation. He concluded by saying that ‘factions were worthless.’

### *Rallies*

The other form taken by the annual commemoration of the establishment of factions is a political gathering marked by speeches. On Friday February 25<sup>th</sup> 2011 I was in Nahr el-Bared camp when a car with loudspeakers drove through the camp announcing the celebration of the DFLP anniversary in the Jal al-Amar hall that same evening. I decided to attend.

Palestinian camps had several halls, which were privately owned and ran as a business. The primary use of these halls was wedding celebrations, but political factions would also rent these halls to conduct rallies and conferences. After Nahr el-Bared’s destruction in the 2007 war, all of the halls were damaged; the Jal al-Amar hall was one of the first halls to be rebuilt after the refugees’ return to the camp. Jal al-Amar was an area of Nahr el-Bared camp situated to the west of the old camp and the Bared River. However the Lebanese military had restricted access to the old camp. Therefore, like any resident of Nahr el-Bared wanting to cross from the Eastern side of the camp to its Western side, I had to walk around the old camp, instead of through it.

It was a dark, rainy day as I set out to walk from the home of the Talal family to the Jal al-Amar hall. I did not know the exact location of the hall but decided to walk to Jal al-Amar and to ask for directions to the hall once there. I walked along the main road of Nahr el-Bared until I reached the army checkpoint blocking the entrance of the old camp. A couple of soldiers in rain gear were standing by the metal gate that had been painted red and white, the colours of the Lebanese flag. I turned left and walked past a huge sign advertising all the donors contributing to the reconstruction of the old camp. I kept going until I reached the southern edge of the old camp, at which point I turned right into an

alley. The alley was deserted as few people had returned to this street and most of the buildings were still partially destroyed with collapsed roofs and perforated walls. Little light reached this narrow alley, making it dark and eerie. As I reached the end of it, I turned right onto the dirt road that ran along the Bared river. I was back in daylight. I had reached the south-western end of the old camp and I was walking north along the river to reach the main road again. To the right were a series of fully collapsed buildings still untouched. To left was the Bared river, swollen by the rains, and surrounded by wild green vegetation. This was a sharp contrast to the narrow and dark alley I had just walked through. Large parts of this road had turned into water puddles with the rain pouring down. As I was making my way trying my best to stay on dry land, a car passed by and slowed down. Two young men asked me if I would like a ride. I gladly accepted the offer.

Upon reaching the hall I saw the head of Najdeh in Nahr el-Bared camp and another man, whom I did not know, standing at the door.<sup>103</sup> They were greeting people coming into the hall. I said hello quickly and walked into the hall. Loud speakers were playing nationalist songs that made discussion with people difficult. To the left of the entrance was a group of highly energetic young men holding a large amount of DFLP flags and congregating around a loud speaker. They would raise their voices above the sound of the songs and chant about Palestine, freedom, return, and the DFLP.

About forty meters by twenty meters, the hall was bigger than I had expected. The walls of the hall, which were painted with different landscape scenes, such as birds flying in a blue sky, or a sunset, had been covered over with red coloured banners with different slogans calling for national unity and the reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared. Across from the entrance was the podium decorated with a banner of what appears to be DFLP martyrs, a combination of Palestinian and DFLP flags, as well as a large picture of Nayif Hawatma, the Chairman of the DFLP. Plastic chairs had been lined up in two separate columns

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<sup>103</sup> Najdeh is a DFLP NGO

and were filling up with women and children on the left and men and a few children on the right.

I saw many of the women I met at Najdeh and decided to sit next to them. Soon the proceedings started. The first speaker was introduced, a former Member of Parliament from Akkar. The speaker began by saluting the audience and congratulating the DFLP on its anniversary but I soon lost track of the content of the speech, of the actual sentences being said. He was speaking in formal Arabic and in such an elevated voice that I found it hard to focus on the speech, rather my attention was diverted to watching the audience. A man was holding his young daughter in his arms and poking her nose, which amused her greatly, an Najdeh employee was video-taping the ceremony, a woman was standing by the entrance greeting late comers, and the woman sitting next to me was silent, looking at the speaker with an expressionless face. Nevertheless certain words would ring out in my ears as the speaker would elevate his voice stressing them: the inalienable right of return, the fight for liberation, the illegal occupation, the heroism of political prisoners, the expansion of illegal settlements, the sacredness of Jerusalem, the need for national unity and PLO reform, the condemnations of American policies (especially the practice of vetoing UN Security Council resolution condemning Israeli aggressions), the demand for civil rights for Palestinians in Lebanon, the rejection of naturalization (*tawfīn*), and the need for a quick reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared camp. The group of young men by the entrance would sometimes interrupt the speaker by chanting 'Freedom! Freedom! We want Freedom!' At which point the speaker would take a moment and then continue his speech in an even louder voice that was raised above the chants. This continued for about ten minutes and then the next speaker was introduced, a member of the Lebanese Communist Party. The same scenario was repeated with what seemed to be a reiteration of the same topics. The group of young men bursted out in chants 'Justice! Freedom! DFLP!',<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> This chant rhymes in Arabic: *Adāla! Hurriyya! Jabha Dimuqrā'iyya!*



In total, four different speakers took turns on the podium in a replay of the above-described scenario until the last speaker was introduced, but this time over music. He was the head of the DFLP in Northern Lebanon, Arkan Bader. While I found the other speakers to be speaking at the top of their voices, Arkan Bader was literally screaming. I remembered a friend who told me that he always has his mouth open; I now understood what she meant. Arkan Bader shouted for about twenty minutes, double the time of the previous speakers but repeating the same key words. At the end, after a long list of salutations, as he was uttering the words 'may peace be upon you' (*al-salām 'alaykum*), everyone got up and began to leave. The sudden ending of the ceremony took me by total surprise. I was still in a daze induced by the series of loud speeches. The swiftness of the audience in getting up and heading for the exit startled me. I soon got up and followed part of the participants to the nearby cemetery, where we visited tombs under the watchful eyes of Lebanese soldiers. We did not remain long in the cemetery as it started raining, at which point each one went his way. I proceeded to walk back home as a car pulled next to me and asked me if I wanted a ride, I again gladly accepted.

While more people participated in the DFLP rally than the PPP march, the staged nature of the ceremony was very clear. The group of young men clapping and chanting intermittently was meant to remedy the audience's general lack of interest in the proceedings. The loud voices of the speakers were meant to dissuade people from chatting. The silence of the audience did not indicate any interest from their part as their faces remained expressionless, even though the topics of the speeches, the return to Palestine and self-determination were certainly of interest to them. Finally, the speed of the exit certainly led me to believe that most participants preferred to be somewhere else than in this rally. This was a disappointing performance for what was supposed to be a strong faction of Nahr el-Bared. Najdeh, the DFLP NGO, was one of the largest in the camp, if not the largest, with four different offices in Nahr el-Bared alone. It was

also one of the first NGOs to come back to the camp after its destruction and had fought hard with the army in order to get access to different areas in the camp. But still what was clear from this 43<sup>rd</sup> anniversary celebration was that the DFLP was unable to mobilize people. Therefore the same questions that had risen in my head after the PPP's march were haunting me here. Why were Palestinian political factions displaying to us their lack of popularity? Why were they insisting on celebrating their annual anniversaries when such celebrations worked to show the public just how unpopular they were?

Even more puzzling was that these ceremonies were the target of criticism by camp residents. They were seen as unnecessary spending on celebrations when money, if available, would be better spent on meeting people's needs. People would point to the money spent on hall rentals and transportation (often factions provide buses to take people from different camps to the celebration hall) and argued that these would be better used on more essential needs such as providing medical help for the sick. A friend even pointed out that, at the PFLP anniversary, they served food. He specified that there were fruits of all kinds such as apples, bananas, and even kiwis. He insisted that there were also two huge cakes, each being one and half meters by one meter, with the PFLP slogan written on one of the cakes and the PLO slogan written on the other. Fresh fruits, especially of a kind not native to Lebanon, like kiwis, were out of reach for most camp residents; a display of such fruits, not to mention large cakes, aroused his indignation.

Others would criticise these events by pointing out that young Palestinians often participated in these proceedings in order to obtain financial assistance from the factions. They argued that the heads of factions noticed an absence and penalized the absentee at the end of the month. However, trying to determine whether people's participation in these ceremonies was genuine, instrumental, or a combination of both can distract us from looking at what these proceedings actually accomplished. The question remains: why did Palestinian political

factions continue to publicly showcase their unpopularity, especially when it caused them to be criticised even more? Little did I know that the answer to my puzzlement was present on my own formulation of the question. The importance of these practices was their *public* nature. Building upon the work of Timothy Mitchell, I suggest that the proceedings, while failing in terms of a popularity test, succeeded in constructing Palestinian political factions as entities with a life of their own separate from the very people and the very practices that bring them into being.

In the next section I demonstrate how anniversary celebrations created the effect of structure by pointing out three of its crucial features. Firstly they created the position of 'the outside observer.' Secondly, they drew lines between the 'inside' and the 'outside.' Thirdly, they gave life to factions through a process of representation.

### *Watching from the 'outside'*

One of the crucial features of these celebrations was that they were public. Indeed anniversary celebrations were not conducted behind closed doors among party members; rather they were meant to be watched. Sitting on a balcony, peering out of a window, stopping in the street, hearing the sound of the drums, or of the advertisement for a rally, were all positions that seemed to put the authors of such actions 'outside' the practice of anniversary commemoration. They seemed innocent in themselves. However, it was precisely this innocuous position that enacted a distance between 'spectators' and factions. The physical distance that existed between the balcony and the procession represented my own separation from the PPP in particular and from factions in general. I felt I was standing outside looking at the physical embodiment of factions go by.

