

REFUGE AND RESISTANCE

Palestinians and the International Refugee System

ANNE IRFAN



REFUGE AND RESISTANCE

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Refuge and Resistance

PALESTINIANS AND THE INTERNATIONAL
REFUGEE SYSTEM

Anne Irfan

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Dedicated to my mother, Ellen Carter.

But what would happen if we were to remain in this temporary world for ever?

—ELIAS KHOURY, *GATE OF THE SUN*

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

Where Arabic words and phrases appear in this book, I have followed the transliteration guide of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (IJMES) without diacritics, except for common English forms such as Beirut and mufti. Similarly, Arabic names are presented here according to the conventions of the Chicago Manual of Style, except for common spellings like Gamal Abdel Nasser.

Where Arabic words are cited from particular Anglophone texts, the source's own transliteration is used.

All translations from Arabic and French to English are my own, unless stated otherwise.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFSC	American Friends Service Committee
AHC	Arab Higher Committee
ALF	Arab Liberation Front
ANM	Arab Nationalist Movement
AUB	American University of Beirut
BDS	Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions
CEIRPP	Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People
COGAT	Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories [Israel]
CUOPA	Cambridge University Official Publications Archive
CURBM	Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscripts
DAPR	Department for the Affairs of Palestine Refugees [Lebanon]
DB	Deuxième Bureau [Lebanon]
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
DPA	Department for Palestinian Affairs [Jordan]
DPRA	Directorate of Palestinian Refugee Affairs [Lebanon]
DUA	Director of UNRWA Affairs
DUO	Director of UNRWA Operations
ESM	Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East [United Nations]
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale [Algeria]
GAPAR	General Administration for Palestine Arab Refugees [Syria after 1974]

GUPS	General Union of Palestinian Students
GUPT	General Union of Palestinian Teachers
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDF	Israeli Defense Forces
<i>IJMES</i>	<i>International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies</i>
IPS	Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut, Lebanon
JA	Jewish Agency
LRCS	League of Red Cross Societies
MECA	Middle East Centre Archive, St Antony's College, Oxford
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs [Lebanon]
OIB	Orient-Institut Beirut
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories [West Bank and Gaza Strip after 1967]
PA	Palestinian Authority
PARI	Palestine Arab Refugee Institute [Syria before 1974]
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PFLP-GC	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command
PLA	Palestine Liberation Army
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PNC	Palestinian National Council
PPC	Palestine Planning Centre
PPPA	Palestine Poster Project Archive
PRC	Palestinian Research Centre
RSC	Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford University
TNA	The National Archives, London [previously Public Records Office]
UAR	United Arab Republic [Egypt and Syria, 1958–1961]
UCRA	UNRWA Central Registry Archive, Amman, Jordan
UN	United Nations
UNA	United Nations Archives, New York
UNCCP	United Nations Conciliation Committee for Palestine
UNDRP	United Nations Disaster Relief Project
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organisation
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

ABBREVIATIONS

UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNRPR	United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCIIP	United Nations Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories
UNSCOP	United Nations Special Committee for Palestine
USNA	United States National Archive, College Park, Maryland
VTC	Vocational Training Centre [UNRWA]

REFUGE AND RESISTANCE

INTRODUCTION

In January 2016 a man set himself on fire outside a clinic in southern Lebanon. Omar Khudeir was a twenty-three-year-old Palestinian from Burj al-Shemali refugee camp, near the Lebanese coastal city of Tyre. Like most Palestinians, Khudeir was excluded from Lebanese state services. Instead, he had to rely on the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which covered the essential healthcare costs engendered by Khudeir's hereditary medical condition. Yet at the start of 2016, UNRWA was facing a mounting crisis. Long operating with a serious deficit, by the middle of the decade it had financial difficulties so severe that management implemented drastic cuts to its service provision across the Middle East. As a result, Palestinian refugees like Khudeir were forced to cover parts of their medical bills themselves—payments that he, like many others, could not afford. Within the first few weeks of 2016, Khudeir had killed himself outside the local UNRWA healthcare clinic, the location a signal to the causes of his suffering.¹

Khudeir's suicide was part of a wave of high-profile self-immolations by young Arab men in the second decade of the twenty-first century.² The decade had begun with the infamous suicide of Mohamed Bouazizi, a twenty-six-year-old Tunisian fruit seller who set himself on fire on December 17, 2010, following continuous police harassment. Four days into 2011, Bouazizi died in hospital from his injuries, his act having triggered a wave

of protests that ultimately snowballed into a national revolution. Just ten days after Bouazizi's death, Tunisian dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was forced to stand down after more than twenty years in power. Within twelve months the Tunisian revolution had enflamed the Arab world, sparking uprisings that overthrew dictators in Egypt and Libya, engendered reforms in Jordan and Morocco, and descended into devastating civil wars in Syria and Yemen.

Nearly nine years to the day after Bouazizi's death, the decade drew to a close with another self-immolation by a young man in the Arab world. On December 7, 2019, an unnamed protestor set himself on fire in central Beirut during demonstrations against government corruption and mismanagement. On this occasion, the man survived, as fellow protestors immediately smothered the flames with blankets and jackets.³ His act was taken as a sign of mounting desperation among the population, following other high-profile public suicides by Lebanese men in previous months.⁴

The commonalities between Khudeir's self-immolation and those in Tunisia and Lebanon are striking. Like Bouazizi and the unnamed Lebanese protestor, Khudeir was a young man driven to despair by systemic injustice, hopelessness, and structural exclusion. He had set himself alight only fifty miles or so from where the Lebanese protestor had done the same nearly four years later, having been similarly pushed beyond the brink. Yet unlike the others, Khudeir's self-immolation was not tied to protests against the state. In fact, as a Palestinian refugee living in Lebanon, Khudeir had been stateless throughout his life. Thus the immediate cause of his self-immolation was exclusion not by a state but by an international agency: UNRWA.

Since it began operations in 1950, UNRWA has continuously provided essential services to Palestinian refugee communities in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip (the "five fields"). Formally classified as an aid agency, it has often been described as a "quasi-state" due to the nature of its role and services. UNRWA is mandated to serve registered Palestinian refugees in the five fields, where it runs large-scale health and education programs akin to those usually provided by national governments. It also issues officially recognized identity documents to stateless Palestinian refugees. Over more than seven decades, UNRWA's role has therefore come to transcend that of an aid agency, evolving into an extensive and complex system that operates across international borders and rivals the scope of national governments in places. For these reasons it is referred to here as a *regime* as well as an agency.

The dynamics between UNRWA and Palestinian refugee communities reflect its quasi-state nature. Throughout their years in exile, Palestinian refugees have overwhelmingly resisted UNRWA's formal designation as an apolitical aid agency, instead insisting that its services are entitlements stemming from their political refugee status. This book tells the story of Palestinian refugees' relations with the UNRWA regime in its early decades, from the initial aftermath of their dispossession in 1948 up until the collapse of the Palestinian nationalist movement's refugee camp base in 1982. Within this timeframe, I trace how Palestinian refugees across the five fields navigated their relationship with the UNRWA regime. I show how they negotiated and even sought to leverage this relationship as they struggled for international recognition of their political and national rights. This often necessitated renegotiating their place in international politics, with UNRWA inadvertently taking on an added significance as a local address for the UN. As a result, the UNRWA regime that came to develop as the Palestinian refugees' *de facto* quasi-state was not simply imposed by the international directorship of the UN; it was created through continual negotiations and renegotiations between institution and population.

Khudeir's suicide came in this context. Like many young men across the Arab world, Khudeir was struggling to survive in a setting of increasing desperation. Unlike them, he had no citizenship in which to anchor his struggle. As such, his desperation came to center on the Palestinian refugees' quasi-state, in the form of UNRWA. In this sense, Khudeir's act was emblematic of a wider reality for Palestinian refugees across the Middle East. Since 1948 they have been compelled to negotiate their political rights and economic entitlements not with their own state, but instead with a fragmented set of regional and international actors. On a day-to-day level, the most present such actor in their lives has often been UNRWA, an international welfare agency acting within a narrow mandate. UNRWA has accordingly constituted the focus of the two pillars of Palestinian history in the modern Middle East: refuge and resistance.

STATE SURROGACY

A stateless people since 1948, the Palestinians have long engaged with state surrogates. Most obviously, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) has been active since 1964 as an umbrella body for Palestinian nationalist

groups, at times taking a leadership role in some of the camps. More recently, since 1994 the Palestinian Authority (PA) has sought to assume the functions of statehood in limited areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (known after 1967 as the Occupied Palestinian Territories, or OPT). As overtly national entities, the PLO and PA purport to be states-in-waiting for the dispossessed Palestinians. Yet there is another surrogate state for the Palestinians in the form of UNRWA, which predates both.

Active since 1950, and thus virtually contemporaneous with the Palestinian refugee crisis, UNRWA fulfills many of the functions ordinarily the remit of state governments. Although established as a short-term aid agency, its work has increasingly come to function in far more expansive terms. For decades now, UNRWA has provided education, healthcare, and municipal services within the fifty-eight officially recognized Palestinian refugee camps across the five fields. Historically it has also issued official identification documents to registered Palestinian refugees, which they can use to claim certain limited rights as noncitizens of the states in which they live. This has made UNRWA a vital part of Palestinian history and makes it especially key to questions of their national identity as a stateless and scattered people.

UNRWA's work transcends the state borders that otherwise separate Palestinian refugees in the Levant. Operating across the OPT, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, UNRWA has served—however inadvertently—as a commonality in Palestinian refugees' experiences of exile. Notwithstanding variations across the five fields, its services have provided some measure of universality to Palestinian lives in exile. And while the details of UNRWA's large-scale relief programs have changed over time, its presence in the region has been effectively coterminous with the Palestinians' statelessness. Comparing its work to that of a state therefore alludes not only to its condition, but also to that of the Palestinian refugees whom it serves.

At the same time, of course, the UNRWA regime is severely limited in its state-like capacities. Although it runs programs on a governmental scale, it has none of the security, military, or territorial functions that ultimately determine statehood. While the refugee camps might be termed extraterritorial spaces in some regards, UNRWA has no sovereignty therein and does not own the land on which the camps are built. Moreover, the nature of its mandate means that the agency always remains subordinate to the host states in which it works—or, in the case of the OPT, the Israeli

occupying power—and so cannot operate without their permission. Finally, UNRWA is a temporary agency, running on a short-term mandate that is renewed every three-to-five years. Its eternally temporary status imposes considerable limitations on its functioning and severely restricts its state-like qualities. With all these caveats in mind, I conceptualize the UNRWA regime here as a *quasi-state*, reflecting the fact that, in the words of the agency's own management, "UNRWA can do at once more and less than a state."⁵

As an international aid agency, UNRWA fulfils none of the national roles claimed by the PLO and PA. Instead, it is mandated by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) to "carry out direct relief and works services to registered Palestinian refugees in the Near East."⁶ Critically, its mandate is far more restricted than that of the UN's other refugee agency, the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which is responsible for all other refugee populations worldwide.⁷ While UNHCR has a mandate to provide protection to registered refugees, and to pursue durable solutions to their plight, UNRWA has neither. In the case of Palestinian refugees, this was originally the remit of (yet) another UN body: the Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), which was mandated in 1948 "to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation."⁸ In other words, UNCCP was created to resolve the core problem of Palestinian displacement. Yet it was in operation for only a few years after its creation in 1948 and had become inactive by the middle of the following decade. Since then, UNRWA has been the only UN body working for Palestinian refugees.

This setup has generated what is sometimes called the "protection gap" for Palestinian refugees.⁹ To put it simply: while all other UN-registered refugees are entitled to protection from UNHCR, Palestinian refugees alone are beholden to UNRWA, which has no such mandate. As such, they are unique among refugees in being internationally unprotected. Their vulnerability on this front is compounded by their collective statelessness. Moreover, there is no international body pursuing political solutions to the Palestinians' dispossession. Instead, they have UNRWA's relief services and humanitarian programs, with the agency looking to promote their socio-economic well-being without regard for their political rights. Its shortcomings in this regard have been a major source of Palestinian criticism over the decades, with refugee communities continually pushing for the agency

to properly recognize and represent the political nature of their plight on the world stage.

By providing socioeconomic aid without political redress, UNRWA's work exemplifies many of the problems inherent in international humanitarianism. As critics have long contended, the construction of modern humanitarian culture, whereby "apolitical" positioning is treated as intrinsically virtuous, serves to cleave socioeconomic need from its political context and causes.¹⁰ In the case of refugees, for example, the emphasis on aid can obscure the underlying fact of their displacement and the (political) reasons for it.¹¹ As a result, refugees themselves are constructed within humanitarian regimes as mere aid recipients, lacking any agency or autonomy.¹² The identity category of "the refugee" is stripped of political context and thus silences a critical part of what displacement really means.¹³

Palestinian refugees themselves have long been in the vanguard of making such criticisms. From the beginning, Palestinian refugee communities across the Middle East have agitated for UNRWA's reform, seeking to counter the potentially depoliticizing impact of humanitarianism. Their resistance on this front is part of this book's title: I use the word *resistance* to refer not only to the Palestinians' national struggle for statehood, but also to their struggle *against* depoliticized constructions of their displacement, as encapsulated by the UNRWA regime. In these ways, their refugeehood and their resistance have been inextricably linked from the beginning.

THE MEANING OF INTERNATIONALISM

UNRWA was established in the context of post-Second World War efforts to construct a new international regime. Led by the imperial powers of Britain and France and the emerging superpowers of the United States and the USSR, these initiatives sought to remake a global political map that had been wrecked by six years of total war around the world. Using the language of peacebuilding, they oversaw the creation of a set of postwar institutions designed to formalize international cooperation. The United Nations, established in 1945, constituted the crux of these initiatives.

In keeping with their postwar rhetoric, the United States and its Western allies, with some support from the USSR, framed the newly created UN's resolutions and agencies as tools for international peacebuilding. *Internationalism* itself was trumpeted as a force for global equality,

justice, and freedom. The UN was seen to embody this, with its goals of “maintain[ing] international peace and security” and “develop[ing] friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination.”¹⁴ The UN Charter in 1945 was followed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and a slew of international conventions that sought to codify these ideals, including the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1951.

From day one, however, “internationalism” in general and the UN in particular enforced a far more hierarchical and inequitable world order than this rhetoric suggested. The Global North powers driving these efforts were motivated less by noble ideals than by their respective political interests. Britain and France wanted to maintain their empires amid rising anticolonial activism across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Meanwhile the United States and the Soviet Union were operating in the Cold War context, each seeking to counter the other’s international influence. These objectives shaped their construction of the postwar order and its institutions, including the UN, which proclaimed the virtue of equality among nations in its Charter while enshrining inequality in its structures. As historian Mark Mazower has shown in some depth, not only did the UN not live up to the ideals of international equality, it was never really intended to.¹⁵

Ample evidence of this can be found in the UN’s conventions and structures. Its grounding in nation-state normativity automatically excluded stateless and colonized peoples, who made up a large proportion of the Global South’s population in the late 1940s. By focusing on sovereignty, the UN’s conventions upheld the exclusion of those communities who remained subjugated. Some mechanisms went further still: the Refugee Convention of 1951 codified a Eurocentric framing that enabled the legal exclusion of non-European refugees.¹⁶

Perhaps most critically, the setup of the United Nations formally enshrined the Global North’s power grab by giving superlative power to the five permanent members of the Security Council (UNSC): Russia, China, France, the United States, and the United Kingdom. In general, then, the form of internationalism espoused by the UN served to benefit the interests of the world’s dominant powers—primarily the United States—while remaining silent on issues of primary concern to much of the global

population, such as colonialism, racism, economic exploitation, and political subjugation. For this reason, political scientist Adom Getachew writes that the early UN was “a quintessentially American creation that sought to institutionalize a liberal international order.”¹⁷

All this means that while UN decisions and actions are framed as “international,” in practice they have often been the remit of a small group of powers that exclude the global majority. The same is true of the so-called international community. Supposedly denoting global consensus and world opinion, in practice this term often refers to the Western-dominated UNSC, which is the only branch of the UN that can issue binding resolutions and determine military action, sanctions, and peacekeeping options. Western domination of the UNSC therefore has a knock-on effect on the nature of the UN as a whole. In this book I use the term “international community” cautiously, largely in lieu of replacing it with another term that would be equally problematic, but with the awareness that the term refers to a Western-dominated system.

There is in fact another branch of the UN that more closely embodies the idea of an international community. The General Assembly (UNGA) includes all UN member states, with each holding equal representation therein. It has therefore been largely free of the superpower dominance that characterizes the UNSC and could more accurately be described as an “international community” of sorts. The UNGA, however, holds considerably less power than the UNSC. Its resolutions are nonbinding, and its main role in setting policy is simply to make recommendations. In perhaps the clearest single indication of the unequal balance of power between the two bodies, admission of new UN member states must be approved by two-thirds of the UNGA and nine of the UNSC’s fifteen members—but can be barred by a single veto from any of the UNSC’s five permanent members.

Over the period discussed in this book, the UNSC and UNGA increasingly diverged in size and political positioning. Starting in the 1960s, widespread decolonization across Africa and Asia meant that a large number of newly independent nations joined the UN as sovereign member states. Such developments drastically changed the UNGA’s makeup, tilting its composition in favor of the Global South and thus challenging the control of the North. Anticolonial voices from the newly decolonized South brought their own understandings of “internationalism” to the UN, using the concept to refer not to the favored liberal vision of the West, but to

global solidarity movements for self-determination and sovereign equality. Crucially, they often anchored this rhetoric in the UN's own discourse of human rights and equality, framing their work as more truly aligned with the organization's ethos.

The UNGA's anticolonial voices did not limit their more radical form of internationalism to rhetoric. They buttressed it with their own conventions and UN institutions, like New International Economic Order (NIEO), the Group of 77 (G77), and the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). As Getachew writes, by the end of the 1970s anticolonial nationalists had transformed the UN's "liberal international order" into "an arena for the politics of decolonization"—at least at the UNGA.¹⁸ Yet ultimate power remained with the UNSC, meaning that the UN came to embody these differing forms of internationalism in its own divergent structure.

What did all this mean for UNRWA and Palestinian refugee politics? In many ways, they were positioned at the nexus between these competing visions of internationalism. UNRWA itself is mandated by and answerable to the UNGA but has historically received much of its funding from the same Western states that dominate the UNSC. It is thus entwined with the "international community" in both senses: the Western-dominated structures that drove the early formal manifestations of this concept; and the more equitable representation of nations around the world in the post-colonial UNGA. As such, UNRWA's work and role perfectly embody the tensions inherent in the very concept of internationalism.

For the Palestinian people themselves, "internationalism" has often had a particular resonance. The UNGA's transformation into an anticolonial hub largely benefited them, as many formerly colonized peoples were sympathetic to the Palestinian national cause. Its radical form of internationalism also aligned with their struggle, as Palestinians themselves have often engaged with notions of international human rights when making their case on the world stage.¹⁹ At the same time, "international" action in Palestine has in practice often comprised Western intervention driven largely by the strategic concerns of the United States and the UK. Since the days of the British Mandate, "internationalism" has been deployed as a sheath for external dominance in Palestine. As I show in this book, supposedly international humanitarian intervention via UNRWA was often similarly Western-dominated. The meaning of "internationalism" in Palestinian history is

therefore complex and paradoxical, and the refugees' interactions with the UNRWA regime reflected this.

A QUESTION OF AGENCY

Decades of minimal interest in UNRWA suddenly changed in 2018, when the Trump administration announced that it would defund the agency. After more than half a century whereby the U.S. government had been UNRWA's single biggest donor, this withdrawal constituted a major policy volte-face.²⁰ The resulting discourse tended to follow one of two trends, as commentators either condemned the Trump move as an affront to humanitarian principles or lauded it as a long-overdue corrective to UNRWA's damaging role in supposedly "perpetuating" the Palestinian refugee crisis. Largely absent from both narratives was any consideration of the actions and experiences of Palestinian refugees themselves—in other words, of their agency as historical and political actors, not merely aid recipients. When the Biden administration announced in 2021 that it would resume funding to UNRWA, the commentary largely fell into the same camps.

In this book, I challenge this reductive view of Palestinian refugees and their place in the international sphere. I show that from the outset, Palestinian refugee communities were not simply aid recipients but political actors. Despite their extraordinary structural vulnerabilities, they acted wherever possible to challenge the situation in which they found themselves and reshape it along their own preferred lines. Such resistance was core to the refugees' relationship with UNRWA, as they positioned themselves as drivers in the regime and not mere passengers. With this in mind, my analysis here considers Palestinian refugee history as understood from the vantage of the refugees themselves. To borrow a phrase from leading scholars in the subfield of refugee history, I "locate them on their own terms rather than those imposed by governments, administrative categories, or humanitarians."²¹

The nature of the Palestinian people's engagement with UNRWA is consistent with their broader engagement with the UN as a whole. Their relationship with the UNRWA regime in the Levant was always underpinned by a core determination that their cause and their case would not be forgotten—what anthropologist Lori Allen calls "a refusal of their banishment to the margins of the international community."²² Their insistent

activism on this front meant that while the international regime shaped their actions, the reverse is also true. By unpacking these dynamics, my analysis here challenges conventional conceptions of the international regime itself, showing the degree to which this was shaped by bottom-up and not only top-down activities.

Overall, then, this book examines a subject that sits at the intersection of Palestinian history, refugee history, and international history. In fact, its analysis unpacks this very intersection itself. In an era when international institutions define and classify refugeehood, these themes are fundamentally intertwined—most notably in the case of the Palestinians, whose displacement constitutes the longest-running refugee crisis in modern history.

At the same time, my analysis should not be taken as an endorsement of scholarly tendencies toward “Palestinian exceptionalism.”²³ Although the Palestinians are certainly unusual in the scale and duration of their displacement, their entanglement with internationalism is not unique. Numerous refugee communities have seen their exiles directly shaped by international intervention, with examples ranging from Tibetan exiles in Nepal to Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Burundian refugees in Tanzania.²⁴ Nor is UNRWA the only UN agency to have served one group exclusively; from 1950 to 1958 the UN Korean Reconstruction Agency (UNKRA) was mandated to aid the economic recovery of South Korea, through support for displaced people and war refugees.²⁵ Even in the Middle East, UN bodies besides UNRWA have long acted as surrogate states for refugees.²⁶

Claims of Palestinian exception are further belied by the fact that Palestinian refugee history has always been intertwined with developments extending far beyond Palestine and the Levant. In their engagement with internationalism, for example, the Palestinians were strongly influenced by the actions of the Algerian anticolonial Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), which came to power in the country’s first independent government in 1962. As historian Matthew Connelly has shown in depth, the FLN successfully used transnational alignments as a core element of its strategy for overturning French colonial rule in Algeria.²⁷ The FLN-led Algerian national government then became a key actor in transforming the UNGA in the 1960s and 1970s, at the very time when Palestinian nationalists were seeking legitimacy via its forum.²⁸ The PLO’s close ties with the FLN provide clear evidence that Palestinian refugee history has not been

hermetically sealed but was always embedded within wider international processes.

The assumptions of Palestinian exceptionalism therefore risk missing some of the key elements of the refugees' history. In her work, anthropologist Dawn Chatty has sought to counter this exceptionalism by analyzing Palestinian displacement within the broader context of ongoing forced migration in the modern Middle East.²⁹ While this book focuses exclusively on the case of the Palestinians, I intend that it should have the same effect in speaking to broader histories, by highlighting the inherent interconnection between Palestinian displacement and the international space.

SPACE AND PLACE

Like all works of history, this book is a study of space as much as time. In particular, it probes how the spatial setup of the Palestinian refugee camps enabled and incubated Palestinian national politics in exile. Although they were historically home to only a minority of Palestinian refugees, the camps have a significance disproportionate to their numbers. After the mass displacement of 1948 (known in Arabic as *al-Nakba* or "the catastrophe"), those refugees who had the means and connections to do so found their own accommodation in exile. Those with little or nothing to fall back on ended up in the refugee camps that quickly emerged across the region. The camps thus became the sites of the greatest need in the ensuing humanitarian crisis, and the focus of many regional and international efforts. From the onset, and to this day, they symbolized Palestinian loss on a mass scale. With the majority of post-1948 camps still in place well into the twenty-first century, they also signify the juncture between the *space* of exile and its *time*—both of which are supposedly temporary, but in practice interminable.