Being on the 'outside' also allowed Palestinians to criticize factions, as Abu Muhammad had. While this position may have seemed to be in opposition to

factions, it actually served to reify them. Writing about corruption in India, Gupta (1995) highlights how “the discourse of corruption turns out to be a key arena through which the state, citizens and other organizations and aggregations come to be imagined” (376). He adds that “instead of treating corruption as a dysfunctional aspect of state organizations” he sees it as “a mechanism through which ‘the state’ itself is discursively constituted” (376). By stating that ‘factions are worthless’ Abu Muhammad was distancing himself from the factions but in the process he was acknowledging their existence as entities. Upon closer examination we realized that two of his sons were in fact participating in the proceedings that he was criticising. He was therefore entangled in the network of relations that factions were. Yet through his criticism, Abu Muhammad placed himself on the ‘outside,’ which in turn helped create the image that factions were bounded structures instead of loose networks brought together by personal relations.

### *Drawing lines*

Just as watching or hearing a parade go by placed the author outside the factions, so too did walking in the parade, attending a rally, hearing the speeches or participating in the proceedings located the person as a faction member. A simple example can illustrate this process. When I was sitting on the third floor balcony watching Mahmud participate in the parade, my mind right away registered that Mahmud was in fact a member of the DFLP. I registered this note in my head in juxtaposition to the previous confusion I felt when he told me that he was only ‘in principle’ with the DFLP. At the time I found his choice of word of ‘in principle’ to be confusing, but then when I saw him walking in that parade as the head of the DFLP scouts I settled the matter in my head: Mahmud was in fact part of the DFLP. Positioning myself ‘outside’ the practice of anniversary commemoration, I pictured factions as edifices and positioned Mahmud inside of its walls. However, as I spent more time in Nahr el-Bared and saw the development of Mahmud’s relationship with the DFLP I realized that that

relationship was more complicated.<sup>105</sup> As we have seen, faction membership is better understood as a relationship between individuals than a relationship between an individual and a building that a person entered or left. Whereas a person must necessarily be either inside or outside an edifice, a relationship with an individual carried with it ambiguity and varying degrees of cohesion. Therefore, attempting to define that relationship in terms of being inside or outside the faction failed to take into account the complexity of that connection. Yet, from the vantage point of the balcony that ambiguity disappeared, factions appeared as bounded structures and Mahmud seemed to be clearly positioned on the ‘inside.’

### *Physical representations*

Mahmud did not only appear to be ‘inside’ factions but, along with his fellow comrades, appeared to represent those factions. Mitchell argued that “the techniques of enframing, of fixing an interior and exterior, and of positioning the observing subject, are what create an appearance of order, an order that works by appearance. The world is set up before an observing subject as though it were the picture of something” (1988: 60). Sitting on the balcony we were made to believe that the children, men and women walking down the street were the representation of factions instead of just a particular instance of people marching. The refugees who were present in the procession and those who spoke in the rally no longer represented just themselves, but they appeared to be representative of the immaterial abstract idea of factions.

Additionally, Mitchell argued that the practice of representation created the effect of a reality that existed prior and outside to that very representation (1988: 7-10). For example, if I accepted the idea that Mahmud was a representative of the DFLP, that means that I accepted the idea that the DFLP existed and in turn the DFLP’s existence seemed independent of Mahmud, and of my acceptance of

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<sup>105</sup> See Chapter 6 p 160-163

him as a representative of the faction. Once we accepted the concept of representation, we accepted the idea that there were two separate entities: the 'thing' and the representations of the 'thing.' The 'thing' is never in itself visible, it is just represented but we remain certain that it exists precisely because it is represented. These material forms appeared to be "giving a visible exterior to the invisible 'inner structure'" (Mitchell 1988: 59). The representations of the 'inner structure' were material; we could see them and touch them; however the 'inner structure' of the faction in itself was immaterial. In other words, once we accepted that something stood for something else, we took for granted that this something else existed.

Representations could only work if they had an audience that seemed to be positioned outside of them and that recognized them. Hence the importance of positioning those watching the parade as being 'outside' factions became apparent. Watching anniversary celebrations and acknowledging them as representations was imbuing life to factions. Yet we did not realize that it was our acceptance of the idea of representation that created them. Therefore when I saw a PPP flag, I thought that I was seeing a representation of the PPP. I believed that the PPP existed and that this flag represented it. Yet in actuality, it was the practice of representation that was actually effecting the appearance of a reality underneath, of a life prior to and outside of the representation. Similarly, when the Lebanese government, UN agencies, or the media treated factions as entities, as representative bodies, they were involved in the very process of erecting a structure. By accepting to treat certain individuals as 'representative' of factions, they were bringing factions to life. This was the paradoxical nature of the method of representation: factions acquired the appearance of a life outside and separate from their representations when it was those very representations that brought them into being. In other words, factions appeared as a framework that existed separately from the particular people and practices it enframed.

However, it is important to realize that the power of these methods did not lay in making us believe that these representations were accurate. Indeed, the claim that factions were representative of the Palestinian people was highly contested with numerous individuals, campaigns, publications, and studies demanding for 'real' or 'true' representation.<sup>106</sup> However the ability to represent was never in itself contested and the particular methods used to enact such effects were never questioned.

We grasp the importance of these practices when we realize that factions participated in each other's anniversary commemorations yet they seldom did so on advocacy campaigns or protests. This collaboration crossed ideological lines, with Islamic Jihad, nationalist Fatah, and the Marxist DFLP joining the communist PPP in its anniversary commemoration. It also cut across political positioning, with Fatah and the PPP advocating a two-state solution and the continuation of negotiations with Israel while the Islamic Jihad called for the establishment of a one-state solution through resistance. Palestinians often referred to the factions' mutual participation in each other's anniversary celebrations as 'social visits' (*ziyārāt 'ijtimā'iyya*). This appellation stressed the fact that a given faction attended the celebrations of another faction expecting that in turn the other factions would participate in its own anniversary. While this cooperation failed to translate into a mobilization of a significant amount of people, it succeeded in effecting the appearance of a structure, an entity that existed outside and prior to the very practice that brought it into being. It underlined the fact that all factions

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<sup>106</sup> For example, Dajani calls for reforming the PLO in order to have legitimate representatives during the next round of negotiations see Omar M. Dajani, 'Preparing for the Inevitable Negotiation', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 35/3 (2006), 39-45. Nabulsi conducted interviews with Palestinian refugees in the Middle East, Europe, the Americas and Australia. She reports an overwhelming desire to reform the PLO to achieve proper representation. See Nabulsi, 'Palestinians Register: Laying Foundations and Setting Directions'. Barakat et al debate different strategies to achieve democratic representation, from reforming the PLO to creating a new representative body. See Rana Barakat et al., 'An Open Debate on Palestinian Representation', (al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network, 2013), available at <<http://al-shabaka.org/roundtable/politics/open-debate-palestinian-representation>> accessed on 18th November 2013.

had a stake in maintaining this system as it allowed them to act as the representatives of the 'people.'

It is hard to end this discussion without also pointing out that anniversary celebrations did not only appear to us as material representations of factions but they also served to portray what proper politics was about. The marches or rallies were carried out in a specific, almost scientific ways. Children in black berets walked in straight lines separated into three columns, men formed a straight line, women were several meters back, the procession started and ended with young men holding flags, and the same route ending at the martyrs' cemetery was taken year after year. The rallies also followed a specific script. First, speakers who were not part of the birthday faction addressed the audience; their names and positions were explained to us. They each had ten minutes to give their speeches, interrupted from time to time by chants. Finally, a representative of the DFLP addressed the audience for double the time. The timing and number of the speakers may vary from rally to rally, but the pattern remained the same. Additionally, watching the DFLP rally, I felt a need to write down the names of the speakers and their positions, as if knowing that information would allow me to better understand the DFLP. The third speaker I noted was the lawyer Abdel Nasser al-Masri of the Organization of the Lebanese People. I had never heard before of this organization and wondered who they were. This missing piece of information on my part highlighted to me the point that I was ignorant, unknowledgeable in the proper conduct of politics, for I didn't know who he was. I felt compelled to conduct research on that organization to become politically educated. When I missed the name of the fourth speaker due to the high volume of the chants, I was even more upset.

The form and content of the speeches also projected an image of the appropriate way of conducting politics. They all followed the same format and highlighted the same topics. The exact content of the speech seemed less important than the form and the manner in which they were delivered, with high



volume interjected by energetic chants. What these proceedings did was project an image of what the proper way of doing politics was. Politics became a definite field of knowledge and practices separated from the everyday practices of Palestinians. Knowledge of party ideology, literature and platforms defined what 'political knowledge' was. It became disassociated from other forms of knowledge, or other ways of learning. "Political knowledge' became something that certain people grasped while others may 'know nothing about it.' Similarly to how factions became separated from people so did politics become separated from everyday life through the development of a particular expertise. In the next section I expand on this idea and look at how ideology opened up a space of separation between factions and people, which, similarly to anniversary celebrations, brought about a position that appeared to be on the 'outside' of factions. Additionally, I show how our conventional understanding of factions as structures defined by a particular ideology relied on a certain modern rendering of personhood as existing outside and prior to power relations.

### **Factionalism and ideology**

The nature of Palestinian society is tribal. To live in the camp you need to be supported by a faction. This is essential, you understand? You have to have a back (a protection) – (*ilik ḍahir*) - if you get into a problem, if you need a university scholarship. [By being in a faction] you have a following (*imtidād*). Additionally, your parents before you [may be affiliated]. The nature of Palestinian society is factional. ... It is rare to go into a home and not find it following a faction.

Rania, young generation, Nahr el-Bared camp, 28 July 2011

Comments like that of Rania were common in Nahr el-Bared. Indeed the fact that Palestinians joined factions due to personal relations, instead of choosing an ideology, created a sense that Palestinians joined factions for the wrong reasons. Following personal ties (most often kin ties) instead of relying on a personal evaluation of the different ideologies of the factions was seen as 'tribal' or 'backward.' Writing about the beginning of the *thawra*, Sayigh (2007) underlines how political ideology and consciousness were considered "the

supreme good” (13). She explains how the *thawra* generation believed “they had to be guided by a correct political ideology, which could only be the product of consciousness” (13).<sup>107</sup>

In this section I ask: Is joining political factions through personal ties, rather than through a personal evaluation of the ideologies of the factions, a tribal, backward, or un-modern behavior? In doing so I investigate the role of ideology in appearing to define factions and in creating a position on the ‘outside’ of factions, a position from where a person is able to study and choose factions ‘freely’. We have already seen how joining factions through personal ties did not mean that Palestinian refugees were blindly following their relatives, friends or neighbours.<sup>108</sup> It was clear in several examples, like that of Abu Ali who hit the Lenin statue with his shoe over a dispute of Russian politics, and his son Rabieh who disagreed with the PFLP leadership over their stand in the Nahr el-Bared conflict of 2007. Palestinian refugees were not putting their faculty of reason on hold, rather they were actively engaged in thinking and debating different policies and events and their ramifications on the Palestinian struggle and their lives.

However I argue in this section that this provides only a partial picture of the interplay between personal relations and ideology. I explore the intricacies of this relationship through the example of Um Fadi, a veteran of the PFLP and one out of two Palestinians who told me that she joined the *Jabha* based on ideology and not due to personal ties. Through an exploration of her life story and her testimony of the killing of her husband during an internal battle between the PFLP and Fatah, I argue that ideology and personal relations are not opposites but they appear to be due to a particular modern understanding of subjectivity as existing outside of power relations. This will highlight the role that ideology plays in giving life to factions by appearing to define them and eclipsing the human

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<sup>107</sup> Similarly Hasso writes about the how the founders of the DFLP viewed ‘backwardness’ as a significant problem and believed that the liberation of Palestine will only be successful once the party modernizes the political attitudes and social values of the working class and peasantry. See Hasso, *Resistance, Repression, and Gender Politics in Occupied Palestine and Jordan* at xiv-xv.

<sup>108</sup> See chapters 5 and 6.

relations that form their very basis. Additionally I show how this severance through ideology brings into being a position that appears to be on the 'outside' from where an individual is able to grasp factions in their entirety.

### *Um Fadi*

Um Fadi was in her late 50s and hid a mixture of stubbornness and resilience underneath a frail body and a wrinkled face. "What type of circus is this?" was how she referred to the chaotic weekly organizational meetings for the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2011 march to the southern Lebanese border which she never missed, travelling two hours from her home in Beddawi camp to Beirut in each direction. Meeting her in her home several months later, I had the chance to discuss her long-standing relationship with the PFLP, which helped me understand how death and ideology interplay to give life to factions. Here, I recount the major events in her life, to give the context through which we can better understand the relation between ideology and personal relations.

Directing me to her house in Beddawi camp, Um Fadi explained that I should go to the commercial street behind the UNRWA school and ask 'anyone' for directions to her home. Sure enough, once I arrived I went into a grocery store where the owner took me a few meters down the street and introduced me to her son Fadi, who was sitting outside the PFLP office. Fadi was in his early 20s, and did not ask what I wanted or who I was, he just proceeded to lead me through the narrow alleys of the camp to his family's home. It seemed he had done this before. Lying on a hill, Beddawi camp was a dizzying labyrinth of concrete alleys and staircases, which he guided me through until we reached his home. It was situated on the first floor of a corner two-storey high building. We went up an open-air concrete staircase to reach the apartment door. Fadi slipped off his shoes in a seemingly effortless motion, went through the cracked open door, and called his mother.

She came to the door and welcomed me into the house. I stepped into what appeared to be a hallway turned into a sitting area, but she did not motion me to sit there. Instead, she went straight into another room with more stylish couches and invited me to sit. The room had couches on three of its sides and a bookcase on the fourth. I sat in the corner of a sofa facing the only window in the room. The window gave onto the alley I had just walked up. The wall of the adjacent house was a mere two meters away from us, which allowed little light to come into the room. It was the end of July, the weather was hot and humid, and we spent the next few hours alternating between opening and closing the window in a desperate attempt to determine what was more bearable, the stifling heat, or the incessant noises coming from the alley. A fan was turning from side to side giving us some momentary relief from the heat.

The bookcase to the right of me contained a number of books and papers. On the top right shelf stood an old black and white picture of a young man in a silver frame. Um Fadi explained that this was her father. The picture, she added, was taken three months before he was killed by an Israeli commando operation in Beddawi camp. Below it was a picture of Che Guevara and to the left a picture of Nasrallah, the current Secretary General of the Lebanese political party Hezbollah.

Um Fadi sat next to me and began almost on her own to recount her life story. Um Fadi was born in the mid-1950s and was exposed from a very young age to both the Lebanese government's repression of Palestinians and Palestinians' resistance against that repression. She began our discussion by telling me that her father, had been working in the Palestinian resistance underground before the official start of the *thawra* in 1965. She remembered her father being imprisoned for six months by the Lebanese government during which time she visited him and saw him performing hard labor. She attributed her later resistance activities to this early moment in her life. "That created something in my unconscious that I only felt later when the revolution started," she said. At

the age of eleven she started going to the *ashbāl* of Fatah.<sup>109</sup> Although her father was socially conservative, he nonetheless encouraged her. She explained that she would participate in Fatah events but did not become a member.

She later married a member of the PFLP and explained that she “kept an independent personality.” She insisted that she did not join the PFLP just because her husband was a member. She further highlighted that point, and her husband’s acceptance of her decision, by telling me that her oldest daughter went to the Fatah *ashbal* and that her husband would take her in his PFLP jeep whenever it rained. Um Fadi’s perceived ‘independence’ from her husband and the PFLP is a point I will come back to later.

Um Fadi went to tell me that in 1978 her husband was killed “at the hands of Fatah.” Um Fadi explained:

At that time Nayif Hawatma [the Chairman of the DFLP] proposed the idea of a state [in any part of Palestine] and Fatah adopted it.<sup>110</sup> The PFLP then formed the rejection front,<sup>111</sup> supported by Iraq, so of course Fatah does not accept this, it wants to impose its project. So they hit their main location in the north and my husband was martyred.<sup>112</sup>

...

It was a political decision [by Fatah to close the PFLP office]. ... Now my husband was the responsible for military affairs. He sent a letter to the *Hakim* [the Chairman of the PFLP George Habash] because the PFLP has a rule

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<sup>109</sup> A literal translation of *Ashbal* is lion cubs. They were the youngest members of Palestinian political factions who partook in basic military training.

<sup>110</sup> In 1974 The PLO adopted the Ten-Point Program calling for the establishment of a Palestinian state on any liberated part of Palestine. Jaber Suleiman, 'The Palestinian Liberation Organization: From the Right of Return to Bantustan', in Naseer Aruri (ed.), *Palestinian Refugees: The Right of Return* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 87-104 at 93. The motion was supported by Fatah, the DFLP, and the Saiqa. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993* at 338. And Alain Gresh, *The Plo, the Struggle Within: Towards an Independent Palestinian State* (London: Zed Books, 1988) at 179-88.

<sup>111</sup> The PFLP, PFLP-GC, ALF, and PPSF opposed the Ten-Point Program and formed the 'rejection front.' Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993* at 344.

<sup>112</sup> In 1978 tension between Fatah and the rejection front increased over the potential participation of the PLO in the peace negotiations between Egypt and Israel which came on the heel of Sadat’s visit to the Israeli Knesset in Jerusalem. The violence was not confined to Beddawi camp, but fighting also occurred in Nahr el-Bared camp, Beirut, Damur, Tyre, and Sidon. *Ibid.*, at 436.

that says that the blood of a Palestinian is sacred, it is forbidden [to fight a Palestinian] under any circumstances. They told him that the mood is not normal; that the camp is in a state of military alert that is unusual with the rental of over seventy-five offices just in this camp. I was very distressed at the time; my family is Fatah and my husband PFLP. I was very tired. He came and showed me the reply from the *Hakim*, he told me look: self-defence is allowed just inside the office. Anyone who goes out of the office area and fights will get prosecuted in a civilian court. It is forbidden to fire a gun in the camp, even if the office gets demolished. He [the *Hakim*] sent another letter stating, this is our people, that we get killed is not a problem but the important thing is that nothing happens to the camp. So they stayed in that office. And at that time, there were three girls and thirteen guys in the office; the battle lasted from seven at night until seven in the morning.