The camps' socioeconomic dynamics have had political meanings as well. Their nature as almost entirely Palestinian spaces facilitated the preservation of Palestinian identity and memory across the generations, extending it to those who were born in exile. The camps' role in sheltering the poorest and least protected refugees also meant that they were home to those who had the least to lose and the most to gain from political activism. Accordingly, they were vital to the formation and incubation of nationalist ideas in exile, as well as strategies for bringing these ideas to fruition.³⁰ The

camps became central to the development of the Palestinian nationalist movement in the second half of the twentieth century and provided the testing ground for the PLO's post-1967 attempts to create a Palestinian para-state-in-exile. In this regard, it is telling that a disproportionately high number of Palestinian *fida'iyyin* originated from the camps.³¹

On top of this, the camps are especially pertinent when examining the dynamics between Palestinian refugees and the UN regime. Continuously administered by UNRWA since 1950, it is in the camps that UNRWA's role has been most influential and significant. On one level, this stems from UNRWA's importance in providing services that are usually the domain of the modern state, as the host states have tended to restrict their intervention in the camps to security and policing.³² Yet beyond this, the camps' histories also illustrate the intersection between nationalism and internationalism that has been a continuous feature of Palestinian refugee history. As nationalistic environments administered by an international body, the camps have served as spaces for the quotidian interface between the theoretically opposing notions of nationalism and internationalism. The result was a construction of Palestinian nationalism that had an evident international inflection, as shall be explained over the course of this book.

The Palestinian refugee camps' significance is far from unique. In wide-ranging interdisciplinary scholarship, researchers in the field of refugee studies have paid considerable attention to the role and function of refugee camps in different settings around the world.³³ Here, I draw in particular on such scholars' ideas of refugee camps as *hybrid spaces of overlapping sovereignties*.³⁴ In contrast to Giorgio Agamben's influential idea that camps are "spaces of exception," this more complex conceptualization allows for a historicized understanding of the Palestinian camps as distinctive spaces that are nevertheless located within particular settings.³⁵

Such a view makes it possible to truly historicize the camps within the broader context of Palestinian refugee history, fully considering the agency of the refugees themselves. Throughout this book, I analyze the camps as spaces that have been shaped by the states that host them, the UN agency that administers them, and the refugees that reside in them. In other words, I approach the camps as sites that exist *within* time and space, not outside of it. This in turn facilitates a more nuanced understanding; as anthropologist Ilana Feldman writes, neither "utter abjection [nor] unending resistance" would be an accurate description of life in the Palestinian refugee

camps.³⁶ I incorporate this complexity into my analysis, in both temporal and spatial terms.

RESEARCH AND RESISTANCE

Anyone seeking to write an academic study of Palestine, refugee history, and UNRWA must grapple with tensions and challenges that can seem interminable. Researching this subject involves an array of political, practical, epistemological, and methodological quandaries.³⁷ Moreover, anyone who writes about Palestine, Israel, and indeed the politics of the Middle East can be challenged to prove their “objectivity”—itself a nebulous concept that is often informed by the preferred narratives of the Global North powers.³⁸ My analysis is driven by evidence that I uncovered over years of research in the Middle East, Europe, and North America. As an international history of the UNRWA-administered refugee camps, it centers the perspectives and experiences of Palestinian refugees in the five fields. Those of other groups—such as Palestinians outside the five fields, non-Palestinian Arabs, and Israelis—are not centered here, not because their experiences are not important, but because they are beyond the scope of what can be covered in a single monograph.

Put simply, then, my intention is to trace and unpack the dynamics between Palestinian refugee communities and the UNRWA regime in the decades after the Nakba. To do so, I draw on a wide range of sources from several different archives. There are both methodological and practical reasons for this multiplicity. Like the Palestinian people themselves, Palestinian archives have been widely dispersed.³⁹ While efforts to establish a national archive are now well underway at the Palestinian Museum in Ramallah,⁴⁰ many sources must still be pieced together from different collections around the world.⁴¹

On account of this, my research for this book took me to six countries across three continents. In the process, I had to grapple with my own positionality. As a white UK passport-holder, I am among the privileged minority of the world’s population who benefit from the global passport hierarchy. Unlike most people, and certainly most Palestinians, I have visa-free and relatively easy access to many countries, including those I visited to carry out the research for this book: the United States, Jordan, Lebanon, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, as well as the UK. At the same time, as

someone of mixed heritage, with a Muslim last name, I am often reminded of racialized international hierarchies when traveling. In 2014 I was denied entry to the West Bank by Israeli authorities at the Allenby Bridge crossing from Jordan—a worryingly common occurrence for Western academics that nevertheless pales in comparison to the immobility imposed on Palestinians.⁴² Since then, I have been unable to visit Palestine.⁴³

My inability to access the West Bank, Gaza Strip, or Israel, combined with the impact of the Syrian war, meant that my research in the Middle East came to focus on two of UNRWA's five fields: Jordan and Lebanon. Fortuitously, these countries contain considerable archival material relating to the five fields as a whole.⁴⁴ In particular, Jordan is home to UNRWA's Central Registry archive, the contents of which forms the backbone of my analysis here. As it is usually closed, much of its material remains unknown to researchers, and I was lucky to be granted access for the purposes of this project.⁴⁵ As a result, this book discusses a considerable quantity of material previously unseen by researchers. It is supplemented by sources from other UN, national, and institutional archives in Lebanon, the United States, the UK, and Switzerland.

A well-worn criticism of archival research concerns the risk of reproducing power dynamics and continuing to silence the structurally disempowered.⁴⁶ While this can be combated to some degree by way of critical methodologies, the value of other types of sources should not be understated. With this in mind, throughout this book I also rely on nonarchival publications, interviews, and testimonies that record the direct accounts and experiences of Palestinian refugees themselves. In particular, I draw on the narratives of several individuals from the Nakba generation (listed in appendix A), whose accounts have been recorded either in direct memoirs or through collaborations with writers and journalists.

On the basis of my research findings, this book is organized into two parts. Part 1, *Remaking Refugeehood*, traces the genealogies of UNRWA and the Palestinian refugee camps in the decades after 1948. Over three chapters, it examines how the Nakba and the 1967 Arab defeat (known in Arabic as *al-Naksa* or “the setback”) engendered new notions of refugeehood, which were constructed and contested by a range of actors, including refugee camp communities themselves. Chapter 1 examines the origins of the Palestinian refugee crisis, showing how the Palestinians became refugees by way of not only their displacement and dispossession in 1948, but

also their classification under the UN regime. It introduces some of the book's central themes, including the refugees' continual contestation of UNRWA's setup and the inherent tensions of the regime claiming to be apolitical while being embedded in a highly political setting.

Chapter 2 discusses how the fallout from the war in 1967 redirected Palestinian political nationalism in the refugee camps. Laying out the distinctive spatial nature of the camps, it analyzes the Palestinian *thawra* (revolution) that seized these spaces over the long 1970s, and its intersections with internationalism. Leading on from this, chapter 3 examines the *thawra's* repercussions for UNRWA as a self-proclaimed international regime in the camps. It unpacks how UNRWA's operations were enabled, shaped, and constrained by its relations with various international actors, and the resulting tensions for its claims to be an *international* agency. This analysis shows how UNRWA's work came to embody the intersection between international politics and the protracted Palestinian refugee crisis.

The book's second part, *Resisting the Regime*, shifts its focus to examining how Palestinians challenged UNRWA's humanitarian governance by seeking to affirm the political nature of their displacement. Over three chapters, it shows how the refugee camp grass roots were crucial, if unofficial, actors in determining the UNRWA regime. Chapter 4 contends that UNRWA's international status, particularly its UN affiliation, drove refugees' perceptions of the regime. Seeing UNRWA's very existence as international affirmation of their refugee status and political rights, they regarded any moves to reduce its services as threats to their political status. Thus despite its claims to be apolitical, UNRWA's work came to play an essential, if inadvertent, role in the refugees' conception of their political cause.

Following on from the discussion of the UNRWA-refugee relationship, chapter 5 probes what it means for an international organization to act as quasi-state for a stateless people. Unpacking the repercussions of this setup, it examines how the presence of the UNRWA regime served to internationalize Palestinian identity in both conceptual and practical terms. Finally, chapter 6 turns to UNRWA's interactions with the institutional expression of Palestinian nationalism in the long 1970s: the PLO. This final chapter covers the complex and paradoxical nature of the PLO-UNRWA relationship, examining both the high politics of their dynamics at the diplomatic level and their quotidian interactions in the camps. In so doing, it follows through on the book's underlying discussion of UNRWA's interconnection with

Palestinian refugee politics by showing how this was manifested at the institutional level.

In the years that I have spent researching and writing this book, Palestinian refugees across the Levant have had to grapple with acute instability and further displacements. Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini of UNRWA stated in September 2021 that “four of the five fields are in severe crisis.”⁴⁷ The Palestinians’ statelessness has been a consistent feature in exposing them to the worst repercussions of these crises. Regardless of variations across the host states, their dispossession is a constant feature in engendering their vulnerability.

Perhaps most notably among the region’s crises, Syria, formerly regarded as the most welcoming and beneficial Arab host state for Palestinian refugees, has been torn apart by a decade of brutal war. The country’s Palestinian community, previously one of the most prosperous and integrated in the region, has been subjected to horrific violence and destruction, causing more dispersal and displacement for a people who already have a long collective history of such experiences.⁴⁸ Yarmouk, an unofficial camp and de facto neighborhood of Damascus that had been home to Syria’s largest Palestinian community, was besieged alternately by the Asad regime and Da’esh, causing widespread starvation and disease.⁴⁹ The resulting deaths and flight meant that its population fell from 160,000 Palestinians to just a few dozen families.⁵⁰ This demographic transformation was not unique to Yarmouk. At the time of writing in 2022, 280,000 Palestinian refugees had been displaced within Syria, while another 120,000 had fled the country.⁵¹

Of this latter group, around 31,000 have sought refuge in neighboring Lebanon, according to UNRWA’s records.⁵² Yet Lebanon has not proven a safe sanctuary. Faced with intensifying political and economic crises, by the end of the 2010s Lebanon was in the throes of its own humanitarian disaster. Mass inflation and unemployment, combined with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, have created rising impoverishment and instability. In 2021 the World Bank declared that Lebanon’s economic collapse is likely to rank among the worst in history since the mid-nineteenth century.⁵³ Increasingly, commentators are describing the country as a failed state.⁵⁴

As one of the most vulnerable groups in Lebanese society, Palestinian refugees have been hit especially hard by the country’s crisis. As noncitizens

excluded from access to state services and barred from professional work, they are experiencing impoverishment and unemployment at a disproportionately high rate. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, some Palestinian refugees from Lebanon found themselves stranded abroad after the government barred them from boarding repatriation flights, on the grounds they were ineligible as noncitizens.⁵⁵ In 2021 UNRWA stated that the situation for Palestinians in Lebanon is worse than it has been at any time since the country's civil war.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, Palestinians in the OPT continue to struggle through the Israeli occupation, now in its sixth decade. The ongoing construction of illegal Israeli settlements on the West Bank—buoyed by the Trump administration's open support for them in 2019⁵⁷—continues to displace Palestinians, some of whom are already intergenerational refugees. The settlements' expansion also further restricts Palestinians' already limited freedom of movement. As the West Bank becomes increasingly atomized, its Palestinian population find themselves isolated not only from the rest of the world but from relatives, friends, and neighborhoods just a few miles away, on both sides of the Green Line.⁵⁸

Isolation is even more acute for Palestinians in Gaza, more than 70 percent of whom are refugees.⁵⁹ The ongoing blockade imposed by Israel and Egypt since 2007 has caused serious impoverishment and de-development, resulting in widespread poverty and extremely high unemployment.⁶⁰ Alongside this socioeconomic deterioration, Palestinians in Gaza face an endless cycle of Israeli assaults by air. The blockade makes movement out of the Strip extremely difficult, and even those who manage to leave are restricted in their mobility due to their statelessness. As a result, the vast majority are confined to live in one of the most overcrowded areas on earth, and condemned to continue suffering through conditions that the United Nations has termed “unlivable.”⁶¹

Alongside the Israeli occupation, Syrian war, and Lebanese collapse, Jordan seems relatively stable. Yet even here, Palestinian refugees have faced intensifying discrimination in the twenty-first century. The oft-repeated claim that Jordan is the only Arab host state to offer citizenship to Palestinians disregards the fact that there have always been significant exceptions to this. Palestinian refugees who fled to Jordan from Gaza after the Naksa (known as “ex-Gazans”) have never been offered citizenship,⁶² and the same is true for those who have arrived from Syria since 2011.⁶³ Even

those with longstanding Jordanian citizenship now face intensifying moves to strip them of it, in favor of those with East Bank heritage.⁶⁴ It goes without saying that stateless Palestinians living in Jordan are far less secure than those who can claim state protection as citizens.

Across the region, then, Palestinians remain chronically vulnerable to further displacement, discrimination, and dispersal, more than seventy years after their original expulsion. This is not a coincidence; it is the structural outcome of their continuing statelessness and dispossession. To understand it, it is necessary to trace the origins and trajectory of how this came to be. This book is my attempt to do exactly that.

BECOMING REFUGEES

How did it come about that a whole nation found itself suddenly in exile and its people afflicted by defeat, hunger, and humiliation, repudiated by men, despised by host countries, and forgotten by the world, left to live as pariah refugees?

—FAWAZ TURKI, *THE DISINHERITED: JOURNAL OF A PALESTINIAN EXILE*

It is rare to find an account of the events of 1948 that does not describe the year in transformative terms. By the end of that year, the new state of Israel had been established on 78 percent of Palestine;¹ more than three-quarters of the Palestinian population had been exiled; more than four hundred towns and villages had been destroyed;² and a state governed primarily by Jewish European immigrants had arrived in the postwar setting of the Middle East. Thereafter the Palestinian people were dispersed, displaced, and dispossessed, lacking the protection of their own state in an international system that increasingly operated on the basis of recognized sovereignty and nation-state normativity. In the early years of Palestinian exile, the self-sufficiency that had characterized the lives of many *fellahin* (farmers) in Palestine was replaced with aid and welfare services. Rural lives were essentially urbanized in the overcrowded refugee camps that emerged across the region to shelter the arriving refugees.

Yet these material changes do not and cannot tell the whole story about 1948. When the Palestinians went into exile, they did not only cross a geographical border. They also crossed a categorical one, moving from citizenship to refugeehood.³ In the international context of the late 1940s, this had a particular prescience. Following the Second World War, major developments were underway in the sphere of international politics and

institutions. The League of Nations—widely regarded as a failure in view of the war—had been disbanded and superseded by the newly created United Nations, established in 1945. A plethora of new international laws were passed, codifying concepts of human rights and state responsibilities. Leaders and supporters of such moves lauded them as evidence a new spirit of global cooperation and peacemaking. Yet the rhetoric of “internationalism” was undercut by the reality of colonial hierarchies, which denied formal representation on the world stage to the majority of the world’s population. This meant that, for all the discourse of cooperation, international politics continued to be characterized by fundamental inequality, including at the UN.⁴

These dynamics also came to inform the emerging global refugee regime. In this same period, the term “refugee”—dating back to the seventeenth century in English and long used colloquially and discursively—was being standardized and codified at the international level as a recognized legal status with accompanying rights.⁵ As a result, refugeehood became a categorical identity that could be formally claimed and recognized—albeit with considerable limitations, and in a form largely dictated by the colonial powers of the Global North.⁶ This would eventually culminate in the Refugee Convention of 1951, the product of years of discussion among (largely northern) states.⁷

Critically, this new refugee regime was being constructed around the same time that 750,000 Palestinians were being forced into exile.⁸ While their displacement came too early for the Refugee Convention, it was the first large-scale refugee crisis to elicit intervention from the newly created United Nations.⁹ This timing would prove momentous, meaning that the Palestinians gained formal recognition of their refugeehood at the international level while being excluded from the primary instrument of the global refugee regime—an exclusion that remains in place to this day. The emergent regime had another disadvantage for the Palestinians as well: it was grounded in notions of nation-state normativity and sovereignty, placing them at a distinct disadvantage as a stateless people.¹⁰

The context of the global regime’s emergence meant that when the Palestinian people “became” refugees, it was a multifaceted process. They became refugees when they were displaced and driven across borders into exile; they also became refugees when they were recognized and constructed as such within the international regime. Crucially, this construction was

not merely a one-directional process. Just as the newly created international regime developed and codified fixed ideas of refugeehood, chiefly via the UN, so those assigned this new category also acted to contest and shape its meaning.

It is the intersection between these two strands of early Palestinian refugee history that forms the focus of this chapter. What led so many Palestinians to become refugees in the late 1940s? At the same time, how were notions of refugeehood constructed and contested by both the new UN regime and the Palestinian refugees themselves? The trajectories of these two strands show how the Palestinians “becoming refugees” was not only the outcome of their displacement and dispossession in 1948 but was also driven by their classification under the new UN regime. This juxtaposition was tied to the complexity of the Palestinian refugees’ relationship to the UN in particular and internationalism in general, a complexity that was present from the very beginning of Palestinian refugee history. From the outset, Palestinian refugee communities would continually exercise their agency to push against the structural constraints of the UN regime, embodied in the work of UNRWA. The latter’s inherently paradoxical positionality, as an apolitical body embedded in a highly political setting, only complicated things further.

FIGHT AND FLIGHT

The displacement and dispossession of more than 750,000 Palestinians from 1947 to 1949 is one of the most consequential, controversial, and contested events in modern history. Indeed, it is so disputed that not even its name is agreed upon. In Israel, it is known as the *Milhemet Ha’Atzmaout* (War of Independence), which created the modern Jewish state. Among Palestinians and in the Arab World, it is the *Nakba* (catastrophe), which engendered the destruction of the national community in Palestine, the disempowerment of the people, and their dispersal across the region and the world.¹¹ The details of what happened, the numbers displaced,¹² and the sequence of events all continue to provoke fierce debate and impassioned arguments among scholars, politicians, commentators, and analysts.¹³ Questions of causality and culpability have proven particularly contentious. While it has now been shown definitively that Zionist actors forcibly expelled significant numbers of Palestinians during the *Nakba*,¹⁴ a small number of scholars

and many more politicians and commentators continue to deny any notion of Zionist-Israeli culpability for the forced migration of more than 750,000 people in this period.¹⁵ The Nakba, with its intrinsic connection to the establishment of the state of Israel, and its centrality within modern Palestinian nationalism, has thus come to exemplify the loaded nature of this subject's history.

Yet amid these fierce arguments, one striking shared feature can be identified: otherwise conflicting interpretations of the events of 1948 nearly all underplay the agency of the Palestinian people themselves. If the narrative in question contends that the refugee crisis was due to the actions of the Arab regimes, the Palestinians are presented as mere respondents to the power of these states.¹⁶ If culpability is placed instead—far more accurately—with Zionist forces and the state of Israel, the Palestinians are still treated as primarily reactive figures, responding to the era's high politics and military offensives.¹⁷

In fact, the refugees' own accounts clearly undermine any suggestion that they were purely passive in the Nakba. On the contrary, the events of the late 1940s were comparable to subsequent decades in how Palestinians exercised whatever agency they had, however structurally limited it was. As historian Rashid Khalidi writes, Palestinians operated within an "iron cage" that constrained their movements but did not restrict them altogether.¹⁸ In this sense, they are the exemplar of historians' more recently favored conceptualization of refugees as autonomous historical actors, or "people who have rescued themselves" by escaping danger for sanctuary.¹⁹ Such agency would be a continuous theme throughout Palestinian refugee history.

When it came to the Nakba, many refugees initially decided to arm themselves and defend their land, before fleeing upon hearing of massacres elsewhere.²⁰ The Deir Yassin massacre had a particularly significant impact in this regard. The villagers of Deir Yassin, located in the Jerusalem area, had signed a nonaggression pact with a nearby Jewish settlement in 1942.²¹ This was ignored on April 9, 1948, when the Irgun Zvai Leumi (IZL) and Lehi militias attacked the village and killed many of its unarmed inhabitants, including women, children, and elderly people. As word spread of the massacre, Palestinians across the country fled for fear that a similar fate would befall them if they stayed.²² Salman Abu Sitta, who was at boarding school in Beersheba at the time, writes about hearing of it: "With the Jewish blockade and attacks, people drifted to the nearest town. Somebody

came from Jerusalem via Hebron and said that Jews had butchered men, women, and children, ripped open pregnant women's bellies with bayonets, and cut off their fingers and earlobes to get their jewelry. This had happened in a village that had signed a peace pact with them. The village was called Deir Yassin."²³ Abu Sitta's account is typical in highlighting the horror invoked by news of Deir Yassin and the gruesome particulars that the massacre had involved.

The greatest terror stemmed from reports of rapes having taken place, which compelled many men to relocate their wives and daughters for safety.²⁴ Abu Iyad, a refugee from Jaffa, recounts:

The news of the genocide had spread like wildfire throughout the entire country, helped along by the Zionist mass media which amplified it as part of its campaign to terrorize the Arabs. But there's no denying that the massacre was also used by Palestinian agitators trying to mobilize the population. For example, they stressed that Deir Yassin women had been raped by the Zionist forces and called upon their compatriots to defend their most precious possession, the honor of their wives and daughters. But in most cases the strategy backfired: In a profoundly traditional society such as ours, many men rushed to remove their women from the reach of the Zionist soldiers instead of staying to resist the aggression. I often remember hearing in this connection that "honor is more important than land."²⁵

Abu Iyad's account reflects gender constructs at the time, whereby men were designated as protectors of their female kinfolk.²⁶ As such, many felt compelled to act when hearing about rapes in Deir Yassin and elsewhere.²⁷ In some cases, men sent their families abroad while staying on themselves to fight.²⁸ Others judged that fighting would be futile in view of the devastating losses of the Palestine Arab Revolt against the British in 1936–1939; they assessed that a temporary departure was the safest course of action.²⁹

The dilemma over whether to stay and defend the land or leave to protect one's family is a common theme in many refugees' testimonies. Elias Shoufani, a Palestinian from Galilee, recalls the intense fear triggered in his village of Mi'ilya by reports of rapes taking place nearby, with many men subsequently evacuating their families to protect the women's "honor."³⁰ Matar Abdelrahim described his family's flight from their village of Nahaf in similar terms: "My uncle said to me in the tone of a

command, 'Listen, you need to leave with the families and take the women and girls to safety. We must protect our honor before everything else.'³¹ As this shows, rape could be seen as a source of shame for both women who suffered it and the men who failed to prevent it. Such feelings were exacerbated by the wider political context, whereby the rape of Palestinian women came to symbolize Zionist domination over Palestine.³²

The resulting shame and stigma meant that women's experiences of sexual assault by Zionist forces were often silenced afterwards. As a result, the significance of rape and fears of rape in causing the mass flight in 1948 has not been properly incorporated into scholarly analyses of the Nakba.³³ Nor is there much consideration of the role and agency of women themselves, with the emphasis placed instead on the dilemmas of their male kinfolk. Yet Palestinian women were just as active in responding to the risk. Salman Abu Sitta, from Ma'in village in Beersheba district, writes of how the women there "splashed dirt on their faces to discourage rape" after hearing reports of rapes having occurred elsewhere.³⁴ Fatima Ibrahim Zankari, a refugee from Haifa, recalls encountering rape survivors from Safsaf, who had "run for their lives."³⁵

What transcended gender differences in these experiences was the fact that all Palestinians who left did so with a view to returning imminently.³⁶ Shafiq al-Hout, exiled with his family from their home in Jaffa in 1948, would later recall his thoughts while on the ship that took them to Lebanon:

No way! No way was this going to be a farewell to Jaffa. It couldn't be anything more than a short vacation. . . . Had it been otherwise, we would not have left behind all the young men in the family capable of carrying guns: my brothers, cousins, and several others. No doubt we would be going back. Two or three weeks at the most and we would be back. . . . No doubt we would be going back, as we had gone back so many times before, and Jaffa would be waiting for us.³⁷

Abu Sitta writes similarly that upon leaving his home, "I never imagined that I would not see these places, that I would never be able to return to my birthplace."³⁸ When examining the flight of 1948, it is therefore critical to consider both the refugees' belief in imminent return and the broader consciousness of their decisions to leave. The Palestinian refugees'

vulnerability did not automatically translate into passivity.³⁹ Their actions and decision making, even within the very narrow parameters of the options available to them, would have a direct impact on their experiences of displacement and exile.