Following the killing of her husband, Um Fadi, twenty-four years old and mother of four, secluded herself. After confining herself to her parent's home for a year and a half, she decided to visit Palestine for the first time. Her uncles had remained in their original village of *Shafa 'Amr* in Palestine after the 1948 *Nakba* and had been able, at the time, to get a permit for her and her four children to visit them for three months. Her trip to Palestine reinvigorated her, she explained:

I returned [to Lebanon from Palestine] energized and replenished. I was more attached to the *thawra*. At the beginning I entered because of the mood of the house, but when I went and came back I returned with a full awareness/consciousness (*wa'ī kāmīl*) of the importance of Palestine, of how they live in it and outside it and that the return must happen. We should all be convinced of it.

Um Fadi explained that it was at that time that she joined the PFLP and started working full time in the PFLP radio communications department and was proud to be working and providing for her children. In the 1980s her responsibilities increased and she took charge of the PFLP's 'women's affairs' in Beddawi camp. She was a highly energetic woman who worked, along other women, to provide food and vital supplies to the many fighters who were in the camp.<sup>113</sup> This work caused her to be well known in the camp, which explained how I could walk into any store on a busy commercial street and ask for

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<sup>113</sup> The number of fighters substantially increased in 1982 due to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

directions to her home. She was also involved in creating economic opportunities for women. She once organized an exhibition to sell women's homemade products such as thyme mixtures [*za'tar*], pickles, dried cheese [*kishik*], and herbal teas [*zuhūrāt*]. She explained that when the PFLP leadership refused to provide money for the exhibition, a sum of 250,000 Lebanese pounds (about 167 US dollars), she borrowed the amount from a friend, carried through her idea on her own, and with the sale of the products made enough money to pay back her friend. Throughout our conversation Um Fadi was highly critical of the leadership of the PFLP and of her comrades in Beddawi camp. She was particularly upset at the financial crisis that the faction was facing which meant that she could not implement any projects or help those in need. In light of her heavy criticism of the leadership and her comrades in the PFLP, I asked her to describe her relationship to it. While her answer was long, I quote it here at length as it reveals the complexity of her affiliation with the faction and drives my analysis.

*Perla:* What do you feel towards the PFLP? How would you describe your relationship with it?

*Um Fadi:* I told you the organization [*tanẓim*] I respect it and I entered it out of conviction, without pressure and after a long time. And I don't forget that there are people who invested a lot in me, who helped me get the skills I have, who trained me, in the PFLP. People who were martyred. And this is what makes it hard. I feel it is a heavy load on me.

*Perla:* That they gave this much.

*Um Fadi:* Yes and that we have to continue regardless of the problems and obstacles.

*Perla:* And they were from the PFLP?

*Um Fadi:* Yes, they were like a father or a brother to me. In the time when I was secluding myself, they were the family that took me in, at the height of my crisis. I remember mostly one person. I consider him like a father to me, Abu Mustafa Rashid of Nahr el-Bared; he was martyred in the internal killing.<sup>114</sup> Damn it!

*Perla:* In 1983?

*Um Fadi:* Yes, he was taking food to people or taking people to a shelter. He was killed in the street, a bomb killed him. When I used to go out in the morning, leaving my kids behind - you know they were young, it was a big responsibility, I had to work and leave them at home - I would be worried and

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<sup>114</sup> Um Fadi here is referring to the 1983 battle between Fatah and Fatah al-Intifada in Nahr el-Bared camp.

upset. I would find him standing outside. When he would see me - his hair was greyish - he would ask me: What is wrong today? Why are you upset? I felt he was like my father, I felt he was my father ... I started bringing books to read, I wanted to read the books of the PFLP. One of the first things I read was the proceedings of the fourth conference of the PFLP. [Abu Mustafa Rashid ] saw me, he told me anything you need I am willing to help. I started discussing things with him; you know the person who is inside something is not like the person who is about to enter. I felt like he encouraged me, like he protected me, he gave me back the confidence I had lost. ... Once a young man was martyred. I was very upset about it, I was with [Abu Mustafa Rashid] in a car going to Tripoli - he had many friends there - to get donations. He put the recorder on a PFLP song [it said:] 'It is not important if we are alive, it is not important if we die in the cry of war, if we find someone who carries the gun and continues the struggle.' He would say, when you are upset, listen to this recording. So this affected me the most. ... What keeps me attached [to the PFLP] is that there are people who were martyred knowing that there are people behind them continuing the journey. They were martyred for convictions and principles that *made* the PFLP. So I have to continue with the same principles that they died for even if the whole community wants to outcast me I don't care, because people gave their blood for this.

This passage is very powerful and reveals several important points, which I discuss in the next sections. Firstly, I will highlight how sacrifice gave life to the PFLP by associating it with the ideals that people died for. Secondly, I will argue that the faction became an immaterial conceptual structure that we learn about through studying its ideology and was separated from the very people and practices that brought it into being. For Um Fadi the PFLP became associated with the ideals that her husband died for and became separated from the current people and leadership of the PFLP. Thirdly, I will reveal how this dissociation of the factions from people also implied a dissociation of the faction from Um Fadi. We will see how Um Fadi placed herself 'outside' of the PFLP, looking at it, studying it and then deciding to 'join' it. I will also highlight how this position was ultimately untenable, as by her own words it became apparent that trying to place Um Fadi as 'outside' or 'inside' the PFLP did not properly describe her relationship to it.



## *Dying for principles*

Firstly, when Um Fadi recounted the story of her husband's killing and when she spoke of Abu Mustapha Rashid, she stressed the fact that they gave their lives for the principles of the PFLP. This was very clear in the way she recounted the story of her husband's death. In particular she highlighted the two letters that the Chairman of the PFLP George Habash wrote to her husband explaining that the PFLP did not engage in internal fighting and forbade her husband from fighting Fatah unless it was in self-defence and confined to the PFLP's office premises. Um Fadi also highlighted how her husband abided by these principles ("they stayed in *that office*") even if it ended up costing him his life. Um Fadi related another incident that further underlined this point. She explained that her brothers, who were with Fatah, wanted to protect her husband and proposed to take him outside of the camp. However he refused and according to Um Fadi one of her brothers asked him: "What, the office is Jerusalem?" and he replied "This office will get me to Jerusalem, you can only get me out of it dead." This again highlighted his resolve to uphold PFLP principles, even if it meant his ultimate death. Similarly, Abu Mustapha Rashid not only abided by PFLP principles, of not engaging in internal fighting, but he was killed in the indiscriminate bombing during an internal battle that he did not partake in, rather, according to Um Fadi, he was trying to help others.

For Um Fadi, her husband and her close friend and mentor, Abu Mustapha Rashid, died to uphold the principles of the PFLP and by doing so they gave life to the PFLP. Um Fadi explained that 'They were martyred for convictions and principles that *made* the PFLP. So I have to continue with the same principles that they died for even if the whole community wants to outcast me I don't care, because people gave their blood for this.' For Um Fadi, the PFLP was 'made' of principles; it was no longer 'made' of people. Additionally, Um Fadi revealed that sacrifice gave life by creating a commitment in the minds

of survivors to honour the ideals that their comrades fell for.<sup>115</sup> This point was highlighted by the song that Um Fadi mentioned, and that Abu Mustapha Rashid introduced her to in order to console her over the death of a young man. Um Fadi repeated a few of its lines: “It is not important if we are alive, it is not important if we die in the cry of war, if we find someone who carries the gun and continues the struggle.” After looking up the song, I found that it ended with the following sentence: ‘If we find others [who continue the journey] then we did not die.’ It’s clear that Um Fadi felt an obligation to continue with those same principles, that the PFLP now stands for, otherwise her husband and friend would have died in vain. This was what she referred to as ‘a heavy load’ at the beginning of the quote.

### *Factions become separated from people*

Secondly, associating a faction with an ideology also separated it from the people currently in the faction. Um Fadi was not happy with the current state of affairs in the PFLP. She was critical of the leadership when they did not support her efforts to create economic opportunities for women in the camp through the sale of homemade products, even with a minimal sum. She voiced her discontent repeatedly throughout our discussion, pointing out that she was unable to help those in need. In the past, she explained, she used to help the sick or if parents were about to take a child out of school due to lack of funds, she would collect enough money to prevent that. But now there is no money and she was secluding herself again at home. She asked me “What should I do? Go and watch the sick? Especially when it is known that I am responsible for this. This is what is depressing me the most.” This situation was making her uncomfortable

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<sup>115</sup> Other research has been made into how sacrifice creates life. Writing about martyrdom in Palestine, AbuFarha points out that sacrifice has always been seen since ancient mythology as that which creates life. AbuFarha, *The Making of a Human Bomb: An Ethnography of Palestinian Resistance* at 14.. He states that “in the Palestinian context the sacrificed Palestinian bodies in Palestine correlate alternative shapes to one another in a homologous relation; the dismembered body parts *creates* the new universe within which Palestine is *alive*” *ibid.*, author’s emphasis. He goes on to argue, “the blood is water that nourishes the fields where streams would flow and birds would sing” and the “human flesh is soil where flowers bloom” *ibid.*

with the current state of the faction, but for her to leave the PFLP was like letting down the people who sacrificed their lives for it. She insisted that one must go on “regardless of the problems and obstacles” because those who sacrificed their lives died knowing that others will “continue the journey.” Her sense of commitment and loyalty to the principles that her husband and friends sacrificed their lives for, not only gave life to the PFLP, but it also separated it from the current people and practices engulfed in it. Through ideology the PFLP gets a life of its own separate from the very people and practices that were engulfed in it.

For Um Fadi, the PFLP became an entity that she learned about through its ideology. Ideology, in this sense opened up a distance, a space of separation that made it possible to ‘learn about’ and ‘enter’ the PFLP. She explained that upon her return from Palestine she became interested in learning more about the PFLP, which she did through reading its literature, including its conference proceedings. She added that Abu Mustapha Rashid was eager to help her, stressing that “the person who is inside something is not like the person who is about to enter” (*yalli dākhil al shī mish mitl yalli baddu yidkhul ‘alayh*). Here we get the image of the faction as a structure, as an entity (*shī*), that people entered. Additionally, a person’s knowledge of the literature of the PFLP became a measure of the supposed depth of their membership. Through ideology the PFLP got a life of its own separating it from the people currently inside of it (its leadership and fellow PFLP members in Beddawi camp). Other Palestinians also referred to this separation of the faction, which now exists at the level of ideas, from the people currently in it. In particular, it occurred most often with Fatah. It was common for Palestinians to say that “Fatah is not about Abu Mazen,’ ‘this is not the real Fatah,’ or ‘Fatah is not about those people.’ For many Palestinians Fatah no longer stood for its current leadership or its current members, but stood for past ideals that their close friends or family members fought for.

### *Standing 'outside' looking 'in'*

Finally, what was particularly interesting about Um Fadi's case was that this apparent separation of the factions, which now existed at the ideational level, from its people also caused her to attempt to portray herself as being 'outside' the PFLP 'about to enter' it upon her return from Palestine. Throughout our conversation Um Fadi was insistent on portraying her involvement with the PFLP as being the result of her own "conviction" which occurred "without pressure and after a long time." This was also emphasized by her initial mention of having an "independent personality" from her husband. Um Fadi was eager to explain to me that her involvement with the PFLP did not stem from her marriage to a PFLP member, but rather it was due to her own reflection and decision. Um Fadi's own portrayal of herself was linked to how the subject was seen to exist as an autonomous moral agent outside of power relations and society (Hindess 1996: 146-51; Mahmood 2005: 5-11). In this case "for an individual to be free, her actions must be the consequence of her 'own will' rather than of custom, tradition, or social cohesion" (Mahmood 2005: 11). This stands in line with Um Fadi's attempted depiction of herself as choosing to join the PFLP out of 'conviction' and not 'out of pressure.' This was again reflected in Um Fadi's description of the change she went through due to her visit to Palestine. She explained that she returned "with a full awareness/consciousness" (*waṭ kāmīl*) which she contrasted with her attachment to the *thawra* prior to her trip which stemmed from "the mood of the house" (*jaw al bayt*).

However Um Fadi's self-positioning as being 'outside' the PFLP 'about to enter it' two year after her husband's killing was untenable by her own admissions. Firstly, she explained that she was privy to high-level discussions between her husband and the PFLP Chairman George Habash. This alone gave us a glimpse into the amount of information that Um Fadi had access to while her husband was alive. Secondly, her statement that she joined the PFLP due to her

own 'conviction' of its principles, and that it was not related to her association through marriage to a PFLP member, was also untenable. As explained earlier what gave those principles their importance was precisely her husband's and Abu Mustapha Rashid's killing. This was perfectly illustrated in Um Fadi's initial response when I prompted her to describe her relationship with the PFLP.

Repeating part of the above mentioned quote, she said:

I told you the organization [*tanzim*] I respect it and I entered it out of conviction, without pressure and after a long time. And I don't forget that there are people who invested a lot in me, who helped me get the skills I have, who trained me, in the PFLP. People who were martyred. And this is what makes it hard. I feel it is a heavy load on me.

Um Fadi began her answer by talking of the *tanzim* and her respect for 'it' and that she entered it out of her own free will. Again we get the picture here of the PFLP being an entity as Um Fadi referred to it as 'it.' The faction appears as a structure that a person 'enters' 'out of conviction' and not out of association with other people in it. However, her second sentence betrays the image of factions as structures defined by its ideology that was drawn in the first sentence. In it she discussed her strong relationship with the *people* in the PFLP who were martyred, an obvious reference back to her husband and Abu Mustapha Rashid. Here her relationship with the PFLP was defined by her relationship to those close to her who were killed upholding the PFLP principles. This showed how sacrifice gave life to the PFLP by associating it with ideals that people appeared to have died for. Through ideology the PFLP obtained a life of its own separating it, not only, from the people currently inside of it (its leadership and fellow PFLP members in Beddawi camp) but also from the people (Um Fadi's husband and Abu Mustapha Rashid) and the practices (their killing) that brought it into being.

There is no disputing that Um Fadi took her own decision to join the PFLP, but none of it happened while being 'outside' of the faction. There was no 'outside' or 'inside', but human relations. Nowhere did a person stand outside others and develop his/her own ideas. Of course a person could disagree with a

certain political idea and stance, like Abu Ali did by hitting the bronze Lenin statue with his shoe, or his son Rabieh by handing over his gun when the PFLP decided to stand on the sidelines in a war that shattered his community, but none of their thoughts existed on their own, outside of the practice of interacting with others. Again I am not arguing that Um Fadi had no ability to think on her own, or that she was predestined to join the PFLP simply by marrying a PFLP member. What I am saying is that Um Fadi was already entangled in the PFLP, which should be seen as a network of people, rather than a structure. She actually formed parts of it. We can only see her as being 'outside' if we look at factions as structures existing separately from people. However if we look at factions as people and practices then can see how Um Fadi was already positioned within its web and that the line she 'crossed' upon her return from Palestine, when she formally joined, was a line drawn internally, by specific practices that served to divide the world between the politically affiliated and the non-affiliated. Ideology, as a form of knowledge, gave Um Fadi the appearance that she could stand 'outside' the PFLP and grasp it in its entirety.

## **Conclusion**

I end this chapter with one last example from Um Fadi's life that illustrates my argument that factions appeared to be defined by ideology while they were constituted by personal relations. In 1983, five years after the killing of her husband, and a few months after the killing of Abu Mustapha Rashid, Um Fadi's younger brother Ziad was kidnapped by Fatah al-Intifada for his perceived involvement with Fatah. Such kidnappings were dreaded and family members had a few hours to try to secure the release of their loved ones before they would be transported inside Syrian territory. Once they crossed the border "God can't return them" as Um Fadi explained. I let Um Fadi recount the remainder of the story in her own words:

One day they came to Ziad's house and took him. My mother was crying. I asked her: Who took him? She said I don't know; they just took him. And you should see my brother, he is so sweet. I lost my mind. I went outside barefoot, running, I went to the [Fatah al-] Intifada office running, asking where is my brother Ziad? They said not here, one of the guys said: you are asking about your brother? But they [Fatah] killed your husband! ... I took him from his shirt and I pushed him onto the wall. [I told him:] 'I don't need someone like you to come and tell me such things and you know full well that my brothers had nothing to do with it, and if I knew who [killed my husband] I wouldn't wait for someone like you to talk to me like that.' I left. As I was going to the office of the Armed Struggle, I saw an ambulance go by and there was someone in it, I felt that it was Ziad. ... I remembered that I knew one man who was with my father in the naval base, Abu Nash'at. He was with Fatah; he was from Jordan. They told me that he was with the Intifada now.

...

When he saw me, he stood up and told me Leila – he knew me from when I was a little girl - he told me what are you doing here? I told him Abu Nash'at they took my brother, and I want to bring him back now, I will not go back and tell my mother that I did not find my brother. I cannot. I prefer to die. I cannot imagine my mother like that. He wrote a letter and gave it to the guy driving me, he told him take her to this place and let her see Ziad.

This story is powerful because it shows how ideology and personal relations interplay. Ziad (who at the time of research was a football coach in a secondary school in Tripoli) was taken because of his association with Fatah, for appearing to be a member of a structure defined by its ideology, by its political positioning, and in this case also characterized by the killing of Um Fadi's husband. However what saved Ziad's life, beyond his sister's courageous and quick thinking, was an old friendship between his long deceased father and a comrade dating more than twenty years back. Um Fadi stressed the strength and longevity of the family's relation with Abu Nash'at by emphasizing that he called her 'Leila' and not 'Um Fadi' which indicated that he knew her prior to her marriage and prior to Fadi's birth. This example shows well how factions, which were based on personal relations, appeared to be defined by ideology but that appearance was quite unstable and could quickly breakdown again when confronted with a personal relation. That was precisely what Um Fadi did when she went to see Abu Nash'at. But this example also shows how powerful this

appearance of separation could be when Palestinians engaged in internal fighting. Instances of violent factionalism were truly the hardest traumas for Palestinians to overcome and it was precisely because they knew full well that people joined factions based on personal relations but then they would be associated with a structure defined by its ideology and a certain political position, which could then lead to internal fighting.

In this chapter I showed how factions appeared to be structures defined by their ideology through the creation of what appeared to be an 'outside'. Firstly, I showed how anniversary commemorations were set up "before an audience as an object on display, to be viewed, experienced and investigated" (Mitchell 1988: 6). Through this new position factions metamorphosed from human networks into structures with a life of their own separated from the people and practices that brought them into being. I argued that the practice of watching anniversary marches or rallies, as the physical embodiment of the factions, was the way through which that very existence was produced. Indeed factions became entities that were assumed to exist outside of the practices people were engaged in. However, factions as entities were never quite visible, they were only represented by their flag, offices, football clubs, stamps, badges, or letterheads. These representations were real: a person could touch them and see them, yet what they stood for was the invisible entity that we called the faction and that was defined by its ideology. This in turn created a space of separation that allowed factions to appear as 'representative bodies' separate from 'the people.'