Early Exile

All Palestinians felt the devastation of the Nakba, albeit to different degrees. Only a small number (around 150,000) remained in the land that became Israel. Most of this population were nevertheless internally displaced.⁴⁰ Hundreds of thousands more became refugees in exile, leaving Palestine on a journey sometimes referred to as *al-hijra*. The less fortunate had to make this journey on foot, enduring exhaustion, hunger, and sickness over hundreds of miles. As most Palestinians left during the summer, they also had to contend with extreme heat and dehydration. Children and older people were the most vulnerable, sometimes succumbing to illness or even dying en route. Survivors later recalled having to eat grass and drink their own urine. The experience of the hijra would become an essential element of the Palestinian collective memory in the years to come.⁴¹

Again, gender dynamics helped determine people's physical experiences of the journey, with women often responsible for carrying babies and young children. Many were left with horrifying stories: one refugee from Galilee later told of how she carried both her babies in a bowl on her head, only to discover when she arrived in Lebanon that they were both dead.⁴² Abu Iyad recalls a woman drowning while attempting to flee Palestine by boat, after she realized one of her children was not on board and threw herself into the sea after them.⁴³ As such testimonies recount, people's experiences of the Nakba and the hijra saw momentous political events intersect with the everyday realities and personal milestones of people's lives. This intersection was something that the Palestinians of 1948 had in common with countless other groups of refugees before and since.

Some women had no choice but to undertake the journey pregnant. Fawaz Turki, age eight at the time, remembers his family coming upon a woman giving birth on the side of the road:

As we trekked north . . . to seek refuge in Lebanon . . . we came upon a pregnant woman lying by the wayside, emitting the ghostly sounds of the pain

of labor. Her husband was running up and down the road, flailing his arms and pleading, “Brothers and sisters, I beg of you, brothers and sisters, I beg of you. Is there a midwife in your midst? In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate, is there a midwife in your midst?”⁴⁴

Such incidents were not uncommon. At the time of the Nakba, Fatima Ibrahim Zankari was pregnant with her first child. After she and her husband fled their home in Haifa for Akka, they were forced to keep traveling north to escape the fighting. They spent two months hiding in fields in Galilee, where she gave birth to a baby boy who died an hour later. After burying him, they had to continue their journey north toward the Lebanese border.⁴⁵

Those refugees who succeeded in completing the journey then had to contend with their new lives in exile. The fortunate ones had the money, connections, and, in rare cases, foreign passports to rebuild their lives and



FIG. 1.1. Palestinians evacuating Al-Fallouja village in Palestine during the Nakba. Photo courtesy of UNRWA.



FIG. 1.2. Palestinian refugees fleeing on fishing boats during the Nakba. Photo courtesy of UNRWA.

businesses in new homes, all the while hoping to return. Others were not so lucky and had to survive in makeshift shelters, tents, or caves.⁴⁶ Their plight was visible to all; in October 1948 the *New York Times* reported on Palestinian refugees “huddled under trees in tents, shanty towns and slums of Arab lands surrounding Israeli-held parts of Palestine.”⁴⁷ The Palestinian diaspora spread across Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq, into the Gulf and out of the Middle East to Europe and parts of North and South America. Thousands of refugees remained in historic Palestine, but in towns and regions far away from their homes. None of the land remained under Palestinian control, as it was now divided between Israel, Egypt (which administered the Gaza Strip), and Jordan (which annexed the West Bank in 1950).



FIG. 1.3. Palestinian refugees initially displaced to Shati Camp in Gaza boarding boats in search of a better life in Lebanon or Egypt. Photo courtesy of UNRWA.

Reflecting this division, the Palestinians themselves were assigned a complex set of legal statuses, which differed depending on their location. Those who remained in what became Israel could apply for citizenship from 1952 but were placed under martial law until 1966, with significant restraints on their freedom of movement and political rights.⁴⁸ Those in the West Bank and Jordan could take Jordanian citizenship from 1949, but most other Palestinian refugees in the Arab world now found themselves stateless, with their Palestinian passports and identity documents defunct.⁴⁹ Palestinians in Gaza were entitled to identity and travel documents from the Egyptian military administration that ruled the territory until 1967, although in practice these were not always easy to obtain.⁵⁰ Those who had fled elsewhere in the region, including Lebanon and Syria, were reliant on their respective host states to issue them with the necessary documentation, which was not necessarily forthcoming.⁵¹

The early years of Palestinian exile saw many of the refugees surviving in dire conditions, with international aid workers commenting on the situation's unsustainability.⁵² All faced the emotional and psychological trauma of having lost their homes, land, and in some cases loved ones.⁵³ On top of this, many also had to deal with destitution, as they now found themselves poverty-stricken, homeless, and hungry.⁵⁴ The poorest refugees took shelter in tents and relied on international aid agencies for emergency relief—Fatima Ibrahim Zankari recounts how conditions were so bad that she and her husband forsook their tent in favor of a cave in southern Lebanon, where they survived the winter of 1948–1949.⁵⁵ Inadequate food and poor hygiene caused considerable health and developmental problems, particularly among children.⁵⁶ There was also a severe psychological impact, with international observers reporting that the situation was creating widespread disillusionment and depression among the refugees.⁵⁷

Yet even amid such dire conditions, there were signs of activism and organization. Some refugees wrote formal letters to international governments, imploring them to address the situation and implement their lawful rights. Traces of their appeals can be found in archival and documentary collections around the world today.⁵⁸ For example, in May 1950—exactly two years after the British departure from Palestine—Ali Ahmed el-Abed penned a letter to the British prime minister, Clement Attlee. El-Abed, a refugee from Shafa Amr in northern Palestine, had ended up in Wavel refugee camp in Lebanon's eastern region, near the Syrian border. Appealing to Attlee, he wrote:

We were under the protection of the British crown for thirty years, but the result is that we are scattered away, far from our homes, our country and our people. . . . We still consider ourselves under British protection and carry passports with the British crown on. O democrats who defended human beings' rights and sanctioned the same in the United Nations Organization. Use your powers to send us back to our country, our homes and our people.⁵⁹

El-Abed's words here are revealing on numerous levels.⁶⁰ His belief in a continuing Palestinian connection to the British government and the invocation of British responsibilities to the Palestinian people are consistent with widespread Palestinian feelings of British betrayal. Consequent suspicion

of the UK government was commonplace. More important, el-Abed's appeal also shows that the losses of the Nakba had not destroyed the refugees' political consciousness, nor had it reduced them to total passivity. On the contrary, el-Abed here utilizes his understanding of international politics and power dynamics to agitate for his rights. Such activism was a continual feature of Palestinian refugee history over the twentieth century and remains such to this day.⁶¹

The content of el-Abed's letter also reveals something of the conditions in Wavel camp at the time. In 1950 Wavel was home to more than 2,700 Palestinian refugees, predominantly from Galilee. As a result, the camp became informally known as Jalil.⁶² Originally a French army barrack during the Mandate period, Wavel became a Palestinian refugee camp in the immediate aftermath of the Nakba. The use of old army barracks in this way was not uncommon in Lebanon and also occurred in Gaza and Syria after 1948.⁶³ The conditions of the barracks and Wavel's remote location in a harsh area of Lebanon made it a particularly tough place for refugees. El-Abed wrote, "Our situation goes from bad to worse so that death is nearer to us than life. We have been in this state for two years and it has not changed." Such conditions were common in camps across the five fields. Shortly before el-Abed composed his letter, the UNESCO director had described life inside the camps as "wretched."⁶⁴

This is a frequent theme in refugee accounts of the period. Fawaz Turki, a refugee from Haifa, describes in his memoir the hardship of his early life in Burj al-Barajneh camp in Lebanon, where residents faced an alternation of torrential rain, bitter frost, and fierce heat. In such conditions the tents deteriorated quickly, leaving many refugees exposed to the elements. Turki recalls how everyone in the camp was unemployed and hungry, and families were so poor that mothers used the sacks of UN flour rations to make underwear for their children.⁶⁵ Ahmed Kotaish has similar recollections of his childhood in Nahr el-Bared camp, also in Lebanon, where he and his friends and siblings wore shirts and pants made from UNRWA flour bags.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, Abdel Bari Atwan, who grew up in Deir al-Balah camp in Gaza, notes that abject poverty compelled children to go barefoot even in bitterly cold winters.⁶⁷ The luckier refugees lived in mud huts while most others were consigned to tents, meaning that none had waterproof shelters, and all were exposed to the elements.⁶⁸ Abu Hisham, a refugee from Zarnouqa village near Jaffa, describes his one-room mud shelter in Nuseirat camp as

“a house for dogs,” with no running water or sanitary facilities; the nearest well was 1.5 km away.⁶⁹

Even other Palestinian refugees were horrified by conditions in the camps.⁷⁰ Wasif Jawhariyyeh, a wealthy Jerusalemite who was temporarily displaced during the Nakba, worked on relief efforts for refugees in Jericho in 1948. He wrote in his diary at that time, “I will never forget the misery and suffering we saw in the refugee tents, and their need for the basics of daily life, food, and clothing.”⁷¹ Such feelings were widespread among Palestinians living outside the camps. Like Turki, Leila Khaled was a refugee from Haifa who fled to Lebanon in 1948; unlike Turki, her family could afford to live in the city of Beirut. In her memoir, Khaled recalls visiting a friend in one of the camps during her childhood. There she observed “the despair of deprivation” in the form of “bare-footed children with swollen stomachs, pale mothers with sickly babies [and] poverty and hunger.”⁷² The camps encapsulated the worst elements of Palestinian suffering in exile, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the Nakba.

Yet as Khaled’s account also indicates, it was by no means the case that all Palestinian refugees lived in the camps. In fact, in the years after the



FIG. 1.4. Palestinian refugees sheltering in caves near Bethlehem. Photo courtesy of UNRWA.



FIG. 1.5. Palestinian couple sheltering in a tent in Ein El Hilweh camp, Lebanon. Photo courtesy of UNRWA.

Nakba, the UN estimated that less than 40 percent of all registered Palestinian refugees were living in what were then sixty official camps.⁷³ This estimate did not take account of the thousands of exiled Palestinians who had not registered with the UN, so the true proportion was even lower. The camp refugees, however, held a significance disproportionate to their numbers. They comprised the poorest and most disadvantaged social groups, who suffered the most as a result of exile. Their continuing survival in the camps came to symbolize the lasting effects of the Nakba and would have serious repercussions in the years to come. The conditions of early exile ushered in a new era for the Palestinians and ultimately provided the

foundations for their political regeneration. Palestinian refugee history thus came to encapsulate the common connection between exile and nationalism.⁷⁴

THE CREATION OF UNRWA

The severe need among Palestinian refugees did not go unnoticed. In the immediate aftermath of the Nakba, a range of local and international NGOs worked with the host governments to provide services to alleviate the situation.⁷⁵ These included the Near East Foundation, the International Children's Emergency Fund, and the American Red Cross. Religious organizations played an especially significant role, with local churches and mosques, as well as international religious charities, coordinating many of the efforts on the ground. Among them were the War Relief Services of National Catholic Welfare Conference, the Federal Council of Churches, the Christian Rural Overseas Program, and Lutheran World Relief Incorporated.⁷⁶

In his diarized account of working with a consultative committee for refugees in 1948, Jawhariyyeh writes of the committee's close coordination with the Lutherans and the Red Cross. His account shows how these early relief efforts were characterized by common practices in humanitarianism at the time, which would later become hallmarks of UNRWA's work, including the use of ration cards and registration records.⁷⁷ These organizations also grappled with questions of identity and definitions, having to agree on criteria for who could be considered a refugee.⁷⁸

Having held increasing responsibility for Palestine since February 1947, when the British had announced plans to terminate the Mandate, the UN played a central role from the beginning.⁷⁹ In July 1948 it established the sixty-day Disaster Relief Project (UNDRP), which was succeeded in November by UN Relief for Palestine Refugees (UNRPR).⁸⁰ Rather than functioning as an operational agency, UNRPR coordinated the aid effort by recruiting other organizations to distribute UN supplies. It commissioned the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to do so in the West Bank and Jordan, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) in the Gaza Strip, and the League of Red Cross Societies (LRCS) in Syria and Lebanon.⁸¹

In the early aftermath of the Nakba, these organizations played a leading role in providing refugees with food, tents, clothing, and blankets. They

also established and organized many of the camps that were emerging to shelter the refugee communities.⁸² Their work is often mentioned in refugee accounts of this period: Matar Abdelrahim recalls how his family received tents and a designated area to sleep from the ICRC in Damascus, while Abu Sitta talks about the AFSC's role in establishing Maghazi, Nuseirat, and Shati refugee camps in Gaza.⁸³ The AFSC was also responsible for operating a school program for refugees in Gaza, which would later form the basis of UNRWA's work in the territory.⁸⁴

As well as addressing the emergency relief elements of the Palestinian refugee crisis, the UN sought to resolve its political causes, at least ostensibly. On December 11, 1948, the UNGA passed Resolution 194, calling for the refugees to be allowed to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors. The resolution also created UNCCP to mediate political solutions.⁸⁵ In theory, UNCCP should have worked to implement Resolution 194, in line with the official stance of the UN.⁸⁶ In practice, it quickly encountered strong resistance from the newly formed Israeli government, with Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion making it clear that the return of the refugees en masse was inconceivable.⁸⁷ Seeking alternative solutions, in August 1949 the UNCCP created the Economic Survey Mission (ESM, known informally as the "Clapp Commission" after its leader Gordon Clapp) to tour Arab countries and investigate ways to alleviate the refugees' suffering.

The ESM's first report, submitted in November 1949, had lasting repercussions for Palestinian refugees and their relationship with the UN. While still speaking of "repatriation," it engaged much more closely with the idea of settling the refugees permanently outside Palestine. In fact, it went so far as to recommend the creation of a specific UN agency to direct a jobs ("works") program that would integrate the refugees into the Arab host countries.⁸⁸ On this basis, the UN looked at replacing UNRPR, which was premised on the presumed imminent resolution of the refugee crisis,⁸⁹ with a more comprehensive relief system.⁹⁰ In December 1949 the UNGA adopted the ESM's recommendations in Resolution 302(IV):

The General Assembly . . . establishes the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, to carry out in collaboration with local governments the direct relief and works programmes as recommended by the Economic Survey Mission [and] to consult with the

interested Near Eastern Governments concerning measures to be taken by them preparatory to the time when international assistance for relief and works is no longer available.⁹¹

All the Arab governments, as well as Israel itself, voted in support of the resolution, with the latter well-disposed toward the ESM's work.⁹² UNRWA was thus created. This meant that a new international relief regime arrived on the scene in the Levant just as the region was emerging from British and French colonial rule. The significance of this, and the fact that the regime



FIG. 1.6. Map of UNRWA's five fields of operations. Illustration by Gerry Krieg.

was predominantly driven by the Global North, was not lost on local populations, including the refugees themselves.

UNRWA began operations on May 1, 1950, in Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, and Jordan (including the West Bank, which Abdullah I had annexed). It did not work in Egypt, despite the significant number of Palestinians there,⁹³ or in Iraq, although it ran a placement office in Baghdad until the late 1950s.⁹⁴ UNRWA also provided assistance to Jewish refugees in Israel until 1952, when it closed its office there at the request of the Israeli government.⁹⁵ Basic agreements with the Arab host states established the terms of UNRWA's role, with responsibilities divided on the basis that "the Agency provides a camp administration staff and operates certain facilities and programmes within the camps in co-ordination with the host Government [which is] responsible for the security services."⁹⁶ The terms of this agreement show the centrality of UNRWA's work to the camps—and vice versa—from the beginning. As a visible element of camp life from 1950, UNRWA quickly became a formative element of Palestinian exile, at least in the fields where it worked.

At the same time, UNRWA's large-scale new services came with caveats. Across all its fields of operation, UNRWA was mandated to serve *Palestine* refugees, not *Palestinian* refugees. While appearing merely semantic, the distinction was crucial, meaning that UNRWA served refugees from Palestine, rather than those who happened to be Palestinian. This enabled UNRWA to also provide services to Jewish refugees in Israel in its early years. Importantly, neither UNGA Resolution 194 nor 302 contained any definition of exactly who constituted a "Palestine refugee."⁹⁷ Instead, UNRWA adopted a working definition of "a person whose normal residence was Palestine for a minimum of two years preceding the conflict in 1948, and who, as a result of this conflict, lost both his home and his means of livelihood and took refuge in 1948 in one of the countries where UNRWA provides relief."⁹⁸ While UNRWA management were keen to highlight that this definition was operational rather than legal, its codification nevertheless meant that the agency played an important part in shaping Palestinian refugee identity at an official level early on.

The definition generated exclusions as well as providing some official endorsement. This was not entirely accidental: donor pressure for UNRWA to limit the number of relief recipients had informed the construction of such a narrowly drawn definition.⁹⁹ At the beginning of 1950 UNRPR had

had more than 950,000 Palestinian refugees on its rolls, but it quickly began reducing the numbers, for example, by denying services to those Palestinians who had left after 1948.¹⁰⁰ These exclusions caused some resentment, not least because many of those who were ineligible were as destitute as the formally registered Palestine refugees—or in some cases even more so.¹⁰¹ Moreover, UNRPR's comparatively loose criteria meant that some refugees lost out when UNRWA's stricter definition came into force. Agency management acknowledged this but contended that some limitations were necessary in order for it to provide effective services.¹⁰²

Early Operations: UNRWA as Quasi-government

The difference in definition was not the only thing that distinguished UNRWA from UNRPR. Unlike UNRPR, UNRWA provided services to the refugees directly, rather than acting as a coordinator. As such, it took over full responsibility for refugee relief from the AFSC, ICRC, and LRCS, although it continued to employ some of the same personnel who had worked for those bodies.¹⁰³ Moreover, while UNRWA remained—at least in theory—a temporary agency with a short-term mandate, it nevertheless took a more comprehensive approach than UNRPR to meeting the refugees' needs. UNRWA ran major relief programs through which it established its own schools, clinics, and health centers, as well as systems for procuring and distributing rations.¹⁰⁴

As such, UNRWA quickly became the primary service provider across the Palestinian refugee camps in the 1950s, with a much more visible presence than UNRPR. Tellingly, the refugees themselves would later refer to this period as *'ayyam al-UNRWA* (the days of UNRWA), signifying its centrality to their lives.¹⁰⁵ Describing his 1950s childhood in Nahr el-Bared in Lebanon, Ahmed Kotaish recalls that even the camp's center was nicknamed "UNRWA square" because of the provisions being handed out there.¹⁰⁶

UNRWA's comprehensive approach to relief meant that observers often described it as a small-scale government, with some even dubbing it "the Blue State."¹⁰⁷ Senior UNRWA management themselves characterized their work as "quasi-governmental," both internally and in official external communications.¹⁰⁸ The term accurately reflected the nature of UNRWA's work in the camps, where it administered services that would usually be

the domain of the state, from health and education to sanitation and roads. While the host governments retained legislative and judicial power over the camps—a point that UNRWA officials were continually keen to emphasize—their actual involvement was limited to matters of security.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, unlike most other relief organizations—including UNHCR, the other UN refugee agency—UNRWA existed to serve Palestine refugees exclusively.¹¹⁰ This setup facilitated its fast evolution into a quasi-government, made easier still by the statelessness of its beneficiaries.¹¹¹ As the only internationally recognized authority that connected the Palestinians across national borders, UNRWA's significance went far beyond that of a typical aid agency—or of the NGOs that worked on a much smaller scale in many of the camps.¹¹²

Reflecting UNRWA's quasi-state functioning, a key element of its work in these early years was the planned resettlement of Palestinian refugees in the host countries, as originally recommended by the ESM.¹¹³ Although UNGA Resolution 194 had called for the return of the Palestine refugees to their homes—a point often highlighted by the refugees themselves—behind the scenes UN officials were increasingly looking to the refugees' integration into the host countries as an alternative “solution.”¹¹⁴ Both the United States and the UK, the biggest global powers involved, encouraged this. They both looked unfavorably on the idea of return and publicly voiced support for the refugees' resettlement in Arab states.¹¹⁵ In line with the ESM's report, they saw UNRWA as a tool for achieving this; the UK government even stated internally that UNRWA had in fact been created to implement resettlement.¹¹⁶

This aspect of UNRWA's work reflected its essential entanglement with politics, despite the repeated insistence of agency management that its role was entirely apolitical. In fact, aid is never apolitical; its provision is determined by actors, conditions, and forces that are themselves shaped by local, regional, and international politics.¹¹⁷ Moreover, aid can itself affect politics in its impact on economics, development, and demography. This is only reinforced in cases such as that of the Palestinian refugees, whereby humanitarian needs are intrinsically enmeshed with the politics of their ongoing displacement. Despite the supposed distinction between politics and aid, many humanitarian actors have been conscious of this overlap in relief work with Palestinian refugees. For example, during its work in Gaza, the AFSC

repeatedly expressed concern that by providing relief they might inadvertently support the continuation of the Palestinians' displacement.¹¹⁸

In the case of UNRWA, the politics of its humanitarianism was especially pronounced. UNRWA was itself, ultimately, the product of political dynamics, which continued to shape its operations subsequently.¹¹⁹ With the United States and the UK regarding UNRWA as a tool for implementing the refugees' permanent resettlement outside Palestine, this quickly informed its work. In 1952 the UNGA, to which UNRWA reported, passed Resolution 513, which officially endorsed the resettlement policy. It also authorized a \$200 million "Reintegration Fund" with which the agency was supposed to implement the refugees' full integration into the host countries over a three-year period.¹²⁰

On the back of this, UNRWA quickly established employment schemes to facilitate the refugees' economic integration—this was the "Works" that went alongside "Relief" in its title.¹²¹ In this way, UNRWA was working not merely to provide relief but to actually implement a political solution to the Palestine refugee crisis, despite the official insistence that it had no mandate to do so.¹²² Four decades later, Giorgio Giacomelli (UNRWA commissioner-general from 1985 to 1991) would acknowledge in an interview that the agency had initially been created in part to facilitate the refugees' permanent resettlement outside Palestine.¹²³

The evidence certainly shows that many of UNRWA's activities in the 1950s were driven by this objective.¹²⁴ In keeping with the aims of integration and long-term development, UNRWA worked to stabilize the infrastructure in the refugee camps. By 1955 it had replaced all the refugee tents in Gaza with huts.¹²⁵ Four years later the director reported the same achievement across all UNRWA's fields of operation.¹²⁶ In undertaking this kind of structural improvement work, UNRWA was unmistakably acting in the guise of government—despite its persistent claims that the camps were the domain of the host governments.

At the same time, UNRWA's quasi-governmental approach was inherently problematic. It may have been the *de facto* government in the camps, but it had been installed by an international body and as such lacked legitimacy in the eyes of the refugees whom it served. While most camp refugees saw UNRWA as being far more significant than a standard aid agency, this came with its own ramifications. They regarded UNRWA as a



FIG. 1.7. Concrete shelters replace tents in Khan Younis camp, Gaza. Photo courtesy of UNRWA.

political body and responded to it accordingly. This would remain the cornerstone of their attitude toward the agency throughout the decades.

REFUGEE RESPONSES

Palestinian refugees' responses to UNRWA's work cannot be properly understood outside the context of their relationship with the United Nations. From early on, most Palestinian refugees viewed the UN with serious hostility. Elfan Rees, a British aid worker who visited Palestinian camps across the Middle East in 1949, reported that he encountered "at least as much criticism of United Nations [*sic*] as I found anti-Semitism." According to his report, "a visit from someone suspected of representing United Nations [*sic*] produces an immediate display of black flags and almost inevitably a hostile demonstration."¹²⁷ As Rees and other international aid workers found, many Palestinian refugees saw the UN as their enemy, blaming it for their dispossession.¹²⁸ UNRWA management were well aware of this. Director

John Blandford Jr. noted in his report to the UNGA in 1951 that “the United Nations . . . are considered by the refugee to be entirely responsible for both his past and present misfortunes.”¹²⁹

The refugees’ general opinion of the UN was thus not only hostile but also mistrustful. In directing their ire at the UN in this way, the refugees implicitly acknowledged the internationalization of their situation. Many understood that Palestine’s fate had been dominated and determined by the world powers for many decades, and they wanted those same world powers to remedy the injustice that they had inflicted.¹³⁰ For this, the refugees looked to the UN, which had proposed and endorsed the partition of Palestine in the first place by way of Resolution 181.¹³¹ Palestinians had long denounced the partition plan; Jawhariyyeh described it in his diary as “treacherous,” while Ghada Karmi, a refugee from Jerusalem, recalls in her memoir how the “bombshell” of Resolution 181 caused “grief verging on hysteria” in her neighborhood at the time.¹³² The world powers themselves also acknowledged the UN’s central role in Palestinian affairs, albeit not publicly.¹³³ In 1949 the UK foreign secretary wrote in a private note to the prime minister that Palestine had been “governed from the UN” for much of the late 1940s.¹³⁴ As those years had not ended positively for the Palestinians, it followed that many of them would view the UN with antagonism.

Palestinian hostility toward the UN had serious ramifications for UNRWA, which was tarred with the same brush. In the refugees’ eyes, the UN and UNRWA were part of the same power base that had created Israel and turned them into refugees.¹³⁵ Fawaz Turki recalls that during his childhood in the 1950s, the residents of Burj al-Barajneh camp identified their enemies as “the UNRWA officials, the American governments, the Zionists, the British.”¹³⁶ In other words, they were all bracketed together. In 1963 the former mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husseini, told the director of UNRWA affairs in Lebanon that many refugees approached the agency with suspicion because it “is a subsidiary agency of the UN which is responsible for the Palestine problem as a whole.”¹³⁷

To make matters worse, UNRWA was known to receive ongoing financial and diplomatic support from the United States and the UK, which many Palestinians saw as their primary political foes.¹³⁸ The UK in particular was viewed as untrustworthy, having supported the Zionist movement in the

Balfour Declaration of 1917, which was then incorporated into the text of the British Mandate for Palestine.¹³⁹ Salman Abu Sitta articulated the feelings of many Palestinians when he wrote in his autobiography:

Comparing the British arrival [in Palestine] in 1917 with their abrupt departure three decades later is one of history's most shameful episodes. In 1917 the British arrived as victors and allies with the promise of their "sacred trust of civilization" to prepare Palestine for independence. [In 1948] they withdrew surreptitiously, without a word of goodbye, leaving behind their Arab charges, in their own country, to the mercy of the Jews . . . well-stocked British military bases [were] left—either through bribery or in collusion—for the Jews.¹⁴⁰

In accordance with such views, many refugees worried that British influence at the UN in general and UNRWA in particular was causing the agency to work against their national interests.¹⁴¹

UNRWA's status as a UN body created a perception among the refugees that would become a hallmark of Palestinian attitudes for decades to come: the notion that UNRWA was a political organization rather than simply an aid agency. UNRWA's insistence that it was apolitical and merely concerned with relief fell on deaf ears. In fact, many refugees feared that UNRWA's operations had a furtive political purpose and that it was secretly working to keep them in exile.

Strikingly, this suspicion could be found across the region. In 1955, for example, a group of refugee students in Lebanon declared to UNRWA, "you have come . . . to complete the conspiracy and deprive us of any chance to return to our usurped paradise."¹⁴² The same year, camp community leader Ahmad al-Yamani distributed a pamphlet accusing UNRWA of conspiring with Israel to prevent the Palestinians' return, which was particularly significant given that Yamani was himself an UNRWA schoolteacher in Lebanon. The publication *Al Tha'r*, an organ of the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM), regularly made similar accusations that the agency was seeking to permanently resettle the Palestinians in exile.¹⁴³ Meanwhile in Gaza, UNRWA teacher Mu'in Basisu railed against UNRWA's alleged efforts to settle the Gaza refugees "in the midst of the Sinai sand."¹⁴⁴ His words articulated the suspicions of many refugees that the real motive behind UNRWA's relief operations was to block their return to their homeland, as per the wishes of the Western powers.

The dynamics were further complicated by the fact that the majority of UNRWA employees at lower levels were themselves Palestine refugees, while senior management were exclusively “international” and in practice overwhelmingly Western.¹⁴⁵ This hierarchy reinforced the refugees’ feelings that UNRWA was a neocolonial body acting at the behest of their former colonizer (the United Kingdom) and its ally (the United States).¹⁴⁶ Indeed, despite the “Palestinianized” nature of much of UNRWA’s workforce, even its Palestinian employees were largely suspicious of its true motives, as the case of Yamani indicates.¹⁴⁷ Many shared the fear that UNRWA’s creation had been contrived to keep them in exile while the new state of Israel established itself—indeed, the very UNGA resolution that had created UNRWA spoke of the need not only “to prevent conditions of starvation and distress” among the refugees, but also “to further conditions of peace and stability.”¹⁴⁸ As one Palestinian UNRWA employee in Lebanon told anthropologist Rosemary Sayigh, “UNRWA and the host governments intend that we should be absorbed in seeking our daily bread and never have time to work seriously to regain our country.”¹⁴⁹ Although this woman was herself part of the agency, she still did not trust it.¹⁵⁰ Many feared that UNRWA belonged to a pro-Israeli alliance, seeking to distract the Palestinians from political campaigning by making them eternally dependent on aid.

The behavior of UNRWA management sometimes fueled these fears, albeit unintentionally. Despite their continuous insistence that their work was apolitical, they were still happy to allude to its political effects when it suited them. In particular, UNRWA directors frequently emphasized the agency’s positive impact on political stability in the Middle East when appealing for funding from donor states, which were nearly all Western. In 1951 UNRWA director Blandford spoke proudly of how its work “kept the situation [in the refugee camps] under control,” stating that this was “not one of the less significant performances of UNRWA.”¹⁵¹ UNRWA’s official newsletters regularly extolled its stabilizing effects, not least when exhorting UN member states to provide or increase their financial support.¹⁵²

Similarly, from the very beginning the UK government, one of UNRWA’s major donors, justified its financial support for the agency on the grounds of a feared “threat to stability in the Middle East.”¹⁵³ It implored other Western states to provide funding for the same reason.¹⁵⁴ But of course, stabilizing the status quo ran counter to the desires of many refugees for a

complete transformation of their situation. As many of them saw it, then, UNRWA was delivering outcomes that were politically desirable to those world powers that supported Israel, and to Israel itself.

UNRWA's failure to consult the refugees on its work in the 1950s tended to exacerbate their suspicion and concern. For example, Turki objects in his memoir to the time and energy that the UNRWA director devoted to meeting committees from the Arab League, while ignoring Palestinian representatives. The agency's perceived disinterest in discussing its services with the refugees led him to dub it "our contemptuous stepmother."¹⁵⁵ Turki's choice of phrase perfectly encapsulates the combination of intimacy and hostility that characterized the refugees' relationship with UNRWA.

Rejecting Resettlement

The refugees' fears about UNRWA's politicized motives were not groundless. Ultimately, UNRWA's main objective in the 1950s was to resettle the refugees in the Arab host countries, largely through the job programs and "reintegration" schemes proposed by the ESM.¹⁵⁶ Unsurprisingly, many Palestinians were highly suspicious of the schemes, taking them as evidence that UNRWA's real purpose was to counter and ultimately obliterate their right of return by permanently settling them outside Palestine. As early as 1950 a Palestinian refugee organization claimed that the agency's works program was "a project prepared by the Imperialists."¹⁵⁷

Arguably their suspicions were justified. In a private meeting with UNESCO in 1952, Blandford said that he was "doing his best" to persuade the Arab governments to agree to Palestinian resettlement.¹⁵⁸ John Davis, who served as commissioner-general from 1959 to 1963, later wrote in his memoir that UNRWA had gone wrong in not focusing sufficiently on economic development and integration.¹⁵⁹ Yet in the eyes of the refugees, even a minimal focus on their integration outside Palestine was unacceptable. Resettlement quickly became a major source of tension in UNRWA's relationship with the refugees, whose reactions to the agency's job schemes varied from passive reluctance to outright hostility.¹⁶⁰

Refugee antagonism meant that UNRWA experienced considerable problems in carrying out its work. A British doctor working in the camps in the early 1950s observed that the agency was facing difficulties in

implementing some of its projects because it lacked the cooperation of the people.¹⁶¹ Blandford confirmed as much in his 1951 Report to the UNGA:

There have been demonstrations over the census operation, strikes against the medical and welfare services, strikes for cash payment instead of relief, strikes against making any improvements, such as school buildings, in camps in case this might mean permanent resettlement; experimental houses to replace tents, erected by the Agency, have been torn down; and for many months, in Syria and Lebanon, there was widespread refusal to work on agency road-building and afforestation schemes.¹⁶²

As a result of these obstacles, UNRWA made little progress in its attempts to resettle the refugees, and its jobs and reintegration schemes ultimately failed.¹⁶³ Of the 878,000 refugees registered with UNRWA in the early 1950s, the largest number ever employed under its Works Program was 12,000, and in less than a year this had dwindled to 812.¹⁶⁴ In 1956 Commissioner-General Henry Labouisse stated in his report to the UNGA that the refugees “have remained opposed to the development of large scale projects for self-support, which they erroneously link with permanent resettlement.”¹⁶⁵ Whether the link was erroneous or not, the refugees’ opposition was palpable and apparently unbreakable.

As Blandford had noted previously, the refugees’ hostility extended to UNRWA’s camp improvement programs. They saw these schemes in a similar light, as a strategy designed to prevent their return to Palestine by making them more comfortable in exile. As a result, UNRWA’s efforts to develop and even beautify the camps often met with opposition so fierce that they became impossible to implement. Turki recalls how the residents of Burj al-Barajneh camp uprooted the trees planted by UNRWA in protest at the perceived attempt to settle them permanently outside Palestine.¹⁶⁶ As Blandford’s report shows, such demonstrations were by no means limited to that camp alone. Using the same rationale, some refugees also rejected early attempts to replace their tents with solid houses. Interestingly Gaza was the only field in which UNRWA was able to do so without fierce resistance—perhaps because its high population density had partially defused the refugees’ concerns about reintegration. Yet even in Gaza, the refugees still fervently opposed other proposals for resettlement.¹⁶⁷

As time went on, UNRWA increasingly found that its focus on jobs and resettlement was not only unpopular, but also costly and inefficient.¹⁶⁸ Consequently, it came to consider a change in focus, although only much later would it acknowledge that the refugees' resistance to resettlement had been the major reason for this.¹⁶⁹ From the mid-1950s the management was focusing on education as an alternative approach.¹⁷⁰ By 1957 it had quietly dispensed with its jobs schemes (although it retains the "Works" element of its title to this day).¹⁷¹ Schools were now declared the new priority.¹⁷² The year 1957 thus marked the end of what could be considered the first era of UNRWA's work, as distinguished by a preoccupation with employment schemes as a long-term solution to the immediate emergency of the refugee crisis. The subsequent shift to education injected a new steadiness and routine into UNRWA's operations over the ensuing decade, until the 1967 war upturned everything in the region once again and returned both UNRWA and the refugees to a state of emergency.¹⁷³

UNRWA's shift in emphasis to education was momentous. Although it had been responsible for camp schools since beginning operations in 1950, its education program had operated on a small scale for the first half of that decade.¹⁷⁴ That now changed, as the education program, developed in partnership with UNESCO and based on the host country curriculum, expanded significantly.¹⁷⁵ The number of UNRWA schools increased from 61 in 1950 to 386 in 1958.¹⁷⁶ In subsequent years, UNRWA's school program developed into a full-scale education system, operating at elementary and middle school level and also providing university scholarships to exceptional students.¹⁷⁷ Since 1960, education has been UNRWA's largest single program in terms of investment, funding, and personnel.¹⁷⁸

It is crucial to note that UNRWA's shift in focus to education came partly in response to demands from the refugees themselves. While the latter were overwhelmingly averse to the jobs schemes, they responded to the prospect of education with great enthusiasm, shared by everyone from teachers and administrators to students themselves and their parents.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, the earliest camp schooling predated UNRWA, as refugees had set up makeshift lessons in tents, the open air, or vacant shelters.¹⁸⁰ In Maghazi camp in Gaza, refugee teachers had even established three classes in an old kitchen.¹⁸¹

In his memoir, Turki describes how most camp residents saw education as a way out of poverty and deprivation and were consequently always seeking academic and training opportunities.¹⁸² In the same way, Abdel Bari



FIG. 1.8. Class in an UNRWA school in Mar Elias camp, Lebanon. Photo courtesy of UNRWA.

Atwan states that education in Gaza was seen as “the only escape route from the camps for the next generation”—and accordingly the only way for a family’s prospects to improve.¹⁸³ Recalling his schooling in 1950s Nahr el-Bared camp, Kotaish writes similarly: “I loved the hours I spent [at school]. Even as a young boy I knew that I was studying for my life. I devoted all of my strength to my education. I saw in it the way to a better existence. I knew that I was a refugee, but it was school that started me dreaming of myself as a free and a respected man. I would tell myself that I somehow just had to claw my way out of this miserable camp.”¹⁸⁴ Having lost the land that had defined them and been their main currency for generations, the camp

refugees—overwhelmingly of peasant origin—looked to education as the key to improving their prospects.¹⁸⁵

There was also a deeper rationale at play. Many felt that they had lost their country in 1948 because of their relative ignorance in comparison to the educated Jewish population of Palestine (known as the *yishuv*).¹⁸⁶ Education was therefore not only the key to better employment opportunities, but also a tool for reclaiming Palestine. In the words of Mu'in Basisu, a teacher at UNRWA's Bureij school in Gaza:

A vegetable box became a blackboard, and with a piece of lime the teachers wrote on the boards they had painted themselves. They began teaching the children, and hope began to spread. When the Palestinian child in the camp—at Burayj [*sic*], Nusayrat, Maghazi, Arrimal, Jabalya, Rafah, Khan Unis, Deir al-Balah, and Beit Hanoun—held a pencil in his hand and made his voice appear on paper, his father felt that the child would someday carry a weapon.¹⁸⁷

Education was thus seen as intrinsically tied to Palestinian liberation. As such, it was the polar opposite of the hated “reintegration” schemes.

UNRWA's policy shifts in this period would have three lasting effects. First, the refugees' collective memory of the agency's early resettlement policy cast a long shadow over its reputation in their eyes. Years later, the legacy of resettlement still had a serious impact on UNRWA's policies. Any subsequent attempts by UNRWA to improve the camps faced an uphill struggle, as such projects remained tainted by their perceived association with resettlement.¹⁸⁸ This was a constant worry for UNRWA management.¹⁸⁹ Most refugees only came to embrace the idea of camp improvement after several decades, and there is considerable scholarly debate over exactly when they ceased to see it as mutually exclusive with return to Palestine.¹⁹⁰

Second, UNRWA's switch in focus to schooling in this period established the agency as what a later commissioner-general would term “an institution predominantly concerned with education.”¹⁹¹ UNRWA's comprehensive education system meant that a generation of Palestinian refugees overtook their Arab counterparts in educational attainment.¹⁹² At the same time, by involving itself in education, UNRWA increasingly, if inadvertently, became incorporated into Palestinian politics. Its education program was vital in

reaffirming and strengthening the Palestinian national identity in exile.¹⁹³ The seeds of this were sown in the 1950s.

Third, UNRWA's repudiation of resettlement in favor of education is an early example of the impact of Palestinian agency on the regime. The refugees' popular demand for schooling was well-known even at high UN levels—as early as 1952, a UN Working Group spoke of the great pressure coming from Palestinian refugees for adequate education.¹⁹⁴ In abandoning resettlement for greater investment in education, UNRWA ultimately capitulated to this demand. The shift thus signifies the intricate and complex relationship between UNRWA and the refugees, which were to become increasingly enmeshed over the decades. Moreover, the latter's demand for education demonstrates the sense of entitlement they felt with regard to the agency's work. This was a hallmark of their behavior toward UNRWA from very early on.

Entitlement and Responsibility: UNRWA as Validation

Although Palestinian refugees were undeniably hostile toward UNRWA, this by no means translated into a wholesale rejection of its work. While they largely viewed the agency with suspicion, they did not seek to remove themselves from its orbit. On the contrary, many Palestinian refugees saw UNRWA's existence and programs as a sign of international responsibility for their plight.¹⁹⁵ As such, they felt entitled to its services.¹⁹⁶ This attitude was inherently tied to the refugees' view of the UN. The thinking went that until they were afforded the repatriation guaranteed in Resolution 194, it was the UN's duty to provide them with essential services.

External observers quickly picked up on this perception of UNRWA services as rights, which took hold soon after it began operations. One international aid worker in the camps recorded in a report in 1953 that the refugees saw the UN as culpable for their dispossession and accordingly responsible for their well-being until they could return.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, UNRWA officials themselves understood that the refugees accepted their provision of services on these terms. As early as 1951, Blandford wrote in his report to the UNGA that the Palestine refugees "say that they have lost faith in United Nations action since, after more than thirty months, the General Assembly resolution recommending their return home, although not revoked, has never been implemented and no progress has been made

towards compensation. The relief given by the Agency is therefore considered as a right, and as such is regarded as inadequate.”¹⁹⁸ As Blandford understood, Palestinian refugees saw UNRWA as much more than a simple aid agency. It was a symbol of the international debt toward them and therefore of their rights. Importantly, these rights were not only humanitarian but also political, relating as they did to the lost national homeland.¹⁹⁹ In this way, UNRWA’s significance easily transcended the humanitarian field, despite management’s continual insistence that it was apolitical.

This understanding of the agency’s role extended to specific services. In the 1950s UNRWA staff reported that the refugees saw their ration cards as proof of their eligibility for repatriation in Palestine—in other words, as a sign of their recognized national rights.²⁰⁰ This view directly influenced their behavior. When the Jordanian government offered hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees full economic integration in exchange for their UNRWA cards in 1959, only eight thousand took up the offer.²⁰¹ UNRWA services were thus treated not just as a right but as actual *evidence* of the Palestine refugees’ identity.²⁰² UNRWA itself was seen as a symbol of the continuing after-effects of the Nakba, the refugees’ ongoing plight, and the international responsibility for finding a solution.²⁰³ In this way the fact of UNRWA’s existence—not to mention its presence in the camps—came to represent Palestinian political and legal rights.²⁰⁴

The significance that the refugees attached to their ration cards is especially intriguing given that UNRWA’s provision of rations was a major source of resentment, with many refugees complaining they were insufficient. Fawaz Turki recalls that UNRWA’s monthly ration supplies provided families in Burj al-Barajneh with only enough food to last a week.²⁰⁵ Leila Khaled and Ahmed Kotaish describe the rations their families received in the 1950s in similarly meager terms.²⁰⁶ The grievances were so widespread that the UN formally reported on them in 1951.²⁰⁷ Moreover, they were supported by external evidence. In 1953 Dr. Leslie Houseden carried out a comprehensive study of the Palestinian camps across the Middle East, reporting that many refugees were surviving on insufficient food supplies.²⁰⁸ Blandford himself acknowledged in his 1951 report to the UNGA that “the diet provided by the standard ration is not by any means a balanced one”—although he added that the refugees receiving it were still nutritionally better-off than many of their neighbors.

The refugees framed the rations' insufficiency as an infringement of their rights. Seeing the provision of rations as an entitlement and not a privilege, many refugees saw the limitations on them as unacceptable. In view of the perceived international debt owed to them, they were unmoved by the explanation that UNRWA's severe financial difficulties necessitated such restrictions. Discerning that the required money could be found within the UN system as a whole, they did not accept that it could not be channeled toward their needs—especially when they observed the comparatively high salaries of UNRWA's international staff.²⁰⁹ In the refugees' eyes, UNRWA's services were granted in lieu of the land they had lost and as such should be fixed and nonnegotiable.²¹⁰

One final point needs to be emphasized here. Although the refugees felt entitled to UNRWA's services, this did not mean that they were happy about it. In fact, many refugees strongly resented the agency, which Turki described as "that ubiquitous symbol of shame in our lives."²¹¹ There was a strong sense among the refugees that life in the camps was fundamentally humiliating and that UNRWA's services stripped them of their dignity.²¹² Both Khaled and Turki recall the shame and degradation that their parents felt over having to collect their rations from the UNRWA provisions bureau, while Matar Abdelrahim wrote of the "denigration of being a refugee."²¹³

Such feelings were reinforced by the contrast between receiving rations and many refugees' previous lives as self-sufficient farmers in Palestine. As Abdelrahim puts it, "we had to turn to others even for our bread, which had once been the staple of our meals and was baked daily by our families from the wheat we had sown and harvested."²¹⁴ Abdel Bari Atwan writes similarly of how reliance on UNRWA invoked feelings of impotence and frustration in his father, who had formerly worked his own land in Palestine.²¹⁵ While UNRWA's aid may have represented Palestinian refugees' international rights, it also signified their national defeat. The refugees thus generally sought to draw whatever meager benefits they could from the agency—relief, health care, education—while keeping up their demands for real political justice.

FROM REFUGE TO REVOLUTION

Only now were we being born. We were being born as Palestinians with the right to fight for our country, and ceasing to be refugees without rights.

—AHMED KOTAISH

In the years after the Nakba, many of the dreams and desires of the Palestinian refugees were profoundly nationalist. They related overwhelmingly to the lost Palestinian homeland and their much-hoped-for eventual reunion with it. Yet on a day-to-day basis the refugees' concerns were often much more basic. As they endured and resisted the miserable conditions of the refugee camps, many focused on surviving and supporting themselves and their families. The combination of trauma, poverty, and host-state repression meant that overt political organization in the camps was minimal in the two decades after the Nakba, at least among the older generations. With little means of taking direct action, many older refugees looked to the Arab governments to realize their hopes of return. This changed dramatically with the Arab defeat of 1967, known in Arabic as *al Naksa* (the setback).

Like the Nakba, the Naksa was pivotal in shaping the development of a national consciousness that was already rooted among the Palestinian people. While Palestinian nationalism long predated 1967, the Naksa shifted its formation and gave it a new prominence.¹ The histories of refugee camp politics before and after 1967 speak directly to the event's significance, while also illustrating the camps' essential role in incubating the nationalist movement that re-emerged after 1967. This was made possible in turn by the camps' distinctiveness, which UNRWA, as the quasi-state authority therein, played a key role in shaping.

Critically, the Naksa also had a significant impact on Palestinians' developing identity as refugees. From the beginning of their dispossession, they had rejected any attempts to reduce their refugeehood to an issue of aid eligibility, insisting on its inherent political meaning. After the 1967 defeat engendered the ascendance of the Palestinian nationalist movement in exile, many refugees explicitly reformulated their identity, speaking of themselves as "revolutionaries" or even "returnees" in attempts to counter the Global North's depoliticization of their plight. Again, the camps played a leading role here.