Secondly, I further investigated how the creation of what appeared to be an outside gave life to factions. In particular I looked at the role of ideology in appearing to define factions and investigated how joining factions through personal relations instead of a private evaluation of ideology was not a backward form of behavior. Rather I showed how our perception of factions as defined by their respective ideologies rested on a particular understanding of personhood standing apart from the physical world, observing it, and grasping it.



## 9. 'THE GUYS WERE DOING SOMETHING GREAT, THE FACTIONS DESTROYED IT'

### CONCLUSION



Tires burning during protests in Nahr el-Bared camp. 15 June 2012. (Photograph: Anonymous)

The primary goal of this study has been to explore how factions appear in the lives of Palestinian refugees in the camps of Lebanon; how refugees encounter them on a day-to-day basis. I have argued that our understanding of the nature of factions changes depending on which practices we focus on. By exploring the motives and methods of Palestinian refugees in joining factions as well as the subsequent evolution of that relationship, we realized that factions resembled loose networks of people coming together with varying degrees of

trust and cohesion which changed with time and circumstances. Yet when we examined practices of aid distribution, physical representation, and factionalism, we concluded that factions appeared as immaterial and impersonal structures that controlled people's lives and fostered mistrust in the community. In other words, factions were formed through local trust relations, yet took on the appearance of impersonal structures that existed separately and autonomously from those personal relations. Additionally, I highlighted that Palestinian refugees were well aware of this double nature of Palestinian political factions. It was the source of constant tension and contradiction in their lives, which was most apparent when they were faced with instances of violent competition between factions.

In this study I have also described the texture of daily life and social relations in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon through an ethnography of Palestinian political factions focused on homes rather than factional offices. An implicit argument of this study is that everyday practices – the seemingly trivial, mundane and banal interactions of Palestinian refugees – are anything but unimportant. Where else would we be able to examine how Palestinians interact with Palestinian political factions on a daily basis? Which form or shape they take? What motivates Palestinians to participate, or not, in formal politics? How Palestinians navigate the web of factions and NGOs in an attempt to better their lives? How those who criticize factions were themselves part of factions? The everyday practices of Palestinian refugees are the crucial ways through which the abstract notion of factions takes concrete shape and form. Factions would simply not exist outside of these social relations and their exploration is therefore essential.

In this concluding chapter I begin by summarizing my research findings to show how an examination of everyday practices advances our understanding of factions and faction membership. I then outline the implications of this work for the study of Palestinian political factions in particular and for the broader

literature on the state and society. Finally, I end by highlighting the importance of the structural effect – of the fact that factions appear as structures defined by ideology when they are based on personal relations – through the exploration of the protest movement that led to the annulment of the military permit system in Nahr el-Bared camp in the summer of 2012. Through this example I explore the tensions and contradictions engendered by the double face of factions. I also highlight how this duality operated as a source of power for Palestinian political factions; how it allowed them to take credit for a popular mobilization of the camp's residents when they had initially criticised it.

### **Key findings**

In chapters 5 and 6 I explored the nature of factions and faction membership. I showed that Palestinians encountered factions not as an ideology but as people, people who were most often family members, friends or neighbours. Examining the personal narratives of Palestinian refugees highlighted how the initial contact with factions occurred out of close, personal, and trust relations. Space was instrumental in fostering these connections and took various forms, including homes, classrooms, neighbourhoods, and factional centres. I also showed that what appeared as the strength of the relationship of a Palestinian to a faction was a reflection of the closeness of the personal relations that were developed in those spaces. As such, the relationship between a person and a faction is not a relationship between a person and a structure defined by ideology, but a relationship between people: it is about personal relations. I posited that faction membership should not be understood as an evaluation of a person's present position vis-à-vis a structure that she or he 'enters' or 'leaves'; rather it is a continuously unfolding story of human relations. It is not about the fulfilment of a contractual agreement – such as the attendance of party meetings – but rather carries with it a dimension of self-identification. In short, factions appeared as loose networks of people bound together with various degrees of trust and cohesion.

The centrality of personal relations in fostering and maintaining factional associations did not reflect a 'backward' or 'tribal' form of politics, where people were putting their analytical faculties on hold and just blindly following those around them. Rather, through the examination of people's life stories I demonstrated how Palestinians were constantly engaged in a critical analysis of the political situation and were often defiant of parental authority even when it was a family member who initially inspired them to partake in factional activities. I also showed the centrality of trust in building personal/political relations in a world defined by constant war, displacement and discrimination.

The next two chapters focused on the practices that allowed factions to take on the appearance of structure when they were based on interpersonal relations. In chapters 7 and 8 I examined three sets of practices: aid distribution, physical representation, and factionalism. I maintained that these practices served to draw factions as impersonal structures that existed separately and autonomously from the trusting personal relations examined in the previous two chapters. I highlighted that the aid distribution process relied on surveillance and monitoring techniques that rendered the lives and homes of Palestinian refugees visible and legible to aid providers while providing little transparency back into the aid distribution process. Aid recipients had little to no knowledge of how much aid was available, when it would be distributed or how its allocation would be decided. This secrecy turned factions into impersonal structures with spatial characteristics. They now appeared as containers that encompassed their members with a top in control, and a bottom that lacked it.

The focus on the provision of care in chapter 7 highlighted how the appearance of structure worked from what seemed to be the 'inside' of factions. However I also argued in chapter 8 that practices of physical representation and factionalism conjured what appeared to be an 'outside,' a position from which we were made to believe that it was possible to see, critique, and study factions. It was this very illusion of being an 'outside observer' that created the imagination

that factions were bounded structures defined by their ideologies. I then demonstrated how that very position was untenable. Through a detailed examination of people's lives I pointed out that what appeared to be the 'outside' was actually a position within the factions' network of relations.

Factions therefore had two natures: they were loose networks of people held together with varying degrees of trust and cohesion yet they appeared as impersonal structures that controlled people's lives and potentially induced distrust in the community. While my thesis is limited by the exploration of the practices I was able to examine in Nahr el-Bared camp at the time of my research (for example, I did not explore the different ways that gender affects the refugees' encounters, experiences, perceptions and imagination of factions) I see my critical analysis of the double nature of factions as a point of departure and not as a moment of arrival. Nevertheless, this study has important implications for the study of Palestinian political factions.

### **Implications for the study of Palestinian political factions**

This thesis offers an alternative means of understanding Palestinian political factions and their role in Palestinian society. My findings questioned three key assumptions that underlie much of the academic and activist work on Palestinian political factions. Firstly, I argued that ideology - the defining characteristic of factions according to the literature - played a small role in everyday life. Palestinians did not approach factions based on whether they were Islamic, secular or Marxist. I demonstrated that the network of factions expanded through personal relations; that factions were built at the local level through strong interpersonal bonds. Secondly, I showed that factions were not bounded structures that contained their members inside, separating them from the outside. As such, no clear line separated those who were politically affiliated from those who were 'independents.' Finally, I explained that

factions had no independent existence on their own outside of the social relations that formed their core.

My work stressed the importance of the social aspect of what is often understood as a political body. While the popularity of Islamic factions (most notably Hamas) is often explained by scholars as being the result of their vast network of services (Baumgarten 2005; Hroub 2006; Milton-Edwards and Farrell 2010; Usher 2006), the process by which this occurs is seldom the focus of research. Rather it is just assumed that the provision of services in itself is what allows the faction to gain popularity. My research highlighted that it was not the services *per se* that increased popularity but, more importantly, it was the personal and social relations that were fostered in these spaces that did. My research pointed to the potentially detrimental side of service provision in increasing mistrust in the community. Indeed when the provision of care was done with little transparency (as was most often done in the camps of Lebanon) than it worked to decrease the credibility of those involved in it, rather than increase it. These points are easily missed and overlooked when studying factions as bodies defined by ideology and their regional and international alliances. Fatah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the PFLP, the DFLP, amongst other, were networks of people where ties were forged, experiences shared, skills gained, and knowledge transmitted. That was their first nature.

Nevertheless, my work did not discount the factions' second nature as containers, shells that existed in their own right. Rather I demonstrated that factions appeared to be so, not out of some intrinsic aspect of their being, but simply due to practices. This realization implies that the appearance of structure is not predetermined. There is no strategic reason that necessitates that factions, for example, distribute aid with little transparency, or that they commemorate annual anniversaries. These practices could always be

otherwise with significant implications for what factions are or could be. Put bluntly, different practices would create different imaginations.

Similarly, by demonstrating that the effect of structure is the result of particular practices, my work implies that even 'independent' or 'grassroots' initiatives could also lead to the effect of structure. I was made particularly aware of this when I was participating in the planning of the march to the southern Lebanese border on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2011. I had classified myself as an 'independent' and in the meeting organizing the press conference for the announcement of the march, several of us, who had labelled ourselves as unaffiliated, insisted that we should have a representative on the podium. The final agreement, after several hours of heated debate, was to have six individuals present, each representing respectively: the PLO, the Alliance,<sup>116</sup> independents, NGOs, Lebanese political parties, and Palestinian youth groups. On the day of the press conference several people came up to me to ask if I had gotten 'my seat on the podium'. I was taken back. When I argued for the inclusion of the 'independents' I was not coveting a seat in front of the cameras, rather I wanted to give visibility to an alternative voice speaking in the name of Palestinian refugees. In other words I was mostly interested in showing that factions were not the only, or 'true', representative of the Palestinian people. However their comment that day made me conscious of how, I, as a self-declared 'independent,' was acting similarly to factions. By asking for a seat on the podium, the 'independents' had just become another faction.