SEEKING RETURN: THE REFUGEE CAMPS BEFORE 1967

The camps' spatial function and distinctiveness were crucial to their significance. From the early aftermath of the Nakba, Palestinian refugee camps across the region were distinguished from their environs by socioeconomic conditions, physical infrastructure and appearance, and governance and administration. Of these, the first factor was the most obvious difference. Poverty levels were noticeably higher inside the camps than elsewhere. Food was limited, and physical sickness was rife, while poverty, homelessness, and high unemployment meant that mental illness was often common.²

The dire camp conditions are a clear theme in refugee accounts of the 1950s and early 1960s. Matar Abdelrahim describes his camp in Syria thus:

For us, it was the end of the world, between the empty sky and this unknown land, where hunger, fear, and depression had settled. We lived amid pools of water and mud, and the rain poured ceaselessly down the sides of the tents. No one was able to leave. The camp was made up of little pockets of people gathered together, forgotten on this vast, empty plot of land, abandoned to their own devices far from the city and any kind of communication with others.³

Such recollections are typical and transcend the distinctions of host state borders. Abdel Bari Atwan recalls that his family's mud hut in Deir al-Balah camp in Gaza, also inhabited by scorpions and rats, was "luxury" compared to the tents around it.⁴ Fawaz Turki describes Burj al-Barajneh camp in Lebanon as a place where children shivered from cold, and everyone relied on aid.⁵ Further north in the country, Fatima Ibrahim Zankari recounts how



FIG. 2.1. Dikwaneh refugee camp on the outskirts of Beirut, 1966. Photo courtesy of UNRWA.

Nahr el-Bared camp was so exposed that a storm tore her family's tent in two shortly after she had given birth.⁶

Poverty also gave the camps' distinctiveness a physical dimension, as the presence of tents, slum-like structures, and narrow alleys often distinguished them from neighboring towns and villages. In some cases the camps were actually formally demarcated, although the extent of this varied between the camps and across the five fields. In Lebanon, where it was greatest, refugees needed permits to leave their camps and venture into the surrounding areas. By contrast, the West Bank saw considerable movement and integration between camps, towns, and villages.⁷ Yet the variation was by degree rather than kind.

The camps' demarcation enabled the host governments to treat them as sites of control, but it also enabled the refugees to retain the feeling of a national community in exile. Recalling his 1950s childhood in Burj al-Barajneh, Turki writes that the camp's physical isolation provided shelter and a form of protection for Palestinian identity, which could otherwise be vulnerable to erosion. In Turki's eyes, the camps' setup enabled the refugees to maintain their connections to Palestine, ultimately reinforcing their traditions and customs: "As we grew up, we lived Palestine every day. We talked Palestine every day. For we had not, in fact, left it in 1948. We had simply taken it with us."⁸ The camps' cordoning off from the outside areas crystallized and reinforced the residents' Palestinian identity.⁹ This meant that "town refugees" tended to feel a greater affinity with the host nation and culture than those in the camps.¹⁰

In practical terms, older generations of refugees helped preserve the collective memory of Palestine in the camps by passing down not only their memories, but also the deeds and keys to the houses left behind in 1948. As a result, the generations born in the camps continued to identify themselves as belonging to whichever town or village their parents had left during the Nakba.¹¹ For example, Atwan was born in Deir al-Balah camp in Gaza in 1950 but grew up hearing detailed stories about his family's hometown of Isdud from both parents; he talks about the importance of the older generations in the camp as sources of knowledge in this regard.¹² Kotaish, born in 1952 in Nahr el-Bared, writes similarly of learning about his ancestral home from his parents and their friends.¹³

Remembrance of the pre-Nakba days was a crucial element of camp life, both as a coping mechanism and as a way to keep Palestinian identity alive. Abdelrahim recalls how reliving former village life helped the community withstand the difficulties of exile and camp life.¹⁴ This fixation on their former homeland meant that, as Turki observes, it was the camp refugees more than anyone else who kept "the notion of *al-'awda* [return] alive."¹⁵

Many refugees reinforced the camps' distinctiveness by imprinting signs of their presence inside. While they resisted UNRWA's efforts to beautify the camps, they were willing to impose their presence on their surroundings in other ways—most notably, by physically re-creating pre-1948 Palestine. Customary remembrance practices saw many camp streets and quarters named after places left behind in 1948.¹⁶ This was true even of some camps themselves: Wavel refugee camp in Lebanon and Jerash camp in

Jordan were known informally as Jalil and Gaza, respectively, after the origins of their residents. This reflected the fact that refugees had largely fled en masse and subsequently regrouped along village lines in exile—something LRCS observed in the early aftermath of the Nakba.¹⁷ The camps' function in "re-creating" Palestine in this way proved important in maintaining the consciousness of a national community in exile.

In some cases refugees took this further and subdivided their camps such that neighborhoods housed people from the same parts of Palestine.¹⁸ Accordingly, the Tarashha quarter of Burj al-Barajneh camp was named after Tarshiha, the hometown of its residents; the same logic applied to the 'Amqa quarter of Ein el-Helweh camp.¹⁹ Atwan and Kotaish describe the same practices at play in Deir al-Balah and Nahr el-Bared, respectively.²⁰ People also tended to apply village social norms to these camp quarters, such that women often wore their informal house clothes when in their own neighborhood quarters but changed into formal visiting clothes when going to other parts of the camp.²¹ This kind of setup turned the camps into their own internal realms, clearly distinct from elsewhere.

UNRWA itself also played a central role in establishing the camps' distinctiveness. It was by no means the only actor providing relief in the camps at this time; as explained in the previous chapter, various local and international NGOs had provided essential services in the camps before UNRWA began operations in May 1950, and some of them remained active afterward. Yet UNRWA's role transcended those of other aid agencies and conventional charities. As the administering authority across the camps, in many it was also the primary provider of social services, and the main employer. It thus comprised a vital characteristic and distinguishing feature of their internal culture.²² In physical terms, the presence of UNRWA institutions, such as schools, clinics, and ration centers, helped demarcate the camps from surrounding areas. Entrances to the camps were marked by prominent signs in the UN's shade of blue, providing the name of the agency and the camp in English and Arabic. Such features reinforced perceptions of UNRWA as "the Blue State."²³

In more conceptual terms, UNRWA's work also helped codify the separateness of the camp refugees. By restricting its services to those formally acknowledged as "Palestine refugees," it provided a concrete practical indication of their status and fueled the formation of the "Palestinian refugee" identity category. In this sense, the agency's work was particularly significant



FIG. 2.2. UNRWA Ration Distribution Centre in Aida camp, West Bank. Photo courtesy of UNRWA.

in Palestinian fields like Gaza, where it helped formalize the distinction between “native” Palestinians and refugees.²⁴ This in turn augmented the separateness of the camps, which were of course inhabited almost entirely by registered refugees. At the same time, UNRWA’s formative role in shaping the camps’ identification signified the continuous presence of internationalism in modern Palestinian history.

In the Arab host states, many of the local populations acted to reinforce the refugees’ separateness. This was most pronounced in Lebanon, where sectarianism and internal tensions combined to create widespread hostility toward the Palestinian refugees soon after their arrival.²⁵ The conceptualization of the refugee camps as “Other” started at this base level; some Lebanese

locals even referred to them as “zoos.”²⁶ Descriptions of Lebanese hostility are commonplace in Palestinian memoirs of life there after the Nakba. Kotaish and Turki both recount the regular anti-Palestinian slurs and even violence directed at them from Lebanese police as well as civilians.²⁷

Disdain toward the camps was not limited to host populations. Leila Khaled recounts in her memoir how she and other “town” refugees in Lebanon looked down on those in the camps as “the scum of the earth.”²⁸ Even Palestinian regions saw palpable tensions between “natives” and refugees, with those in the camps at the bottom of the hierarchy. UNRWA’s codification of the differences inadvertently aided this differentiation.

The divisions were particularly pronounced in Gaza, where the population increased more than threefold as a result of the Nakba, with an influx of more than 200,000 refugees set against a “native” population of just 80,000.²⁹ Many native Gazans felt resentment over the refugees’ increased eligibility for aid and relief services, especially when they themselves were equally impoverished following the Nakba, having been cut off from economic hinterlands.³⁰ Some had even been displaced but were excluded from UNRWA’s mandate as their original homes had been within the Strip. They had to turn instead to limited support from the Egyptian administration and the Red Cross.³¹ Reflecting on his childhood in Deir al-Balah, Atwan recalls the extreme poverty of the Gazan “locals,” and the many similarities between their lifestyles and those of the refugees.³²

These social and communal tensions further reinforced the camps’ separateness. Widespread anti-Palestinian hostility engendered a shared solidarity among many camp residents, regardless of which camp they came from, as they all experienced this distancing from the rest of society, albeit to varying extents.³³ In other words, the refugee camps were distinctive even within the Palestinian diaspora before 1967. This would prove important in the post-Naksa period, as the camps’ containment facilitated the promotion and expression of Palestinian national identity, while simultaneously providing nationalist organizations with ready-made bases for their operations.

Camp Politics Before the Naksa

The camps’ physical and social separation went hand-in-hand with many refugees’ detachment from organized politics in the early years of exile. As

they grappled with the trauma of losing their homes and livelihoods, many focused on survival in the face of the daily struggles that characterized life in the camps. For this reason historian Jean-Pierre Filiu has dubbed them “the generation of mourning.”³⁴ Moreover, the executions and exiles of most Palestinian leaders during the revolt of 1936–1939 had left the refugees with little means of political organization,³⁵ while the brutal British repression had seriously damaged the Palestinian economy and led to the confiscation of much of their weaponry.³⁶

The precariousness of the Palestinians’ situation as stateless communities in the host states fueled this reluctance to participate in politics. Remembering the outcome of the revolt, many feared that such activity would imperil them. Atwan relates how his parents did not encourage him and his siblings to participate in politics because the prospect scared them.³⁷ Similarly, Turki recalls that when he and his sister first became interested in politics as teenagers, their mother admonished them for endangering their educations. Turki himself provides some rationale for this, writing that “until the emergence of the Palestinian Revolution in 1967, it was illegal for Palestinians to engage in any kind of political activity.”³⁸ The refugees’ feeling of vulnerability was augmented by their perception that in 1948 they had fallen victim to the plans of major international powers, which had resources far beyond their reach. This led many to conclude that political activity was both futile and dangerous.

As a result, political activism in the camps was relatively limited in the years after the Nakba. Palestinian identity was expressed in the form of opposition to Zionism and Israel and calls for return, which remained the ultimate goal and dream.³⁹ In another instance of political naming practices, refugees sought to call Jabal al-Hussein camp in Jordan the “Camp of Return” but were barred from doing so by the government.⁴⁰ The refugees’ desire for return was significant enough to be noted at the international level. In 1950 the Jordanian delegation to a UN meeting on Palestinian refugees contended that “nothing could be more unrealistic than to believe that the refugees would abandon hope of returning to their homes.”⁴¹ Aid agencies working in the camps reported similar observations.⁴² Tellingly, many refugees continued to look to the international community to deliver this; in the 1950s UNRWA recorded repeated fierce calls from the refugees for the right of return to be implemented in line with UN Resolution 194.⁴³

These calls were not merely rhetorical. In the early post-Nakba years, some refugees tried to make their dreams of return a reality, risking their lives by attempting to cross into what was now Israel.⁴⁴ Thousands of Palestinians crossed the border illegally every year from 1949 to 1956, with a peak of sixteen thousand recorded cases in 1952.⁴⁵ From the late 1950s such crossings were increasingly connected to ambush operations, but in this earlier period the majority were motivated by more basic desires: they wanted to retrieve belongings, visit relatives, reap their crops—especially as many were acutely hungry in exile—or simply see their old homes. In some cases refugees attempted to cross Israel in order to reach the West Bank from Gaza, or vice versa, to reunite with loved ones.⁴⁶

Notwithstanding these motivations, the Israeli state deemed all border crossers “infiltrators” and shot them dead if caught.⁴⁷ Reflecting on the fate of many who crossed the border in this period, Mu’in Basisu later wrote, “The Gaza peasant cuts the barbed wire and returns to his fields to sow the wheat. He cuts the barbed wire again at harvest time. He returns with a bundle of wheat stalks and is shot dead on the wire. The next day it is proclaimed that an infiltrator has been killed.”⁴⁸

This phenomenon was not limited to Gaza and the West Bank. The Israeli-Lebanese border was relatively porous in the early years after the Nakba and features in many accounts of such crossings and extrajudicial killings.⁴⁹ Fatima Ibrahim Zankari gives a detailed account of how she and her husband paid a smuggler to take them back across the Lebanese border in 1949, along with fifteen other refugee families, in the hope of reuniting with her husband’s family. They successfully reached Galilee and met with her brother-in-law there but traveled back to Lebanon a few days later after learning that the Israeli authorities were deporting undocumented Palestinian returnees to Gaza and Sinai.⁵⁰

Zankari’s account is far from unique. Ali al-Tarsha, a refugee from Annaba village, recounts sneaking in to retrieve belongings as often as a hundred times.⁵¹ Atwan and Abdelrahim both note that their fathers successfully made brief visits to their former homes after the Nakba to collect possessions and visit relatives who had stayed behind.⁵² Atwan’s father managed to do so twice but desisted from a third visit after narrowly escaping shooting by the Israeli Army.⁵³ Many more died trying. In June 1950 the *New York Times* reported that dozens of civilians had died of thirst and exhaustion in the desert while attempting to enter Israel from Gaza and

elsewhere.⁵⁴ Ramzy Baroud, born in a camp in Gaza, recalls hearing horror stories in his childhood of a cousin who was captured and brutally killed when crossing over to collect food from the family's abandoned farm.⁵⁵

The practice of "infiltrating" indicates what is perhaps most crucial to understand about the camps at this time: while the refugees were victims by many measures, they were not passive. Far from accepting their fate, they sought to confront it at every opportunity. The ways in which they did this ranged from crossing the border to petitioning UNRWA to re-creating Palestine in exile.⁵⁶ Their ability to take decisive action was highly constrained by the structures that disadvantaged them at every turn, but this did not mean that they did not try.

The Arab host states imposed many of the structures in question, continually oppressing and disempowering Palestinian refugees while outwardly claiming to serve their interests and support their cause. As is discussed in depth in chapter 3, all three Arab host regimes opposed Palestinian nationalist activism, for various reasons. The resulting repression goes a long way to explaining many refugees' reluctance to become involved in political activism in the years 1948–1967. It can also help explain why they focused on calling for return, which was the only one of their demands to be uncontroversial in the political context of the Arab host states. In fact, with the possible exception of Jordan, the Arab states saw return as the preferable course of action for Palestinians. Calling for it was therefore relatively straightforward and, most important, low risk for vulnerable camp refugees.

The situation was quite different when it came to other forms of political activism that might pose a perceived threat to the Arab regimes. Such agitation was usually suppressed, sometimes brutally. Journalist David Hirst has recorded that the Lebanese authorities frequently told Palestinian refugees at this time that "all you have to do is eat and sleep . . . the Arab armies will get your country back for you."⁵⁷ In the years after the Nakba, many Palestinian refugees believed this. Often traumatized by the devastating losses of 1948, many sought solace in the Arab regimes' promises to defeat Israel and win them back their old homes.⁵⁸ As a result, those Palestinians who were politically active at this time were often affiliated with the pan-Arab movement, inspired by Constantine Zureik's argument that Arab disunity had enabled the Nakba.⁵⁹ For example, George Habash, a refugee from Lydda, founded the Arab Nationalist Movement (Harakat

al-Qawmiyyin al-‘Arab, or ANM) in Beirut in 1953 with the explicit purpose of uniting the Arab peoples.⁶⁰

Palestinian-centric exceptions had only a minor role to play in this period. The most obvious example is Yasir Arafat’s Fatah, which was established in 1959 by a group of exiled Palestinians in Kuwait.⁶¹ Fatah gained some traction in the early 1960s, as the breakup of the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1961 and the success of the Algerian revolution the following year made the first challenges to pan-Arabist doctrine. Fatah’s role, however, remained relatively marginal so long as the majority of Palestinian activists continued to be subordinate to the Arab states.⁶² Meanwhile Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the most prominent Palestinian nationalist leader before 1948, saw his formal authority completely truncated after the Nakba. He was compelled to defer to the Egyptian regime as a *de facto* condition of his exile in Cairo and then had to move to Beirut in 1959 after falling out with Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser.⁶³

Al-Husseini’s experience is indicative of Nasser’s hold over both the pan-Arab movement and the subjugation of Palestinian nationalism at this time. Having risen to power after the Egyptian revolution of 1952, Nasser’s leadership provided huge impetus for the Arab nationalist movement, as he promised a turnaround in Arab fortunes. In 1956 he successfully nationalized the Suez Canal Company and won a comprehensive diplomatic and political victory against the Tripartite Aggression by Britain, France, and Israel. These triumphs consolidated his position as the darling of the Arab people, with even his communist critics now feting his achievements.⁶⁴ Nasser himself was determined to maintain this position of unrivalled dominance. Accordingly, the Arab League created the PLO in 1964 at his behest, as a way of containing any potential threats to his power.⁶⁵

For the Palestinians, Nasser’s success with Suez provided hope that the great powers could be defeated. Abdelrahim, living in Syria at the time, writes that the event “lit a fire simultaneously in the hearts of Arabs everywhere.”⁶⁶ Fatah founding member Abu Iyad similarly recalls how he consequently came to believe that “everything was now possible, including the liberation of Palestine.”⁶⁷ And PLO figure Bassam Abu Sharif writes:

To most Arab youths growing up in the 1950s, Nasser represented a dream and a symbol: a symbol of Arab nationalism, a dream of Arab unity, of Arab liberation, and of Arab progress. Arabs everywhere watched the battles

Nasser waged with the Western colonialist states, and fought them as their own individual battles. . . . When Nasser spoke about the wrong that had been done to the Palestinians, in 1948 and since, I felt pride, and anger, and the will to act.⁶⁸

Nasser was particularly popular in Palestinian refugee camps, where people pinned their hopes of return on him (with the exception of some in Gaza who experienced political repression under his regime).⁶⁹ Turki recalls seeing Nasser's picture displayed on mud houses and makeshift shelters everywhere in the camps in Lebanon.⁷⁰ Describing the same period, Kotaish describes Nasser as "our hero, a new-age Salah El-Din, a prophet and a savior."⁷¹

Nasser's radio station *Sawt al-Arab* was especially popular in the camps, with Atwan citing it as one of the biggest sources of political information for refugees in Deir al-Balah in the 1950s and 1960s.⁷² It was sufficiently popular among Palestinians for the Lebanese authorities to ban it in the country's camps—Kotaish recalls how his father would listen to it in secret in Nahr el-Bared, with the volume turned as low as possible to avoid police beatings.⁷³ Even Gazan political activist Basisu would listen to *Sawt al-Arab* with his cellmates in an Egyptian prison in the 1950s, despite his opposition to the Nasser regime.⁷⁴

The camp refugees' faith in Nasser's promises to defeat Israel and liberate Palestine shows that they had certainly not given up on politics in the years 1948–1967—quite the opposite. However, they tended to express their political convictions at this time through the Arab regimes, rather than by way of direct action.⁷⁵ The camp residents' profound belief in this approach would be severely shaken by the war in June 1967, with serious repercussions for the entire region.

AL NAKSA: THE SETBACK

The year 1967 was a turning point for the Middle East. In six days, Israel defeated the Arab coalition of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan and nearly quadrupled its territory. It seized East Jerusalem and occupied the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and Sinai, thus acquiring land from all three Arab states. Nearly 400,000 Palestinians fled their homes, more than half for the second time.⁷⁶ UNRWA reported that most went to Jordan.⁷⁷ Their

exile echoed the events of the Nakba, two decades earlier. Bassam Abu Sharif recalls seeing Palestinians cross from the West Bank into Jordan in June 1967:

Among all [the] shambles struggled an unending stream of new Palestinian refugees. There were thousands and thousands of them. Most were on foot, carrying their small children and belongings. . . . Everything was happening at a snail's pace, a tragedy in very slow motion. I stood among the great press of people, letting them flow around me. The sense of their misery was overwhelming. I could almost feel it physically.⁷⁸

Again, the refugees sought to return to their homes as soon as possible. Uzi Mahnaimi, an Israeli intelligence agent who was a teenager in 1967, recalls making a triumphant visit to the Allenby Bridge with his father the day after the war ended. There, they saw Israeli soldiers denying entry to refugees trying to return.⁷⁹

Meanwhile, the 614,110 UNRWA-registered Palestinian refugees who remained in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (now the Occupied Palestinian Territories, or OPT) came under the regime of the occupying Israeli Army.⁸⁰ Thereafter they would live under military law and emergency regulations Israel retained from the British Mandate. These were the same regulations that had been imposed on Palestinian citizens of Israel until six months before the outbreak of the 1967 war.⁸¹

The Naksa sent shockwaves throughout the region.⁸² For the Palestinians, it engendered feelings of despondency, frustration, and renewed shame and humiliation, as the losses of the Nakba were extended and magnified.⁸³ The refugees' resulting devastation and trauma were widespread and visceral, their significance continually emphasized in Palestinian memoirs and testimonies.⁸⁴ Sami al-Arian recalls his father's tears upon hearing of the defeat; Bassam Abu Sharif details the resulting "atmosphere of depression, frustration and humiliation."⁸⁵ Describing the defeat in 1967 as a "turning point," Atwan talks about the despondency that took hold afterward, as the refugees lost their hopes of returning imminently to the homes they had lost two decades earlier.⁸⁶ Such feelings were not limited to the region itself. Ghada Karmi, a refugee living in the UK at the time, writes of despair among Palestinian exiles at the defeat: "the overwhelming feeling was one of shame at the Arab armies' abysmal performance."⁸⁷



FIG. 2.3. Palestinian refugees fleeing east across the river Jordan during the Naksa. Photo courtesy of UNRWA.

As Karmi's comment reflects, the Naksa seriously undermined the power and status of the Arab regimes in the eyes of many Palestinians.⁸⁸ Not only had they failed in their promises to reverse the Nakba, but they had significantly worsened its impact. Palestinian nationalist Mustafa Barghouti, who was living in Ramallah at the time, recalled the aftershock in an interview in 2005, saying, "The feeling of injustice was very strong. . . . There was also the sense of failure—that the Nasserite approach had failed, and we had to find something else. How had such a tiny country as Israel been

able to beat all the Arab armies?"⁸⁹ Like Barghouti, many Palestinians now ceased to believe the Arab regimes' promises that they would liberate their homeland.⁹⁰ Conversely, the feeling took hold that trusting the Arab leaders had been one of the major mistakes of the first war. Leila Khaled states that the effect was visceral, leading the Arab armies to lose their "moral credibility" in the eyes of the Palestinians.⁹¹

Nasser's following was one of the biggest victims of the defeat. While Nasser retained immense popularity—UNRWA officials reported widespread school absenteeism in the West Bank following his death in 1970—the Naksa nevertheless led increasing numbers of young Palestinians to question whether he could really win back Palestine for them.⁹² This included those who had previously been affiliated with his pan-Arab movement; in Gaza, where the ANM had had 1,200 active members before the Naksa, only 213 confirmed their membership in the summer after the war.⁹³ Palestinian nationalist Bassam Abu Sharif recalls that the defeat seriously damaged George Habash's previously close relationship with Nasser, whom he no longer trusted.⁹⁴ Soon afterward, Habash told him: "The useless Arab regimes will not liberate Palestine. We, the people of Palestine, will liberate Palestine."⁹⁵ Habash now abandoned the ANM and formed a new organization, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (Al-Jabha al-Sha'biya Litahrir Filastin, or PFLP).⁹⁶ To make matters worse, after 1967 Nasser himself lessened his support for the Palestinian nationalist fighters (*fida'iyyin*) to avoid any greater reputational damage, as he considered the potential advantages of a diplomatic agreement with Israel instead.⁹⁷ Many *fida'iyyin* reacted with dismay.

As many Palestinians grew disillusioned with the Arab regimes' unfulfilled promises of liberation, they increasingly came to frame their national struggle against Israel in exclusively Palestinian rather than pan-Arab terms. Numerous figures, including Turki, Khaled, and Abu Sharif, identify 1967 as a seminal moment in the Palestinian struggle for this reason.⁹⁸ The rising number of attacks on Israel by nonstate actors thereafter indicates what this divergence meant in practice.⁹⁹ In the words of Ahmed Kotaish:

The several June days of 1967 swept away the myth of the unity and strength of the Arab states, which, in reality, were never capable of waging a war against Israel nor anyone else. . . . We Palestinians emerged from June 5th [1967]

with one crucial lesson: If we wanted to return to our country, we could rely on ourselves alone! Our fate had to become the battle for regaining national freedom, independence and sovereignty! Our revolution grew out of the military tragedy of 1967.¹⁰⁰

The refugees in particular now sought to seize control of their own destinies by taking direct action against Israel. This shift was driven by the younger generation who had been children during the Nakba or born shortly afterward. Meanwhile, as the “Question of Palestine” continued to be entwined with the so-called international community, both UNRWA and the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) formally acknowledged the catalyzing effect of 1967 on the Palestinian nationalist movement.¹⁰¹ The refugee camps would take a leading role in the movement’s new manifestations.

New Forms of Palestinian Nationalism:

The Rise of the Fida’iyyin

Palestinian disenchantment with the Arab governments in general and Nasser in particular created a vacancy for new heroes and leaders in refugee communities after 1967. This enabled the fida’iyyin to come to the forefront. Although Palestinian nationalist guerrilla groups had existed before 1967—Fatah was created in 1959 and proclaimed 1965 as the official starting date of its “revolution”¹⁰²—the Naksa amplified their prominence and propelled them to a new status as leaders of the nationalist struggle. In this setting, the fida’iyyin found some of their greatest success in the refugee camps, in terms of both recruitment and popularity.¹⁰³ Shafiq al-Hout, himself a leading figure in the PLO, notes the camps’ significance in this regard.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Major Derek Cooper, a British Army official who coordinated aid efforts for refugees in Amman in 1967, identified camp-born refugees as “the hard core of the Resistance and Commando groups” at that time.¹⁰⁵ This is verified by the accounts of Turki, Kotaish, and Atwan, all of whom were living in camps in 1967.¹⁰⁶

The fida’iyyin’s particular success in the camps can be explained by the latter’s disempowerment, which made Palestinian proponents of direct action especially appealing.¹⁰⁷ In the words of Abdelrahim, “To be doing something had an amazing effect. Action for the sake of the homeland lifted

our sagging hearts, which had been dragged down by displacement, the misery of the camps, and the handouts we accepted from the international charitable organizations.”¹⁰⁸ The fida’iyyin’s direct action thus provided a way to counter the refugees’ widespread feelings of helplessness. Indeed, refugee Ramzy Baroud writes that his father Mohammed joined the fida’iyyin in Gaza precisely because he saw their actions as a way to overcome his humiliation in the camp.¹⁰⁹ In a controversial statement in 1972, even the Israeli politician Arye Eliav, a Labor member of the Knesset, acknowledged that the fida’iyyin had “raised the Arabs’ morale for some time, by becoming symbols of heroism and self-sacrifice” (in keeping with the literal meaning of fida’iyyin).¹¹⁰

The fida’iyyin also benefited from the practical repercussions of the Naksa. The discrediting of the Arab regimes—in the eyes of non-Palestinian Arab populations as well as the Palestinian *shatat*—meant that they could no longer repress Palestinian nationalist activity, when their own attempts to defeat Israel had been so shamefully unsuccessful.¹¹¹ On the contrary, many regimes believed that the fida’iyyin served as a useful diversion from the defeat and provided an alternative source of hope to their populations. Across the Arab world, the fida’iyyin were now given permission to openly recruit, train, and publicize their activities.¹¹² Abu Iyad relates explicitly how the weakness of the Jordanian regime after the Naksa led King Hussein to release many militants and “close his eyes” to fida’iyyin bases along the Jordan River.¹¹³ Meanwhile, in Gaza, the removal of the Egyptian regime gave more freedom to the Palestinian movements that Nasser had suppressed, at least in the brief moment before Israel tightened its military grip.¹¹⁴

The change was epitomized by the fida’iyyin’s takeover of the very structure that the Arab regimes had established to contain them: the PLO. Having functioned from 1964 to 1967 as a subordinate to Nasser, its position was now transformed. Late in 1967 Ahmed Shuqairi, Nasser’s favored PLO chair, resigned. The following year, the fida’iyyin groups formally took control of the PLO and in doing so fully emancipated it from Nasser’s grip. It was now dominated by Fatah, the PFLP, and later Nayef Hawatmeh’s breakaway Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (Al-Jabha al-Dimuqratiya Litahrir Filastin, or DFLP).

This new PLO was exclusively Palestinian in its concerns and explicitly militant in its actions. In 1968 it adopted a new covenant that embraced the strategy of armed revolution and called on all Palestinians to fight for their

rights.¹¹⁵ In an indication of the ongoing internationalization of the Palestinian struggle, it did so on the very grounds that the international community had failed to secure these rights for them.¹¹⁶ Symbolically, the PLO also came to establish its own radio station, Sawt Filastin (The Voice of Palestine). For many Palestinians, this now took the place of Nasser's Sawt al-Arab.¹¹⁷ From the late 1960s Sawt Filastin played a crucial part in spreading Fatah's discourse of nationalism, armed struggle, and revolution, through speeches and songs.¹¹⁸ Specifically, it fueled the iconization of the fida'iyyin with its regular tributes to martyrs and battles.¹¹⁹

The fida'iyyin's rising prominence at this time was not limited to the Palestinian diaspora or even to the Arab world. Indeed, while the nationalist movement emphasized its "Palestinian-ness" and its distinctiveness from the Arab regimes, it was neither insular nor solely inward looking. Strategically, the fida'iyyin actively engaged with the wider world, launching an increasing number of international operations from the late 1960s. As a result, their profile on the world stage rose. Most famously, in 1969 PFLP militants Leila Khaled and Salim Issawi hijacked a plane flying from Rome to Tel Aviv, in the mistaken belief that Israeli politician and former commander-in-chief Yitzhak Rabin was onboard.¹²⁰ After the plane made an emergency landing in Damascus, the story made news worldwide, with added interest stemming from Khaled's gender. One passenger later spoke of being struck by Khaled's youth and glamour.¹²¹ Khaled quickly gained an international profile, becoming so recognized that she even had plastic surgery to enable her to undertake further hijackings undetected.¹²²

Khaled, however, was by no means the highest-profile *fida'i(a)* of this era. The same year that Khaled hijacked the plane, Fatah leader Yasir Arafat (also known as Abu Ammar) was elected the new PLO chair. Retaining the position continuously until his death thirty-five years later, Arafat quickly became the most well-known and recognizable Palestinian in the world, as well as in the camps.¹²³ Unlike Nasser, Arafat was relatively unconcerned with pan-Arab politics. He focused exclusively on Palestinian liberation—albeit often with an appeal to the world stage. This was a welcome change to many Palestinian refugees in the aftermath of the Naksa. Fatah's operations against Israel made Arafat a rising star and a hero among many Palestinians; Atwan recalls widespread hero worship of him in the Gaza camps, with Fatah's revolutionary songs sung at camp parties and even in schools.¹²⁴ Nor was Arafat's following limited to the Palestinians; he also

enjoyed the admiration of many other Arabs at this time. As the Lebanese Army general escort Jonny Abdo later put it, “before 1967 everyone wanted to be photographed with Abdel Nasser. After 67 Abdel Nasser wanted to be photographed with Abu Ammar.”¹²⁵ The Naksa alone, however, was not sufficient to make Arafat into a hero of this magnitude. That status was conferred as a result of one particular event, which would occur nine months after the Arabs’ devastating defeat.

The Battle of Karama

The infamous Battle of Karama was fought between the Israeli Army, the Jordanian Army, and Fatah. Karama was a Jordanian town close to the river, where Fatah had established a base from which it launched attacks on Israeli forces in the West Bank. Following months of continuing clashes, the Israeli Army crossed the River Jordan on March 21, 1968, with the aim of destroying the *fida’iyyin*’s bases in Karama. Confident of a victory, the soldiers were surprised to face considerable resistance from both Fatah and the Jordanian Army. Although they succeeded in dismantling the Karama military camp, they endured surprisingly high casualties, with 32 soldiers killed and 70 wounded. Despite inflicting far higher losses on Fatah—an estimated 170 killed and another 100 captured—the Israeli Army ultimately failed in its goal of destroying the organization.¹²⁶ Fatah thus quickly claimed the battle as a victory over Israel, quietly disregarding the fact that the Jordanian Army had played the bigger part in the outcome, and giving the Palestinian people a much-needed morale boost in the process.

The impact of the Battle of Karama was immediate across the Palestinian diaspora. Atwan, who was living in Amman at the time, recalls how the city “erupted in jubilation” at the news, with thousands pouring onto the streets to celebrate as captured Israeli tanks were paraded and displayed.¹²⁷ The *fida’iyyin* quickly gained an almost mythical status, enjoying a popular legitimacy that had never applied to Shuqairi’s PLO. Photos of the Karama martyrs were displayed throughout refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, and inside many homes in the OPT. Pictures of Arafat in particular were common—his biographer Said Aburish contends that this marked the moment when Arafat became “Mr. Palestine.”¹²⁸ Hani al-Hasan, a Fatah official from Yarmouk camp in Syria, has said that Arafat’s leadership was unchallengeable after Karama.¹²⁹

Kotaish, Abu Iyad, and Abu Sharif all write that the battle was also crucial in restoring Palestinian dignity—which, fittingly, is the literal meaning of *karama*—after the devastation and humiliation of the Nakba.¹³⁰ The victory had a major impact on the Palestinian psyche, with many seeing it as a precursor to the pending full recovery of Palestine.¹³¹ In practical terms, Karama was hugely important in giving rise to a much greater degree of political activism across the diaspora and “recasting” the Palestinian image as one associated with courage and sacrifice, rather than dispossession and victimhood.¹³²

There was a strongly generational element to the post-Karama dynamic in the camps. It particularly inspired those who were too young to remember life in Palestine. The “Nakba generation” (*jil al-Nakba*) was now overtaken by the “revolutionary generation” (*jil al-thawra*).¹³³ Both Kotaish and Turki recall the phenomenon, with the latter writing that after Karama, “all of us [in the camps] wanted to join the resistance and struggle for freedom. As it turns out, most of us did.”¹³⁴ Flooded with donations and volunteers, Fatah became a mass movement virtually overnight.¹³⁵ A reported five thousand Palestinians tried to join in the subsequent forty-eight hours; according to Abu Iyad, its limited capacity meant that only nine hundred could be accepted. Fatah went on to expand its average number of monthly operations from 12 in 1967 to 279 in the first eight months of 1970.¹³⁶

As a powerful symbol for Palestinian strength and steadfastness (*sumud*), the Battle of Karama effectively launched Fatah as a major player on the world stage. On December 13, 1968, *Time* magazine covered the battle in detail, featuring Arafat on the cover with the strapline “The Arab Commandos: Defiant New Force in the Middle East.”¹³⁷ The accompanying article acknowledged the fida’iyyin’s international significance, having even drawn in the U.S. State Department during the course of production.¹³⁸

The new recruitment and prestige also bought the PLO considerably more clout in its negotiations with the Arab regimes. It now successfully pressured the latter to allow the fida’iyyin greater freedom of action. The PLO leadership was aided in this by its widespread support among the Arab populations, buoyed by the perceived contrast between Fatah’s success at Karama and the inability of the Syrian, Jordanian, and Egyptian armies to hold their ground against Israel in the 1967 war less than a year earlier.¹³⁹ As a result, many Arab governments were keen to share in Fatah’s popularity and started supplying the fida’iyyin with rockets, military transport,

and artillery. Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Algeria also expanded the *fidaiyyin*'s training facilities, while many of the wealthy Gulf states contributed millions of dollars.¹⁴⁰ In the clearest single sign of Arab attempts to capitalize on the *fidaiyyin*'s new popularity, King Hussein even declared himself a *fidai'i*.¹⁴¹ Five years after the Battle of Karama, the Jordanian government issued a commemorative stamp, keen to share in the glory.¹⁴²

Historian Rashid Khalidi characterizes the Battle of Karama as a classic foundation myth, and with good reason.¹⁴³ Alongside the Balfour Declaration, the UN Partition Resolution, the Deir Yassin massacre, and the Nakba itself, Karama became a significant reference point in narratives of Palestinian history.¹⁴⁴ Khaled describes it as "a turning point"; Atwan, as an event "etched in the collective memory of the Palestinian people."¹⁴⁵ Many Palestinian refugees continued to celebrate its anniversary as a national holiday thereafter; on March 21, 1970, UNRWA staff reported significant school absenteeism due to commemorations of the battle's second anniversary.¹⁴⁶ Observations such as this have led numerous scholars to argue that the commemoration of Karama, which continued for decades, was far more significant than the battle itself.¹⁴⁷ The refugee camps were key to its iconization, with many camp neighborhoods subsequently named "Karama."¹⁴⁸

Both Fatah in particular and the PLO in general made great use of the Karama myth, capitalizing on its positive reception.¹⁴⁹ On the battle's first anniversary, Fatah produced commemorative postage stamps. For years thereafter it continued to organize commemorations among the Palestinian population, using photos and tokens to help mythologize the battle further.¹⁵⁰ Nor was this invocation merely symbolic. Eleven years after Karama, the PLO invoked its memory in order to denounce the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel, producing posters that proclaimed "*abt al karama sayahzimun al-khiyana*" (the heroes of Karama will overcome the treason).¹⁵¹ Even other PLO parties made use of its memory in their own narratives; the DFLP organ *al-Hurriyya* described Karama as the "beginning of the real *sumud* [steadfastness]."¹⁵²

Explanations vary as to how and why this mythology developed. Khalidi sees it as a classic case of the PLO claiming victory from defeat, as they would later do following their eviction from Lebanon in 1982.¹⁵³ Inversely, security analyst W. Andrew Terrill attributes the mythologizing of Karama to the Palestinian people's receptiveness to positive national news in the aftermath of the Naksa.¹⁵⁴ Either way, it is universally agreed that Karama became a

seminal moment in the Palestinian national narrative. Four months later, the Palestinian National Council (PNC) amended the PLO Charter to reflect a shift toward armed struggle.¹⁵⁵ Its campaign had now been established beyond all possible doubt as specifically *Palestinian*, rather than broadly Arab.

"NESTS OF THE RESISTANCE": CAMP POLITICS AFTER 1967

Camp refugees' participation in the post-1967 struggle was fervent, immediate, and wide-ranging. The Naksa's impact on Palestinian politics enabled the camps' potential for political activism to be realized, meaning that they developed into what one refugee would describe decades later as "nests of the resistance."¹⁵⁶ This was demonstrated most immediately by the camp refugees' overwhelming enthusiasm for joining the *fida'iyyin*, as Fatah, the PFLP, and the DFLP all found their most fertile recruiting grounds therein.¹⁵⁷ In the recruitment rush that followed the Battle of Karama, the camps not only provided numerous fighters but in some cases went on to function as bases for *fida'iyyin* operations. This latter function was made possible by a development that characterized the post-Naksa shift and centered entirely on the camps: the Palestinian revolution.¹⁵⁸

The Palestinian Revolution

The Palestinian revolution (*al-thawra al-filastiniya*) was the clearest demonstration of the refugee camps' centrality to the nationalist movement after 1967. With the Arab regimes discredited, the Palestinians now sought to challenge the latter's power in the camps and take control themselves of their own spaces. Across the Arab host states, and most notably in Lebanon, the late 1960s saw Palestinian fighters force the Arab regimes' security forces out of the camps and take charge themselves. State attempts to regain control were unsuccessful; when Lebanese police entered Nahr el-Bared in 1969 in a bid to demolish the Fatah office, the residents took them hostage. Kotaish, who had joined the *fida'iyyin* in Nahr el-Bared at that time and was involved in the subsequent fighting with the army, recalls:

Twenty-four Lebanese policeman. . . . Those were the trump cards we held and they would allow us to negotiate as equals. And that is exactly what

happened. Our representatives and the leaders of the Lebanese army agreed to a truce: We would remove the roadblock and free the hostages. In exchange, the Lebanese police would move out of the camp and Nahr al-Bared would be under our, Palestinian, self-rule. They were bold demands, but the Lebanese gave into them! We celebrated our enormous victory. Freedom had finally come to us. The Palestinian flag waved high above Nahr al-Bared.¹⁵⁹

Nahr el-Bared was far from unique in this. By October that year refugees in all seventeen camps in Lebanon had ejected the police, the army, and the state security forces, with armed Palestinians taking control instead.¹⁶⁰

This was not a temporary change. In November 1969 Nasser brokered a deal between the Lebanese Army and the PLO that formally recognized the *fida'iyyin's* control of the refugee camps in Lebanon. The Cairo Agreement, as it became known, placed the UNRWA-run camps under the authority of the PLO instead of the Lebanese state. It also sanctioned *fida'iyyin* activity in southeastern Lebanon and permitted Palestinians to participate in armed struggle—including launching attacks on Israel from Lebanese soil.¹⁶¹ Finally, it recognized a Higher Palestinian Commission, headed by PLO official Shafiq al-Hout, as a *de facto* Palestinian embassy in Lebanon.¹⁶² In so doing, the Cairo Agreement legitimized the new status quo and gave formal cover for the *fida'iyyin* to act independently of the Lebanese state.

Lebanon therefore came to serve as the base for the Palestinian insurrection in this period. In a press interview in 1975, Abu Iyad acknowledged the country's significance, saying that "Lebanon is the lung through which we breathe politically . . . and it is also the lung which sustains the existence of the Palestinian Revolution."¹⁶³ Lebanon's centrality to the development of the Palestinian nationalist movement in this period can be explained chiefly by the weakness of the state, which enabled the *fida'iyyin* to take control of the refugee camps there and legitimize the new arrangement via the Cairo Agreement. This meant that from the late 1960s, UNRWA had to pay particular attention to events in the camps in Lebanon, which often drove bigger developments in Palestinian politics. As a result, Lebanon holds a particular significance to the history of both the Palestinian refugee camps and, by extension, the more general activities of UNRWA.

However, while the *thawra* was based in the camps in Lebanon, it was not limited to these spaces. On the contrary, the movement transcended

national borders, albeit with varying degrees of impact, as this period saw increasing expressions of solidarity among Palestinians across borders.¹⁶⁴ From late 1969 until 1972, a wave of agitation and strikes in solidarity with Lebanon swept the Gaza camps,¹⁶⁵ spreading to a lesser extent to the West Bank as well.¹⁶⁶ In 1972 UNRWA's Gaza director reported that around five hundred young men had traveled from Gaza to Lebanon on illegally purchased Omani passports, with the intention of joining the *thawra* in its hub.¹⁶⁷ Abdelrahim, who was active in the *thawra* from his base in Syria, recalls how he and his comrades forged passports and identity cards so that they could cross state borders in the region to connect with Palestinian activists in Jordan and elsewhere.¹⁶⁸ Such journeys signified both the solidarity that existed between Palestinian refugees across the region and the increasing internationalism of their nationalist movement.

With many camps in the Arab states now guarded by armed Palestinians, residents could freely engage in political activity and openly express their national identity. The impact was immediate and transformative. As the camps were released from the authority of the host states, internal activities became demonstrably "Palestinianized." The *fida'iyyin* established popular committees to organize defense, public hygiene, sports and cultural facilities, all with a strongly nationalist tilt. Education had a particular importance, seen as key to the struggle, and so the popular committees established out-of-school training programs to inculcate a nationalist consciousness in refugee children from a young age.¹⁶⁹ These programs, of which Fatah's *ashbal* (lion cubs, for boys) and *zahraat* (flowers, for girls) were the largest, provided basic military training as well as education in Palestinian and political history.¹⁷⁰ With the camps now under full Palestinian control, they became hubs of transnational activism, both within the *shatat* and beyond. In the 1970s various camp communities received visits from a range of international actors, including Black Power leaders from the United States and communist activists from Italy and Germany.¹⁷¹

It is revealing that camp residents commonly use the term *thawra* (revolution) to describe these events. Although the Palestinian revolution did not fit the conventional criteria of overthrowing a national government, it did involve the ousting and replacement of state security authorities in the camps. In so doing, it turned the camps' spatial separateness on its head, from being a feature that enabled state control to one that facilitated and incubated autonomous political activism. From the perspective of many

refugees, it was therefore just as significant as a change in central government. The use of the term *thawra* also indicates the magnitude of the psychological impact, as the perception of Palestinian “self-rule” in the camps was important in overcoming the feelings of powerlessness that had plagued many refugees since the Nakba. Fatah’s slogan “revolution until victory” (*thawra hata al-nasr*) now prevailed.

The resulting shift in the refugees’ self-perception was shaped by the role of the fida’iyyin. Many exiled Palestinians now constructed their identity as that of fighters rather than refugees, rejecting the UNRWA imagery that focused on the latter.¹⁷² This had long been a cause of resentment, with Khaled complaining that categorizing Palestinians as “refugees” served to deny them their national peoplehood and with it their political rights.¹⁷³ In this sense one major effect of the Naksa was to transform the Palestinian refugee issue from a humanitarian to a political one.¹⁷⁴ Turki writes that in this period the Palestinians “scrubbed off the grime of a name given to them by the outside world, *Arab refugees*, and wrested control of their own, *Palestinians*.”¹⁷⁵ Kotaish expresses a similar sentiment in the epigraph to this chapter.

The PLO endorsed and encouraged the change, with Fatah in particular keen to associate the *thawra* with the rejection of the Palestinians’ post-1948 psychology.¹⁷⁶ In 1964 the PNC had passed a resolution to describe refugees as “returners,” to stress their agency; PLO publications subsequently used the term.¹⁷⁷ Speaking in January 1971, Arafat said, “We create a new people, instead of being refugees to be fighters. This is very important. We were refugees, homeless, we become now fighters, freedom fighters.”¹⁷⁸

As Arafat’s comment shows, the “new” identity of the refugees was inextricably linked with the armed and militant nature of the nationalist struggle. Arafat himself firmly believed that only violence would win results for the Palestinians.¹⁷⁹ After the Battle of Karama, armed struggle became a core element of the Palestinian nationalist movement, with participation in it a key source of nationalist legitimacy for most Palestinians.¹⁸⁰ Militarization was most evident in the refugee camps, which were now guarded and to some degree managed by armed fida’iyyin. Their presence gave the camps new levels of protection and defense against hostile agents like the Lebanese state security forces, and many refugees spoke positively of the *thawra*’s liberating and empowering effects in this way.¹⁸¹ As time went on, however, the U.S. Embassy in Beirut reported that some camp residents

were tiring of the clashes and violence resulting from the fida'iyyin's presence, particularly as the latter splintered and in-fighting increased.¹⁸²

For UNRWA, the camps' new militancy had highly problematic repercussions. The international attention given to the fida'iyyin takeover meant that UNRWA now found itself caught in the diplomatic crossfire, with rising concerns about what the U.S. State Department described as "the role of fedayeen [*sic*] in UNRWA's camps."¹⁸³ As UNRWA depended on Western funding to operate, the implications were potentially serious.¹⁸⁴ This would become an ongoing problem for the agency in the years to come, as the camps became tied in the international consciousness to both UNRWA and the militant Palestinian nationalist movement.

Fida'iyyin and *Falahin*

The camps' deep connections to the *thawra* also informed developing understandings of Palestinian identity. In keeping with the camps' significance, ideas of "Palestinian-ness" became imbued with the cultural customs and norms of those social groups that dominated the refugee camps. The vast majority of camp refugees were *falahin* from rural villages.¹⁸⁵ As they and their descendants swelled the ranks of the fida'iyyin, so Palestinian nationalist expression tapped into older ideas about rural village culture.