### **Implications for the literature on state and society**

Beyond the Palestinian context, this study has broader implications for the study of state and society relations. Similarly to how theories of the state

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<sup>116</sup> The Alliance or *Taḥāluf* is a group of factions that are not part of the PLO. See Strindberg, 'The Damascus-Based Alliance of Palestinian Forces: A Primer', (

informed my work on Palestinian political factions, so can my work advance our understanding and study of states. This dissertation offers a novel way to study political structures, whether factions or states. Bringing together Mitchell and an ethnographic exploration of everyday life helped greatly by pointing out that it was particular practices that created the effect of structure and provided a method to explore them empirically.

The basic driving force behind this work has been to demonstrate that different practices both build and break the appearance of structure. Such attention to the tension and instability of the structural effect can be helpful in studies of the state. Most theories of the state look at either practices that create the appearance of separation (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Hansen 2001; Mitchell 1988) or tear it down (Abrams 2006; Miliband 1973; Navaro-Yashin 2002; Taussig 1992). By looking at both movements at the same time, this study was able to account for how factions appeared to be structures when they were not. It denaturalized their taken-for-granted nature without getting entangled in a discussion of whether the state existed or not. It took both realities – the existence and non-existence of the structure – to be equally true, as this was how people experienced it.

My work also highlighted that this double movement was the source of contradiction in people's lives as they were constantly aware of how personal relations metamorphosed into ideological positions. Again, few studies look at people's own perception of the double nature of political structures such as states. Those that do ascribe a false consciousness to people who are perceived as being unaware of the 'myth' of the state (Abrams 2006; Taussig 1992). Navaro-Yashin (2002) is an exception as she highlights that her respondents were well aware of the Turkish state's artificiality. Navaro-Yashin explains that in the Turkish context it was difficult to ignore the everyday criticism and ridicule of the state. Informants were not 'falsely conscious,' rather they were well aware of the non-existence of the state, yet



they had to act as if it existed.<sup>117</sup> She illustrates her point through the story of a young woman, Saniye, who worked for the Turkish state but who constantly made fun of “its corruption, its fakeness, its inefficiency, and injustice” (169). Saniye was therefore “conscious of what was behind state ideology” (169). Yet in her protest over the lack of water in her neighbourhood she directed herself, along with friends, to the district mayor’s office (167). This action leads Navaro-Yashin to argue that while Saniye was aware of the state’s fakeness she had to act ‘as if’ she was unaware of it, in order to restore water to her neighbourhood. For Navaro-Yashin, the state is therefore a ‘fantasy,’ a myth that continues to exist even after its hollowness is exposed.

My work leads me down a different path than Navaro-Yashin. While, similarly to her work, my empirical evidence highlighted how Palestinian refugees were well aware that factions were not bounded structures defined by their ideologies but networks of people held together by social relations, they nevertheless also experienced the factions as impersonal structures that controlled their lives. I do not discount one explanation for another. They are both equally significant. Therefore, my work differs from Navaro-Yashin’s in explaining that factions were not mere fantasies (or myths) but rather they were *real* as they affected the daily lives of Palestinian refugees in a very *real* way.

My analysis also indicates the instability and fragility this appearance of structure was as well as its potential power. The elusive character of political structures should not be seen as a drawback or as a source of weakness; instead, it was a source of power. In the next section I further develop the implications of this point through one final empirical example of a protest movement in Nahr el-Bared, which brought the end of the military permit system.

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<sup>117</sup> Navaro-Yashin’s work follows on the concept of cynicism from Žižek, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1995). Cynicism grants agency to subjects by advancing the idea that they know about the state’s falsity but choose to act ‘as if’ they didn’t.

This example allows me to tease out the fissures and ruptures as well as the power of the structural effect.

### **The effect of structure**

There was an event in Shatila. They built a wooden seat and they were making people sign it asking for the seat [at the UN] ... We used to distribute *klashins* [Kalashnikov rifles], now it's wooden chairs.

Faris, young generation, Beirut, 10 October 2011

The face of Palestine is known as the factions. That's it. Palestine has this and that faction. Factions are everywhere. This is why, if you appear alone, you won't appear. Who are you? With whom are you? It is as if Palestine needs to remain ... amongst those factions; that those are the factions that need to work.

Lina, young generation, Nahr el-Bared camp, 28 July 2011

On Friday the 15<sup>th</sup> June 2012 a Lebanese army patrol accosted a young Palestinian man sitting on a motorcycle in Nahr el-Bared camp. An altercation ensued which quickly grew in size as more young Palestinian men converged on the scene and as the patrol called for reinforcements. Soon armoured personal carriers were rolling down the camp's main street using tear gas and shooting live ammunition. As a result, a fifteen-year-old water delivery boy, named Ahmad Qassem, was fatally shot in the head and five other Palestinians were injured. Young men began throwing stones at the army, burning tires and building barricades. The army eventually retreated and the young men decided to remain in the streets and began an open-ended sit-in. Three days later at Ahmad's funeral, protesters stormed a barricade separating the funeral procession from the army. The army responded with live fire and a grocery store owner, Fuad Lubani, was fatally shot while standing at his home's doorstep allegedly attempting to convince the protesters to move back. In a further act of provocation the army shot and injured two of his brothers and a cousin as they each, in turn, attempted to bring the bodies of their wounded relatives inside the family home.

The killings of Ahmad Qassem, and Fuad Lubani, were the most immediate events that infuriated the protesters, but what drove the residents of Nahr el-Bared to rebel against the army was their treatment at the hands of the military apparatus for the past five years.<sup>118</sup> Residents repeatedly pointed out how they needed a permit to access their own homes (a process often used by the army to coerce residents to provide 'information' about camp activities similarly to how the army had attempted to do with me). Residents also found the conduct of soldiers at checkpoints to be particularly degrading. Protesters demanded the end of the military permit system, the return of confiscated land and homes, the expansion of the camp's cemetery, which could no longer accommodate new burials, as well as the release of those detained since the beginning of the events.

Many of the residents I spoke to about the initial days of the sit-in expressed both fear and defiance in the face of the army's response.<sup>119</sup> People were especially proud to state that Nahr el-Bared 'was like Gaza,' or 'like Palestine' highlighting how through their resistance to the Lebanese army's repression they felt closer to their compatriots in Palestine who were seen as perpetual resisters. Nadia, the Talal family's daughter, who was fond of Turkish soap-operas, told me how she ran faster than tanks as she looked for her brother during the initial clashes. Other residents described how women threw garbage bags from their windows and balconies onto the moving tanks and APCs; others explained how young men took their shirts off, publicly displaying their lack of fear at facing the army with nothing but their bare chests. Everyone's favourite story featured a tale of soldiers running away and retreating in the face of stones or burning tires.

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<sup>118</sup> Khaled Yousef, another Palestinian protester was killed in Ein el-Hilweh camp in the south of Lebanon during a protest in solidarity with Nahr el-Bared.

<sup>119</sup> I visited Nahr el-Bared camp about a month after the protests started. I conducted seven in-depth interviews as well as about twenty informal conversations.

However, the Palestinian political leadership issued statements criticizing the sit-in and supporting the army. In a statement released in the first few days of unrest they declared their deep relationship with the army and expressed their solidarity (Al-Jadeed TV 2012). The Palestinian Authority representative Azzam al-Ahmad declared to the media that ‘foreign elements’ were trying to steer problems between the army and the residents of Nahr el-Bared (Ma’an News Agency 2012; Mroueh 2012). These statements infuriated the protesters who feared that their leadership would not object if the army continued to deal with them in a violent manner. While the popular mobilization was clearly aimed at the Lebanese army’s control over life in the camp, the protest also carried within it a second condemnation aimed at Palestinian political factions. The mother of the Talal family, Um Muhammad, explained to me how on the first day of unrest, several heads of factions attempted to approach the young men along with the army and stones were thrown at them, which amused her greatly. A common chant during the protests was “*hīrī hīrī hīrī, qiyāda shī bikharrī*” (loosely translated to ‘Shitty leadership’). Young protesters appearing on YouTube videos would distance themselves from political factions (SolidarityPalestine 2012). Condemnations of the factions began to appear on blogs (Rami 2012).