These ideas often centered on the perceived purity of the peasant lifestyle. In her memoir, Leila Khaled paraphrases what a middle-class Palestinian teacher in Lebanon told her about the *falahin*: "They are the true children of Palestine because they live on the land, and cultivate and harvest it. Virtue is a part of the people of the land, and the simple folk are the backbone of all societies. Those peasants did not leave Palestine willingly like the rich people who now live in villas in Cairo and Beirut. They were forced to out to make room for the Zionist intruders. Leila, those are the people of Palestine."¹⁸⁶ The peasants' close link to the Palestinian land made them the perfect emblem of the nationalist campaign to reclaim it and was taken as a sign of their virtue.

With striking similarities to Khaled's recollection, Ghada Karmi describes the perceptions of her urban middle-class family and their circles: "The fellahin [*sic*], judged uneducated and backward on the one hand, were also seen as symbols of tenacity, simplicity and steadfastness on the other. They represented continuity and tradition and the essence of what it

was to be Palestinian. And people believe it was these qualities which saved them from disintegration in the refugee camps after 1948 where so many of them were sent.¹⁸⁷ It is this latter point that is most important. Ideas of what it was to be Palestinian were anchored in the perceived characteristics of the *falahin*—who, by no coincidence, were now largely living in the refugee camps.

Karmi points out elsewhere that it was the traditions and customs of the *falahin*, not those of the urban elites, that distinguished Palestinian culture from its neighbors.¹⁸⁸ This meant that *falahin* culture proved particularly effective when asserting a specifically *Palestinian* national identity—which was of course a key idea after 1967.¹⁸⁹ Accordingly, the *fida'iyyin* drew heavily on the typical imagery of the *falahin* in order to convey a sense of “Palestinian-ness.” Arafat, who came from an urban background and had grown up in Cairo and Jerusalem, led the *fida'iyyin*’s widespread adoption of the *kufiyya* as a throwback to the peasant headdress of the revolt of 1936.¹⁹⁰

By the same token, nationalist political posters and songs made use of peasant imagery that related to the land and portrayed the Palestinians as deeply rooted therein.¹⁹¹ Some nationalist organizations explicitly linked the peasant tending of the land to the struggle to reclaim it; the PFLP presented Palestine as the “land of oranges, land of revolutionaries” (*ard al-burtaqal, ard al-thuwwar*).¹⁹² Olive trees, with their obvious connection to the land and to *falahin* culture, were another popular source of nationalist iconography during the *thawra*.¹⁹³ Of course, the fallout from the Nakba meant that by 1967, an entire generation of Palestinians had grown up away from the traditional agricultural life of the villages, making it impossible for agricultural traditions to continue in the same way. Despite this, they took on a hallowed significance as symbols of the lost homeland.

The “Insider Diaspora”:

Camps in the West Bank and Gaza After 1967

While the Palestinian revolution was underway in the Arab host states, the refugee camps in the newly occupied West Bank and Gaza were experiencing a different change in authority. Of all the camps, it was these that were the most directly affected by the 1967 war. Many had been seriously damaged by the fighting, with UNRWA making claims to the Israeli government for \$323,400 in property damage in 1967.¹⁹⁴ Fifteen UN soldiers had

been killed in a bomb attack on the UN base in Gaza; the camps had also experienced significant fatalities.¹⁹⁵ Recounting his experiences living through the war in Gaza's Rafah camp, Atwan recalls how the Israeli Army shot dead his grandmother and destroyed her house when searching for his cousin, who was involved with the *fida'iyyin*. By the end of the six days of war, twenty-three refugees in Rafah had been killed.¹⁹⁶

The occupation meant that Israel now ruled an additional 1.4 million Palestinians, more than four times as many as before 1967.¹⁹⁷ Many were refugees, as all camps across the OPT came under the governance of the newly established Israeli military governorate. For those in the West Bank, this meant that they had regular direct contact with the enemy state for the first time since 1948.¹⁹⁸ For those in Gaza, it was an intensified return to what they had previously experienced during Israel's first occupation of the Strip in 1956, a period characterized by violence and repression.¹⁹⁹

At the same time, Palestinians in the OPT were now distanced from the camps in the rest of the diaspora, which remained under Arab administration. UNRWA unofficially acknowledged the difference, commenting internally that "for political reasons the situation should not be entirely equated in the occupied territories to that in the other three Fields."²⁰⁰ As a result, Palestinians in the OPT faced considerable difficulties in linking up with their counterparts in the Arab host states. This separation, combined with the impact of Israeli military suppression after 1967, would limit the scope of the *thawra* in the OPT.

Somewhat ironically, the Israeli occupation meant that the West Bank and Gaza were reunited under the same sovereign power. In August 1967 Israeli defense minister Moshe Dayan ordered the lifting of restrictions on movement between the territories, meaning that for the first time in two decades West Bank Palestinians could visit their brethren in Gaza, and vice versa. While Dayan's order required direct travel between the territories, with no time to be spent in Israeli towns, many refugees disregarded this and went to visit their previous homes for the first time since the Nakba.²⁰¹

The ability to move between the West Bank and Gaza was particularly valued in view of the OPT Palestinians' new isolation from the *shatat*. Accordingly, many Palestinian nationalists seized on it as a chance to organize politically across the two fields. Observing this, the PLO initially determined to dominate the OPT, pressing the population to take an assertive stance against the Israeli occupation.²⁰² The leadership paid particular

attention to the camps, noting the spaces' potential as hubs of Palestinian nationalism and militancy.

Yet PLO efforts in the OPT camps were quickly countered by the Israeli authorities, who recognized exactly the same point about these spaces' potential.²⁰³ Moving to suppress any potential for agitation, Israel quickly came to focus on the camps in its crackdowns on the OPT, with an approach that took numerous forms. In 1969, for example, the Israeli Army demolished shelters in Amary and Kalandia camps in the West Bank on the grounds that "occupants had been aiding and abetting terrorist activities."²⁰⁴ This became the standard rationalization for such practices. Five years later, Israeli representatives told the UN Special Political Committee that "attack[s on] refugee camps . . . had been directed solely against bases and other installations of the terrorist organizations."²⁰⁵ Nor was the approach short-lived: into the late 1970s and thereafter, Israel continued to impose curfews and closures on the refugee camps, a point noted by the UNRWA commissioner-general in his report to the UNGA in 1979.²⁰⁶

From the Israeli state's perspective, its clampdowns on the camps existed in a wider framework whereby it desired the OPT's land without its Palestinian population.²⁰⁷ In the words of Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, "The dowry is followed by a bride whom we don't want."²⁰⁸ As early as 1963 Israel had devised a plan for controlling the West Bank on the basis of this conundrum, with the aim of separating the "bride" of the land from the "dowry" of the population. Copies of the Shacham Plan, as it was known, were distributed to army units when preparing to go to war in May 1967.²⁰⁹ On its basis, new policies were formulated and enacted to thin out the Palestinian population of the OPT after they came under Israeli control in June that year. These moves started with the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from the West Bank into Jordan during the war; they continued as the Israeli Army displaced thousands of Palestinians from the Moroccan Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City by destroying their homes shortly after the war ended.²¹⁰ In his autobiography, Atwan recounts the expulsions that took place across the OPT directly after the war.²¹¹ By creating particular conditions against which OPT Palestinians had to struggle, such moves sometimes served to divert them from greater common cause with the shatat during the thawra.

While the displacement of Palestinians was core to Israeli policy in the OPT, it was nevertheless not standardized across the territories. Israel saw

the West Bank as the far more desirable acquisition, as it was home to several sacred religious sites and could provide significant strategic depth. The late 1960s therefore saw numerous discussions in the Israeli government about whether to annex the West Bank.²¹² Cabinet conversations over annexation hit a stumbling block over two points: the demographic impact of nationalizing a large non-Jewish population, and the potential damage to Israel's international reputation of annexing a conquered territory while claiming it was seeking peace.²¹³ In the end Israel did not annex the West Bank, although the first Israeli Jewish settlement was built there soon after the June war concluded.

In contrast to the West Bank, Israel considered Gaza much less desirable as a possible site of annexation. It had no sacred sites and its geostrategic value was limited. There was also a long-standing view in Israeli governmental circles that Gaza's acute poverty, population density, and high proportion of refugees rendered it exceptionally radical.²¹⁴ The director of Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics clearly expressed this at a meeting with Prime Minister Eshkol in December 1967: "If the [occupied Palestinian] area remains in our hands, then you'll have less trouble from those in the West Bank than in the Gaza Strip. Because in Gaza they're presented for all the world to see as refugees."²¹⁵ This comment is revealing about not only the Israeli view of Gaza, but also its understanding of the refugees themselves. While the West had constructed Palestinian refugees primarily as aid recipients, the Israeli government saw them as inherently "troublesome" agitators. It followed that Israel should be more concerned about the Gaza Strip, with its higher proportion of refugees.

Israeli policy toward Gaza thus diverged from its approach to the West Bank. In both cases it was particularly hostile to the refugees and the camps, deemed spaces of anti-Israel agitation. Yet it was especially alarmed by the refugee demographics of the Gazan population.²¹⁶ Accordingly, Israel's Gaza policy in the late 1960s sought to reduce the Strip's refugee population to a minimum, by permanently resettling as many of them as possible elsewhere.²¹⁷ Early discussions in the Israeli government considered transferring Palestinian refugees from Gaza into Egypt, the West Bank, or Jordan; Eshkol even floated the possibility of sending them to Iraq.²¹⁸ The aim was to facilitate the ultimate Israeli annexation of Gaza by first depopulating it of Palestinian refugees, thus cleaving the land "dowry" from the "bride" of the people.²¹⁹ Again, such policies would limit the scope of the

thawra in the OPT, through both demographic disruption and their impact in generating distinctive conditions for OPT Palestinians.

Israel started carrying out collective deportations of Palestinians from Gaza to Jordan in the immediate aftermath of the June war. However, this practice quickly ran into trouble with the Jordanian authorities. In December 1967 Jordan refused to allow a group of several hundred Palestinians to enter the country, on the grounds that they were being transferred against their will. The Jordanian government eventually banned deportations across the River Jordan altogether.²²⁰ Partly as a result of this, Israel switched its focus to resettling refugees from Gaza in Sinai and the West Bank instead.²²¹ The government even talked about rehousing Gaza refugees in the houses vacated by those West Bank Palestinians displaced in the June war, so as to prevent the latter's return.²²² Again, this ran into problems, as Jordan continued to protest Israeli practices of forcible relocation.²²³ The Israeli government was also concerned that expulsions might endanger the U.S. support they badly needed.²²⁴

With this in mind, Israel started to try softer means of engendering Gazan emigration. Again, it targeted the camp refugees; Eshkol explicitly stated that it was their emigration he sought.²²⁵ Having gained tacit approval from U.S. president Lyndon B. Johnson, in 1968 Israel set up "emigration offices" in the Gaza camps, offering money and foreign passports to refugees who agreed to permanently relocate abroad, primarily to Canada, Australia, and Brazil.²²⁶ Such moves could be traced back to the occupation in 1956–1957, when then finance minister Eshkol had allocated half a million dollars to fund the emigration of two hundred Palestinian refugee families from the Strip.²²⁷

While the government had hoped that the "emigration offices" would elicit the movement of thousands of refugees out of Gaza, in practice they had limited success. Observing this, Israel turned to a third tactic: suppressing standards of living in Gaza in order to encourage people to leave. In an echo of UNRWA's 1950s jobs program, the Israeli Defense Ministry even created a public works program in the West Bank to draw unemployed refugees away from Gaza.²²⁸ Over the course of 1968, such policies led around three thousand Palestinians to leave the Strip each month, but again the Jordanian authorities hindered Israeli efforts when they banned Gazans from entering Jordan at the end of that year—the country had been the most popular destination for Palestinians leaving Gaza. At the same time, popular

resistance to Israeli occupation in Gaza was rising, in the form of both militant attacks and civil disobedience tactics, with some Palestinians opting to stay as a form of resistance in itself.²²⁹

Israel's "transfer" policies in Gaza intensified in the early 1970s. In 1971 the Israeli governor of Gaza, General Pundak, spoke about "break[ing] up some of the big camps . . . [and] moving refugees."²³⁰ Under the policies of Commander Ariel Sharon that year, thirty-eight thousand Nakba refugees were uprooted for the second time and resettled elsewhere. Twelve thousand of them were sent to encampments in Sinai, while the others were dispersed between Dheisheh refugee camp in the West Bank and towns and cities elsewhere in Gaza.²³¹

Meanwhile Palestinians who had already left the Gaza Strip—including those who had been outside during the 1967 war—were not allowed to return. From the onset of the occupation, departing emigrants were required to forfeit their ID cards and sign a declaration of understanding that they would not be able to return to Gaza without a special permit.²³² When Atwan left Gaza in late 1967 to finish his education in Jordan, the Israeli Army compelled him to sign a sworn guarantee that he would never try to return to the OPT.²³³ In a rerun of what had happened to Palestinian refugees trying to return to their homes after the Nakba, those who tried to slip back in without permission were deported and sometimes shot dead. From June to September 1967, 146 people were killed trying to cross the River Jordan westward, and more than 1,000 were arrested and deported.²³⁴

At the same time as it fomented large-scale emigration, Israel also targeted the structures of the camps themselves. Again, this policy applied to both territories, but with variations. Its operations in the West Bank camps were more piecemeal, comprising clampdowns, closures, and curfews.²³⁵ In Gaza, Israel went further and sought to remove the camps' potential for militancy altogether by dismantling their structures. For some camps, this meant annexing them to neighboring towns in the hope of "diluting" the concentration of refugees that was seen as a direct cause of their radicalization.²³⁶

In the most crowded camps, the military authorities went so far as demolishing housing and shelters. From July 1971 more than 2,500 houses were demolished in Jabalia, Rafah, and Shati camps, and 320 km of road were cleared to make them suitable for military patrols.²³⁷ UNRWA estimated that more than fifteen thousand refugees were affected by demolitions in the

summer of 1971 alone.²³⁸ The Israeli authorities encouraged some of the displaced to move into newly built city flats instead.²³⁹ Yet the ultimate result of the demolitions was increased overcrowding—a somewhat ironic outcome, given that one of Israel’s aims had been to reduce population density.²⁴⁰

As a result of both direct expulsions and the occupation’s other push factors, the population of Gaza fell dramatically, from 385,000 in 1967 to 334,000 the following year. The demographic decline was particularly stark in 1968, which saw 32,300 Palestinians leave Gaza.²⁴¹ Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics reported that in the first six months of that year, approximately 20,000 people had emigrated from the Gaza Strip, 80 percent of them Nakba refugees. The Strip’s population would not return to the level of spring 1967 until the mid-1970s.²⁴²

Ostensibly the Israeli government justified these actions as “measures necessary to restore law and order in the camps and security” and insisted that they had been successful in reducing terrorist activity in Gaza. In private, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv that the moves were part of a plan to “thin out the population” and thus reduce its perceived propensity for political activism.²⁴³ As the most densely populated spaces, the camps lay at the heart of this. In the Knesset in 1972, Mapam politician Dov Sakin even stated that “refugee housing should not be concentrated in a particular neighborhood, but widely scattered through urban areas.”²⁴⁴ The implications for the camps are clear.

Among Palestinians, and in the Arab world more broadly, the policies were seen as part of a plan to dissolve the refugees’ political identity and undermine the right of return.²⁴⁵ Characteristically, many refugees sought to resist them. In 1972 a group of *mukhtars* (community leaders) informed the military government in Rafah:

In the name of all the refugees, we, the mukhtars, cannot agree to buy or have on rent such [new Israeli-built] houses [outside the camps] because we are still refugees and we, the refugees, are satisfied with our respective existing shelters provided to us by UNRWA. . . . There are some refugee families who are overcrowded in their present shelters in the camp to which they were moved as a result of demolition of their respective shelters for widening of roads and opening of streets by the authorities.²⁴⁶

Their efforts were not unique. That same year, the Gaza City mayor was dismissed after he refused to provide municipal services to Shati camp on these grounds.²⁴⁷

Twelve years into the occupation, the Israeli government reaffirmed that its policy toward the Gaza camps had been justified. In a letter to the UN secretary-general, the permanent representative of Israel, Yehuda Blum, wrote that Israeli policy had created “a vast amelioration in the economic and social condition of the refugees [in the Gaza camps].” He added that Israeli housing projects had enabled refugees to move outside “the squalid conditions of the camps.”²⁴⁸ Yet whatever the socioeconomic effect of the policy, it had definitively failed to quell the camps’ political activism—a reality that Israel continued to grapple with thereafter.

In the camps, as in the wider Arab world, the Naksa had a transformative effect on political culture. Whereas in the 1950s refugees like Ali Ahmed el-Abed had called on governments to implement the right of return,²⁴⁹ by the late 1960s they had lost faith in the latter’s willingness and ability to do so. Before 1967 Palestinian efforts to reverse the Nakba had usually been small-scale, consisting of individual “infiltration” attempts and limited early fida’iyyin operations, with the latter often subordinate to the Arab regimes. After 1967 the Palestinian national movement became self-driven, organized, and highly active. In both ideological and practical terms, the refugee camps were central to driving this new movement.

The camps’ long-running spatial distinctiveness enabled them to function effectively as bases for the post-1967 Palestinian thawra. Their formative role in the nationalist movement that reemerged at this time was manifested in the mythologizing of both the *falihin* and the refugees, combined with their connection to the *fida’iyyin*. There was a far-reaching notion of the camps as the most authentically Palestinian spaces, coming to serve as a “Palestine in exile.” Najwa al-Qattan, a Palestinian who grew up in Beirut, recalls how her family felt shame over the fact that they did *not* live in the camps and were therefore “abandoning” their “Palestinian-ness.”²⁵⁰

In Palestinian nationalist discourse, there was a particular focus on the camp refugees’ refusal to relinquish their right of return. In 1978 Arafat

wrote in a letter to UN secretary-general Waldheim: “The fact that [the refugees] have continued to live in tents for over 30 years is eloquent testimony to the determination of our people and their tenacity with regard to their right to return to their homes.”²⁵¹ Of course, at the time of writing it had been many years since the Palestinian camps had consisted of tents. Arafat’s references to the latter is indicative of the near-romantic symbolism sometimes ascribed to the camps in nationalist rhetoric.

This idea continued to hold sway over the years. In negotiations with Israel decades later, Arafat refused to renounce the right of return on the explicit grounds that the Palestinian nationalist revolution had arisen from the refugee camps in the first place. According to one of his advisors, Arafat stated that “any [peace] agreement [with Israel] that did not include a just solution for the refugee problem would engender an even stronger revolution.”²⁵² The image of the camps as bastions of militant nationalism was thus lasting. As a result, they also gained a lasting respect in much of the diaspora, where camp refugees were characterized as the “true” Palestinians. This notion would prove enduring across both time and space, with far-reaching consequences for not only the Palestinian nationalist movement but also the Arab host states, Israel—and the UNRWA regime, discussed in depth in the next chapter.

AN INTERNATIONAL REGIME

UNRWA walks a tightrope between the aspirations of the Palestinians and the stance of the host Governments and Arab contributors on the one hand and, on the other, the requirements which its major contributors wish to see satisfied and on which their support is to some degree dependent. On occasion the two are compatible; more often they are not.

—OFFICE OF THE UNRWA COMMISSIONER-GENERAL, 1979

What does it mean to describe UNRWA as “international”? On the one hand, the answer is simple: UNRWA is an agency of the United Nations, an international organization, and is funded and mandated by a range of governments around the world, sometimes referred to as the “international community.” Yet this term is replete with controversies, and conceptions of what comprises “the international” are complex and contested. Was UNRWA truly international if it was essentially operating at the behest of a selective group of powerful states in the Global North? Conversely, to take the view of some of its critics, how can it be called international when it operates entirely in a single region, with staff who are nearly all Palestinian? And what difference does it ultimately make either way?

In fact, UNRWA is most accurately described as a hybrid body, combining various strains of internationalism. In their efforts to resist and reshape refugeehood along their preferred lines, Palestinians had to grapple with three major categories of international actors: states in the Middle East; global powers (particularly the United States); and international organizations like the UN. In its construction and operations, UNRWA is a product of all three.

Most fundamentally, of course, UNRWA was and is a UN body. Yet with no regular income, it has always relied entirely on voluntary donations from UN member states (chiefly the United States) to fund its programs. At the

same time, UNRWA's lack of legal jurisdiction has meant that it can operate only at the invitation of the host states: Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Israel in the OPT after 1967.¹ In this chapter I unpack how UNRWA's hybrid internationalism played out in its relations with these actors. Specifically, I examine how the latter enabled, influenced, and constrained the agency's operations; what this meant for UNRWA as both an international organization and a quasi-state body; and how this fed into constructions of Palestinian refugeehood.

There were certain underlying commonalities to these relationships. None of the donor or host states saw UNRWA as solely humanitarian. On the contrary, they all dealt with it as an organization that was essentially political in its purpose and significance. They accordingly assessed its impact through a political lens—albeit with varying priorities—and, tellingly, tended to focus on the camps. Moreover, all saw Palestinian nationalism as an unwelcome development and feared that UNRWA's work was fueling the refugees' national identity and consciousness. At the same time, they preferred the agency to the Palestinian organizations that might otherwise run the camps. UNRWA's positioning in this regard thus embodied the conflicting characteristics at the heart of its role: international yet national, apolitical yet politicized, local yet global, and ultimately fixed at the intersection between international politics and the Palestinian refugee crisis.

BEING INTERNATIONAL

Internationalism was central to UNRWA's self-perception at the senior management level. The Commissioner-General's Office, consistently staffed by "internationals" from the Global North, often reiterated that UNRWA was an international organization, positing this as critical to its neutrality. Indeed, management regularly responded to allegations of inappropriate politicization by citing UNRWA's internationalism as evidence of its objectivity.² In turn, they constructed the Palestinian refugees solely as aid recipients. As we have seen, this was something the refugees themselves continually rejected and resisted.

UNRWA's UN affiliation was central to management's claims of apolitical internationalism.³ Yet there were significant structural constraints on what the affiliation meant in practice. While UNRWA was mandated by the

UNGA—arguably the UN’s most truly international body—in financial terms it was entirely reliant on donor aid, which largely came from Western states. The United States consistently provided the largest proportion of UNRWA’s budget, followed by the UK, Canada, and France.⁴ These states provided the agency with substantial donations that were reasonably consistent but ultimately voluntary, giving them considerable leverage over its work. By contrast, the Arab states consistently refused to contribute to UNRWA’s General Fund (although they would sometimes donate to specific programs).⁵ The Arab governments contended that the Western states had enabled the Palestinian dispossession in 1948 and were therefore responsible for supporting the refugees while their plight remained unresolved, with this responsibility enacted in the form of UNRWA.⁶ As we have seen, many Palestinian refugees shared this view of UNRWA as international penance, although they did not necessarily absolve the Arab states of responsibility.

The Western donor states strongly denied that their financial support for UNRWA constituted any form of reparations for their actions in 1948. Instead, they framed their donations in utilitarian terms.⁷ However, the fact that UNRWA’s funding came largely from Western states undoubtedly influenced its standing and unsurprisingly generated suspicions among the refugees about the agency’s real motives. Such suspicions were reinforced by the preponderance of American, British, and Canadian nationals within UNRWA’s top personnel,⁸ as well as the presence of the UK, the United States, France, and Belgium on the UNRWA Advisory Commission, alongside Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Turkey. Indeed, when the UK invited Canada to join the commission in 1958, British diplomats expressed concern that the Western overrepresentation might provoke Arab complaints.⁹

Despite the donor states’ apolitical presentation of their financial support for UNRWA, in reality their motives reflected the unavoidable entanglement between humanitarianism and politics.¹⁰ Most statesmen—and they were predominantly men—believed that without basic services, the refugees would be more likely to turn to political extremism. In the context of the Cold War, the biggest Western fear on this front was communism, and there was particular anxiety that without aid many Palestinian refugees might be susceptible to its charms.¹¹ In providing basic services to forestall absolute poverty, UNRWA’s work thus became a crucial part of the

strategy for combating communism and preventing revolution across the Middle East.¹² In diplomatic circles the United States and the UK made the case for funding UNRWA on these very grounds, alerting statesmen to the potential “threat to stability” that might otherwise arise.¹³ Internally, UK government officials openly acknowledged that their reasons for supporting UNRWA were “overwhelmingly political.”¹⁴ The UK Foreign Office described UNRWA in 1977 as “an important humanitarian *and political* priority” (emphasis added).¹⁵ This view of UNRWA as a stabilizing force in a volatile region explains why the same Western states continued to fund UNRWA even after the failure of its “Works” programs in the 1950s.