Nevertheless, according to my interviewees, the factions were able to ‘take over’ this budding opposition movement after the death of Fuad. They explained that the factions had been able to do so for three reasons. First was the issue of who would care for the families of the martyrs. The protesters did not have the financial resources needed to provide for the families who had lost a family member and a breadwinner. Secondly, the need to negotiate with the army became more pressing after the killing of Fuad. The young protesters knew they could not protest endlessly without entering into discussion with the army. The best intermediary was considered to be the factions. Young protesters repeatedly explained to me that they felt wrong to speak to the army directly, as if it would dishonour the martyrs’ sacrifices. They were also well aware that the army would not enter into direct negotiations with them. “At that time, the army is not going to

talk to me, they will talk to the factions,” said one young protester. Thirdly, there was a general sense that the political situation in Lebanon was too unstable and everyone feared that the events in Nahr el-Bared would be wrongly linked to the Syrian uprising. Barely a month prior to the protests two prominent sheikhs, affiliated to the Syrian opposition, were killed at a checkpoint by the Lebanese army. Demands for the withdrawal of the army from northern Lebanon grew louder at that time. Camp residents feared that local Lebanese leaders would use the camp mobilization as a way to further increase the pressure on the army for their own goals. While everyone, including the protesters, wanted to protect the protest from Lebanese meddling, some felt that the situation was dangerous enough to warrant the intervention of more ‘experienced’ parties, meaning the factions.<sup>120</sup>

Over the next month, the army refrained from entering the camp and the protesters continued their sit-in. It featured nightly events, such as dance and music performances, film screenings, political speeches or just discussions between the different participants. Donations were collected locally and from the Diaspora to sustain the sit-in. The protesters also took it upon themselves to clean the streets from the residue of burned tires, which was considered a health hazard. Finally, in July the army released the detainees. A few weeks later it lifted the permit system and handed over confiscated land and properties. The protesters had achieved their goals, and it created much joy in the camp. However many individuals were unhappy that this development was being portrayed as a victory for the factions. They were outraged that Palestinian political factions, who stood on the sidelines at the beginning of the protests, had managed to bare the fruits of this popular mobilization. Their credibility vis-à-vis

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<sup>120</sup> My own interactions with the protesters did not substantiate this view. For example, as I was sitting one evening in the protesters’ encampment, a middle-aged man introduced himself to me. I had never met him before. He explained that this movement needs ‘real men’ and ‘*rujūl*’ (manliness). A young boy, probably no more than fourteen years old, replied back that what was needed was ‘*ḥikmi*’ (meaning wisdom). The middle-aged man then replied ‘go to UNRWA if you want ‘*ḥikmi*’ playing on the double meaning of ‘*ḥikmi*’ in colloquial Arabic as wisdom and as medical care.

the Lebanese government had increased and new security and coordination committees were now formed in conjunction with them (Dockery 2012).

Yet I contend that it was possible to have a different reading of how and when the factions' involvement began. Through my discussions with camp residents and by looking at pictures on Facebook and videos on YouTube, it was apparent that many of the people who participated in the initial events, even before Fuad's killing, were themselves part of the network of factions. For example, both of the Talal family's sons, Mahmud and Ahmad had attended several rallies. Ahmad was a self-identified Islamic Jihad member, while Mahmud kept a complex relationship with the DFLP.<sup>121</sup> Similarly Rabieh – who 'left' the PFLP because of their non-involvement in the 2007 battle but had deep friendships with part of its youth group – and his father Abu Ali – who hit the Lenin statue with his shoe – were part of the protests.<sup>122</sup> Finally, Shadi, the ex-head of a PFLP NGO who was relieved of his services over a financial dispute, was also present early on and actually became one of the spokespersons for the young protesters.<sup>123</sup> It seemed that factions had been part of the mobilization all along.

How can we explain this discrepancy in the accounts? Examining the moment when factions were said to have 'taken over' helps us answer that question. From the narratives of camp residents, it appears that factions 'took over' and 'took credit' for the movement's successes once particular actions needed to be taken: the care for the martyr's families, negotiating with the army, and analyzing the political situation. These fall under three categories of practices, which I already investigated as causing the structural effect: the provision of care, the need for representation, and the apparent monopoly over political knowledge. It seemed that our understanding of the factions' involvement

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<sup>121</sup> See chapter 5 p 147-148 for a discussion of Ahmad's relation with Islamic Jihad and chapter 6 p 167-170 for Mahmud's relationship with the DFLP.

<sup>122</sup> See chapter 5 p 135-143 and chapter 6 p 184-189

<sup>123</sup> See chapter 6 p 164-170

in the protests depended on our conceptualization of factions. Looking at factions as a network of people we realize that factions had been part of the movement all along; they were never 'outside' it. However if we understood factions as entities with a life of their own, separate from the people, then their involvement appeared to occur after Fuad's death. In other words, the participation of individuals, who were part of the network factions, did not seem to implicate the factions in the mobilization, it was the involvement of factions as entities in their own right that did. This point can be further highlighted by examining the involvement of the factions in the organizing committees of the protests.

Protesters I spoke to explained that factions became part of the organizing committees after Fuad's killing. However, this was again difficult to substantiate. Those same protesters added that the initial ad-hoc committees were comprised of a representative of the youth, of the popular committee, and of the inhabitants who lived close to the protesters encampment. Since the popular committee was itself appointed by factions, it meant that faction members were already part of the organizing committees from the first day. However the involvement of the popular committee members was not seen as involving the factions. For the protesters the involvement of the factions only began when certain individuals participated in the organizing committees as representative of factions. In other words factions only gained a presence once they were represented. It was not a person's involvement in the network of factions that involved the factions, but the factions' representation that did. In the latter case, the factions as bodies appeared to be involved instead of individuals.

This was the power of the structural effect; it turned a network of people into a structure while hiding the actual social relations that formed its very basis. The lifting of the permit system was no longer attributed to people but to factions. Factions became something the media – and activists – could point to and either credit them with victory or accuse them of profiting from people's sacrifices. Furthermore by appearing as structures the factions became the centre of

political life despite their widespread unpopularity. They were the ones the army wanted to negotiate with, they were the ones to whom funding was given, and they were the ones seen to have adequate political knowledge. In other words, the structural effect increased the occurrence of those very practices that caused it in the first place. It was a self-perpetuating mechanism, reproducing itself at each juncture. This explained why Palestinians always accused the 'factions' of wanting the 'chair.' 'It's a struggle for the chair not the cause' was a common refrain in the camps in Lebanon. The 'chair' represented the seat in high-level meetings, at the negotiation table, at donor and press conferences. It was this seat of power that allowed a minority of individuals to speak in the name of a majority.

## **Final thoughts**

I end this thesis on a personal note, not because as an ethnographer I was personally implicated in my own research, but because this work taught me something about myself. I began this journey with one goal in mind: to find out how unpopular and discredited factions remained in charge. How did 'empty buildings,' mere shells, maintain their status as the centre of political life in the face of widespread condemnation? What was their power? With time I realized that their source of power was my own formulation of that question. It was the 'they.' By making me believe that 'they' were a discrete entity that I needed to struggle against, I was unknowingly strengthening 'them.' In my way of speaking, thinking, and acting I was reinforcing 'their' appearance of structure. In other words, this study taught me that I too am part of the network of factions. This may seem like a depressing conclusion, but I prefer to see it differently. Armed with this new understanding I now begin another journey with a different goal in mind. Knowing that I am on the inside rather than the outside, and that practices are at fault and not 'factions,' the new question becomes: can this novel perspective be used to destabilise the appearance of structure?



## APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF FACTIONS

**DFLP:** The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine was formed out of a break from the PFLP led by Nayef Hawatmeh in 1969 over disagreements over the role of diplomacy and armed struggle. It proclaims itself Marxist-Leninist and was the initiator of the 'mini-state solution,' which calls for the creation of a Palestinian state on any part of historical Palestine.

**Fatah:** A leading Palestinian political faction, Fatah constitutes the largest and dominant group within the PLO and is the embodiment of secular Palestinian secularism. Founded in 1959 by Yasser Arafat, Khalil Wazir, Khaled al-Hassan and Salah Khalaf, it rose to prominence after the Arab defeat by Israel in 1967 by engaging in guerilla warfare against Israel. Currently chaired by Mahmoud Abbas, it features multiple internal discords over the issues of peace negotiations versus resistance, corruption, and undemocratic practices within the organization.

**Fatah al-Intifada:** A splinter group from Fatah. Fatah al-Intifada was founded in 1983 by Abu Musa and Abu Saleh following disagreements with the Fatah leadership over military decisions and corruption during the Israeli occupation of Lebanon in 1982. It receives financial, military and political support from Syria.

**Hamas:** An offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas was founded in the Gaza Strip in 1987 at the beginning of the first *Intifada*. It espouses an Islamic ideology and has attempted from the beginning to offer an alternative to the secular Palestinian organizations. Hamas remains outside the PLO until today. It has an extensive network of social, welfare, cultural, economic, and educational services. While officially retaining the right to armed struggle against the Israeli occupation, it has repeatedly offered to abide by a long-term ceasefire in exchange for the founding of a Palestinian state alongside Israel along the 1967 borders.

**Islamic Jihad:** Founded in 1979 by former members of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood who wanted to take military action against the Israeli occupation of Palestine. It differentiates itself from Hamas by advocating that first an armed struggle needs to be waged against Israel and then efforts can be diverted towards the establishment of 'proper Islam' in society.

**PFLP (*Jabha*):** The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine was formed in 1967 under the leadership of George Habash out of the Arab Nationalist Movement, an organization set up in the 1950s that identified itself with Nasserism. Over the years it was Fatah's main rival and critic within the PLO. It proclaims itself a Marxist organization. It became well known for spectacular operations including airplane hijackings, which it renounced in 1972.

**PFLP-GC:** The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command is a small group, founded by Ahmad Jibril out of a split with the PFLP in 1968. Backed by Syria, its presence is limited to Syria and Lebanon.

**PPP:** The Palestinian People's Party was previously known as the Palestinian Communist Party. The PPP enjoyed considerable support in the West Bank and Gaza in the 70s and 80s and played an important role during the first *Intifada*. Its popularity has since significantly declined and it has a small presence in Lebanon.

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