UNRWA management took heed of these motives. When appealing for the voluntary donations it desperately needed, UNRWA continually emphasized its importance as a stabilizing force in the region. Its newsletter *Palestine Refugees Today* made the point repeatedly, explicitly stating that cuts in UNRWA’s funding and services could lead to “very serious effects on stability.”¹⁶ In 1971 a UN Appeal to address UNRWA’s funding shortages stated similarly that continued shortages would “increase the tensions and contribute to the instability of the situation in the area.”¹⁷ The same principle has applied into the twenty-first century, as UNRWA management responded to the Trump administration’s defunding of the agency in 2018 by warning of the risk to regional stability.¹⁸

To many Palestinians, this was exactly the problem with UNRWA: it worked to mollify them and quieten their nationalist ardor.¹⁹ The agency’s dedication to the “stability” line was also taken as evidence by some Palestinians that it was operating on behalf of the West, embodying the latter’s neocolonial view of “internationalism” rather than the anticolonial radical internationalism favored in much of the Global South.²⁰ The resulting tensions became especially acute from the 1970s, as the rise of Palestinian nationalism combined with heightened fiscal strain to put increasing pressure on UNRWA from all sides.

UNRWA and the Donor States After 1967: Leverage Through Welfare

After the thawra, donor states became increasingly concerned about the implications of Palestinian politics for UNRWA’s work. The United States, the agency’s largest donor, classified the PLO as a terrorist organization and

virulently opposed any cooperation with it. Many Western European states took a similar position, albeit less forcefully. As their motivations for funding UNRWA were tied to its perceived value in preventing political extremism, its apparent connections to the PLO in the camps led many to question the purpose of continuing to support it.

At UN meetings in the 1970s, the donor states repeatedly expressed concern about funding an agency that had become, in their eyes, inappropriately political. In his annual report for 1974, UNRWA commissioner-general Rennie acknowledged “growing [international] recognition of the political dimension of the Palestine refugee problem,” adding that this was adversely affecting perceptions of the agency.²¹ Four years later nine states, including the United States, the UK, and France, abstained from a vote on renewing UNRWA’s mandate after several Arab states amended the resolution to include a statement that “any attempt to restrict, or attach conditions to . . . the right of return” was “inadmissible.”²² The nine governments contended that this was inappropriately political for the mandate of a welfare agency.

These rising tensions reflected the unavoidable entanglement between politics and humanitarianism, despite the UN’s insistence that the two were and should be separate. When the donor states criticized what they saw as UNRWA’s inappropriate politicization, they disregarded their own political motives for supporting its work. Thus the UK Foreign Office emphasized in 1974 the need “to reduce [UNRWA’s] political overtones to the minimum” while admitting internally that it funded the agency for “overwhelmingly political” reasons.²³ In view of this, it would seem that the real issue was less about UNRWA’s politicization than about *what kind of politicization* the various parties considered acceptable.

The controversy raged particularly fiercely in the United States. As the thawra brought new international attention to the fida’iyyin and the camps, some American critics of UNRWA charged it with providing aid to refugees who belonged to anti-Israeli terrorist groups.²⁴ In 1970 the U.S. government attached to its financial support the condition that “UNRWA take all possible measures to assure that no part of the United States contribution shall be used to furnish assistance to any refugee who is receiving military training as a member of the so-called Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) or any other guerrilla-type organization.”²⁵ The camps were a particular concern to the United States on this front, with President Carter

expressing concern later in the same decades about these spaces' capacity for "demagogues and terrorists to feed on despair."²⁶

American concerns about UNRWA's political positioning reached a crescendo in the early 1980s, during the most ideological period of the Reagan administration. Although some diplomats argued that Washington's leading support for UNRWA enhanced its relations with the Arab world, others objected that the agency was anti-Israel and pro-PLO. Tensions came to a head when Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 led to the discovery of a PLO training camp at the UNRWA Vocational Training Center (VTC) in Siblin, where activities allegedly included storing military equipment and recruiting students to join the *fida'yyin*.²⁷ In response to the discovery, the United States reiterated that its contributions to UNRWA must not go toward guerrilla organizations.²⁸ Yet it did not speak of defunding UNRWA, conscious that the status quo gave it considerable leverage, and that the agency remained far preferable in its eyes to the alternatives.

Unsurprisingly, UNRWA management were alarmed by the donor states' increasing hostility in this period. Tellingly, they identified the agency's quasi-state role in the camps as the main problem, with notes from a senior management meeting in 1970 revealing "concern about the effect of UNRWA's reputation of identification with the camps, with its implication of responsibility for the activities of refugees residing in them."²⁹ Acting on this, management tried to publicly distance UNRWA from the camps, emphasizing that it had no legislative power over the camps and did not control or supervise residents.³⁰

To underline this further, management even sought to modify official terminology around the agency's work.³¹ In 1971 the deputy commissioner-general issued a memo to all directors, telling them to "adopt terminology which will . . . discourage [the] total identification of UNRWA with refugee camps." Accordingly, a "Camp Leader" became a "Services Officer," and for the next decade commissioners-general repeatedly stated in their annual reports that "the expression 'UNRWA refugee camps' is misleading."³² While ultimately unsuccessful, these attempts to create distance demonstrate the camps' centrality to the Palestinian nationalist movement and the extent to which they defined broader perceptions of UNRWA. They also speak to the inherent tensions around the real meaning of the UNRWA regime's internationalism.

BEING REGIONAL

While the “international” donor states approached the UNRWA regime as a financial and diplomatic investment, regional stakeholders had an entirely different perspective. In blunt terms, the Arab host states, along with Israel after 1967, all benefited fiscally from UNRWA’s operations, which saved them the cost of providing services to the refugees themselves. In this regard, there were fewer differences between Israel and the Arab host states than between the donor and host states. While Israel and the host states wanted UNRWA to deliver as many services to as many recipients as possible, donors wanted the opposite. UNRWA’s relations with the regional states thus challenge conventional paradigms that assume a constant polarity between Israel and the Arab states. Here, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria all held common concerns and interests, albeit without acknowledging their similar positioning in this regard. Moreover, like the Western donor states, the regional states all held significant leverage over UNRWA, in ways that constrained its autonomy. The UN is sometimes described as *supranational*, but the reverse may be true of UNRWA; while its work transcends national borders, it has remained beholden to the authority of the states under which it operates.

UNRWA and the Arab Host States

The Arab host states’ relations with UNRWA were shaped by their remarkably complex and at times inconsistent policies toward the Palestinians. While Arab leaders all imbued their public speeches with calls for Palestinian liberation, their policies betrayed a more ambiguous stance on the issue. As Fawaz Turki writes, “Politically, ‘usurped Palestine’ became a catch phrase to use in speeches by [Arab] government leaders with a thirst for prestige and popularity. Pronunciamentos about liberating Palestine were heard continually. . . . All made, presumably, on behalf of the Palestinians . . . [but] the Arab governments had put the solution of the Palestine issue at the bottom of their list of priorities.”³³ This was underpinned by widespread anxiety among the Arab states about the possible repercussions of hosting a powerful nationalist movement, particularly if Palestinian militancy were to attract Israeli retaliation.

Such concerns grew after 1967, as the *fida'iyyin* intensified their militant attacks on Israel while exerting increasing autonomy across the region. Bas-sam Abu Sharif, then a member of the PFLP, recalls: "Nobody, nobody, in the Arab world then [after 1967], dared raise a voice against a *fedayi*. If the Egyptian army had tried to stop a group of Palestinian commandos attacking Israel from its territory, there would have been a revolution in Egypt. The same was true of Syria, or any other Arab state. In the aftermath of *al-Nakbah*, the *fedayi* was good. This was the measure of our freedom then."³⁴ Whatever the precise accuracy of Abu Sharif's words here, there is no doubt that the *fida'iyyin*'s post-1967 power caused significant trepidation among the Arab regimes.

The Arab host states' approaches to UNRWA were similarly framed by concerns about potential threats to their authority. Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon all frequently disagreed with the agency over the limits of its jurisdiction. In turn, the latter complained about host-state interference in its staff appointments, programs, and freedom of movement. These tensions were most acute when it came to the refugee camps, which came under the legal jurisdiction of the state in which they were located.³⁵ As UNRWA had no legislative or police power, it was reliant on the host states to maintain order in the camps, while it provided quasi-state services like health and education. This setup caused endless problems for the agency, which the host states often blamed for disorder in the camps. The *fida'iyyin*'s increasing prominence after 1967 only worsened relations, especially when they clashed with government forces.

Such tensions were exacerbated by the Arab host states' perception of UNRWA as a force underlining Palestinian separateness. Officially, they supported this notion; all three governments spoke publicly of Palestinian nationhood and made calls for the refugees to be allowed to return home. In reality, they responded to the idea of a separate Palestinian nationhood with varying degrees of hostility. Both the Jordanian and Syrian regimes wanted to absorb the Palestinian refugees into a greater state, albeit in different ways. Meanwhile the Lebanese government feared that a strong sense of Palestinian nationhood might threaten the already weak central government in Beirut. Accordingly, all three were instinctively dubious of any organization that might reinforce Palestinian nationalism—including UNRWA.

A final complicating factor was the Arab host states' ultimate support for UNRWA's work. By providing essential services, the agency relieved the states of the financial burden of caring for the refugees. It even paid them subsidies for the Palestinian refugee children who were educated in state schools.³⁶ Having voted for UNRWA's creation in 1949, the host states certainly did not want to see it disbanded.³⁷ As a result, their clampdowns on the agency's power and authority were juxtaposed with demands for it to maximize its service provision. The policies that stemmed from this inconsistent basis were complex and sometimes even erratic, with considerable variations across states.

Syria and UNRWA: Control and Interference

Syria was consistently the most welcoming Arab host state for Palestinian refugees.³⁸ From early on, the country provided its Palestinian population with more benefits and entitlements than either Jordan or Lebanon.³⁹ Just a few years after the Nakba, most of the Palestinian population in Syria were employed and, unlike in neighboring countries, were relatively settled.⁴⁰ As early as 1951, the United Nations reported that Palestinian refugees in Syria were comparatively better off than their counterparts elsewhere, possibly helped by the fact they constituted only 2.7 percent of the local population (as opposed to 10 percent in Lebanon).⁴¹ Syrian policy meant that Palestinians in the country were more likely to be gainfully employed and to live outside the camps.

These relative advantages are reflected in the testimony of Matar Abdelrahim, who had sought shelter in Syria with his family in 1948:

In early 1951, the Syrian General Security approved my petition to join the Syrian police. The president of the Syrian Republic, Shukry al-Quwatli, had decided that Palestinians could be residents of Syria with most of the rights and responsibilities due to Syrians yet without having to give up their Palestinian citizenship. After I passed all of the [police] exams, I could feel a sense of relief and security wash over my family. My monthly income was 150 Syrian lira, which, when added to the UN rations, greatly improved our living situation. With the income from my job, we moved from the tent to live in a house.⁴²

Syrian policy was confirmed in 1956 with Law No. 260, which gave Palestinians the same rights and obligations as Syrian citizens, except for voting and standing for political office.⁴³ They had full access to state education and health care services, with their affairs administered by the Palestine Arab Refugee Institute (PARI), later renamed the General Administration for Palestine Arab Refugees (GAPAR).⁴⁴ Despite the frequent upheavals of Syria's numerous coups in the 1950s and 1960s, Palestinian entitlements remained constant in the country.

The coups finally came to an end with the ascendancy of General Hafiz al-Asad. After the Ba'ath Party to which he belonged took power in 1963, General Asad swiftly rose through the ranks. He became defense minister in 1966, prime minister in 1970, and president the following year—a position he retained until his death in 2000. Asad was determined to claim the mantle of leader of the Arab world, a status that had been vacated with Nasser's death in 1970. Central to this was the notion that he would defend the Arabs against the perceived threat posed by Israel and act as savior to the Palestinians.⁴⁵ Accordingly, his government provided the *fida'iyyin* with arms and training facilities, and Syria was the only Arab state that attempted to protect them in Jordan during Black September. Asad reinforced his position with strong support for the Rabat Declaration of 1974, in which the Arab League recognized the PLO as "the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people."⁴⁶

Behind the scenes, however, Asad's stance on the Palestinian national cause in general, and the PLO in particular, was much more complicated.⁴⁷ Although the Ba'athists preached pan-Arab unity and their own form of secular socialism, Asad's real priority was regime maintenance. Even his pro-Palestinian positioning on Black September and the Rabat Declaration was driven in part by the desire to buttress his power against that of rival King Hussein. Throughout, Asad was fixated on removing any potential threat to his authority—including that which might be posed by a powerful Palestinian nationalist movement. Accordingly, he clamped down on any Palestinian militancy that might rival his power, be it by threatening his regime directly or by generally endangering state security. His regime focused in particular on the refugee camps, especially after the *thawra* brought the *fida'iyyin* new power. The Syrian government paid stipends to camp *mukhtars* and informers who kept control and clamped down on political agitation among the refugees.

Such repression tempered the socioeconomic advantages of life in Syria for many Palestinians. Abdelrahim, who had previously benefited from Syrian policy and qualified as a policeman, was fired from his job after refusing to work as a state collaborator:

I received a notice of transfer from Damascus to a reserve division in the city of Suwayda, and I was also called in for questioning. . . . The head of the political unit [asked me] “why don’t you work with us? . . . I want you to cooperate with us on security matters. You can choose: work with us and get an extra salary or refuse and you’ll be dismissed this week and you and your family will die of starvation.” After ten days, decision #1322 was recorded in the office of the prime minister, and I was dismissed from my position.⁴⁸

This was not the end of it. Elsewhere in his memoir, Abdelrahim recounts how Palestinian political activists had to meet outside the camps because the Syrian authorities monitored the latter so closely. After he became actively involved in the *thawra*, the Syrian security services would regularly show up at his family home, sometimes breaking their possessions.⁴⁹ Thus Asad’s pro-Palestinian stance did not temper his brutal suppression of their political activism.

Asad’s take on UNRWA was similarly double-edged. On the one hand, his regime favored the counterweight that the agency could provide to the Fatah-dominated PLO in the refugee camps. It certainly preferred UNRWA to the alternatives, which were likely to be less docile. On the other hand, the Syrian government was concerned that UNRWA’s presence and work created an alternative quasi-governmental authority within the country and ultimately underlined Palestinian separateness, which in turn placed implicit limitations on the state’s authority.

UNRWA’s relationship with the Syrian regime was accordingly ambiguous. The government’s relative generosity toward its Palestinian refugee population benefited UNRWA in many ways.⁵⁰ It meant that the agency did not need to provide in Syria the intensive services required in other fields.⁵¹ UNRWA staff acknowledged that “the Agency does benefit [in Syria] from the exceptionally generous arrangement.”⁵² GAPAR officials were often keen to underline the point in their interactions with the agency, as Syrian generosity toward Palestinian refugees put them in a stronger negotiating position than their counterparts in either Jordan or Lebanon. When

campaigning for UNRWA to implement new programs, for example, the Syrian government highlighted the savings that the agency had made from the state's provision of free education to Palestinian refugees.⁵³

Yet the consequences for UNRWA were not entirely positive. The Syrian government's close involvement in service provision to Palestinian refugees also meant that UNRWA faced considerable encroachments on its autonomy in the country.⁵⁴ Its internationalism did not exempt it from the clampdown that characterized much of Syrian state policy. Observing UNRWA's position—as an internationally supported quasi-governmental authority in charge of self-contained camps that housed hundreds of thousands of foreigners—the Asad government quickly concluded that its power as an “international regime” needed to be contained. It took several routes to achieving this, first asserting its power by clamping down on UNRWA's privileges as a UN body.⁵⁵ In 1967 it enacted a decree excluding local UN staff from the usual privileges and immunities, meaning *inter alia* that they could now be inducted into the military and needed PARI-issued permits to travel.⁵⁶ This had both a symbolic and a practical impact, causing UNRWA so many problems with personnel that in 1973 it appealed to the UN Office of Legal Affairs for assistance.⁵⁷ In a similar vein, the Syrian regime ignored UNRWA's immunities as a UN body vis-à-vis taxation on imports and frequently refused the transfer of refugee employees to other UNRWA fields.⁵⁸

In addition to disregarding UNRWA's UN privileges, the Syrian regime constantly interfered in its internal affairs. It regularly pressured the agency to hire the regime's preferred candidates, who were often government employees.⁵⁹ At other times it pushed aggressively for the employment of Syrian staff rather than internationals, partly as a show of force, partly as a matter of prestige, and partly as a way of ensuring its own continued power over UNRWA's internal affairs.⁶⁰ Robert Gallagher, who worked as director of UNRWA Operations in Syria in the 1980s, later stated, “GAPAR doesn't really have to control the agency because they control the staff. Basically, in Syria the Syrians are in control, and they really are. And they are ruthlessly in control. . . . People owe their loyalty more to them or to the Ba'ath Party in positions on our staff [than to UNRWA].”⁶¹ The Syrian government thus enacted its authority over UNRWA by integrating its contingent directly within the agency's internal affairs. This gave the

UNRWA-Syrian relationship a totalitarian character that could not be found in any other host state.

As a result, UNRWA's internationalism was continually curtailed in Syria, where the state sought to restrict any possible exemptions or privileges its status might generate. This meant that UNRWA had to perform a balancing act between resisting the government's interference and cooperating sufficiently to be able to operate. Over the years, management expressed repeated concerns that they were becoming a mere wing of the Syrian government. As early as 1969 UNRWA's director of affairs in Syria wrote formally that the agency had "lost practically all semblance of independence" in the country and asked the UN Headquarters in New York to take action.⁶² Three years later, the commissioner-general raised the issue directly with the PARI director general, writing in a letter, "UNRWA can only operate, and obtain the funds for, its programs for the Palestine refugees if it functions as a United Nations organization, and to do so it must adhere to the principles and the practices that regulate United Nations organizations."⁶³

Yet such calls made little impact. Ten years later UNRWA directors in Syria were still facing the same problems, as the field director wrote of his frustrations over "direct interference in appointment of staff" and claimed that "we have not pursued [our] privileges and immunities with sufficient vigor in the past."⁶⁴ His observations strongly implied that the Syrian regime had been largely successful in its attempts to restrain UNRWA's autonomy.

The Syrian regime's containment shaped UNRWA's operations in another way, too. Whenever possible, the regime used the agency as a tool for enforcing its repression of Palestinian nationalism, for example, by making registration with UNRWA a prerequisite for Palestinians to be issued with Syrian identity cards or travel documents.⁶⁵ This served the dual purpose of subordinating UNRWA's authority to that of the state, while simultaneously clamping down on any risk of independent Palestinian activism. Despite UNRWA's claims to be apolitical, it could not avoid being co-opted even indirectly into the politics of the Syrian state.

An UNRWA deputy commissioner-general privately acknowledged the problems in 1980, writing in an internal memo that the agency's tensions with the Syrian regime were "a product of the continuation after 30 years of programs which are normally conducted by a government."⁶⁶ The

Syrian-UNRWA relationship thus encapsulated the tensions of the agency's quasi-state positioning, whereby it balanced its supposedly international autonomy in the camps with its ultimate dependence on the host states' support and acquiescence. In the Syrian context, Asad's double-edged approach to the Palestinian nationalist movement added an extra layer of complication.

Lebanon and UNRWA: Conflict and Insecurity

The Lebanese state tended to support UNRWA's work more wholeheartedly than its Syrian counterpart. Its weak and fragmented nature, however, combined with the tensions of its confessional political system, made the situation inherently difficult. Lebanese society was precariously balanced between its different ethnoreligious groups, heightening the potential for unfriendliness to outsiders—including Palestinians, 100,000 of whom had arrived in the country following the Nakba.⁶⁷ From the beginning, the Lebanese general population were more hostile toward Palestinian refugees than either the Syrian or the Jordanian populations.⁶⁸ The hostility only grew after 1975, when the country descended into a fifteen-year-long civil war for which many blamed the Palestinians. This had inevitable consequences for UNRWA, as the refugees' main service provider and unofficial representative.

Accordingly, the Lebanese state's approach to UNRWA is best understood within the framework of its stance on the Question of Palestine in general, and Palestinian refugees in particular.⁶⁹ PLO official Shafiq al-Hout, who spent much of his life as a Palestinian refugee in Lebanon, contends, "The basis that has always underpinned Lebanese policy towards the [Palestinian] refugees has been fear."⁷⁰ Specifically, there were three fears at play. First, the Lebanese government was anxious that militancy in the Palestinian camps might provoke an Israeli attack on the country. Second, there were concerns that if the overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim Palestinians became fully integrated into Lebanese society (a process known as *tawtin*), they would threaten the country's delicately balanced consociational system.⁷¹ This fear was particularly acute among the political establishment, which was dominated disproportionately, if by no means exclusively, by Maronite Christians, and it was sufficiently prolific to be reported by the UN in 1951.⁷² Linked to it was the third fear: that the Palestinian



FIG. 3.1. Nahr el-Bared camp in northern Lebanon. Photo courtesy of UNRWA.

population might become sufficiently strong to rise up and threaten the authority of the state altogether.⁷³ The Lebanese state accordingly sought to suppress any activity that might lead to the realization of these fears.

In the years before 1967, it could do so relatively easily, by containing large numbers of Palestinian refugees in the camps and targeting these spaces. As the Palestinians were noncitizens without visas, they came under the domain of the Lebanese Army's security agency, the *Deuxième Bureau* (DB), which controlled the camps in the 1950s and 1960s. Its head at the time, Joseph Kaylani, explained his mantra thus: "The Palestinian is like a spring: if you step on him he stays quiet, but if you take your foot off, he'll hit you in the face."⁷⁴ Unsurprisingly, the DB had a notorious reputation among Palestinians in this period. Al-Hout describes it in his memoir as an "absolute ruler . . . [with] an iron fist."⁷⁵ Turki recalls how DB agents would intrude into refugee shelters to terrorize the residents, and Kotaish writes of its constant brutality.⁷⁶

In keeping with the state's concerns, the DB was most preoccupied with suppressing any political agitation in the camps. In a striking echo of Turki's words, Kotaish writes, "Officially the government [was] on our side, they supported our rights to return, they called us brothers and were generous with words of sympathy. In reality, however, they feared that nascent strength more than Israel [did]. They wanted to nip Palestinian national sentiment in the bud before it fed the winds of change in their own country."⁷⁷

As well as straightforward measures like banning displays of Palestinian flags and insignia, the DB also used its power to grant or deny permits as a means of curtailing activism.⁷⁸ Far more so than in Syria or Jordan, Palestinians in Lebanon faced severe restrictions on their right to work, move, or travel, which only the DB could permit.⁷⁹ They were so disempowered that they needed permission even to visit relatives or friends in another camp—Kotaish recalls how his family would seek such permission a couple of times a year in order to leave their camp of Nahr el-Bared and visit his mother's extended family in Tel al-Zaatar.⁸⁰ Anyone who attended political meetings in the camps would be denied these permits; any Palestinian who left Lebanon for military training abroad was barred from returning.⁸¹

Like its Syrian counterpart, the Lebanese government also paid stipends to camp mukhtars and informers who kept control and maintained order inside.⁸² From 1959 to 1974, it made particular use of Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the former mufti of Jerusalem, as an instrument of control. Despite the total loss of Husseini's formal power, he retained some standing among parts of the older generations in exile. Indeed, al-Hout recounts that his own attempts to politically organize in Burj al Barajneh camp in 1949 ran into difficulty because many people there remained loyal to Husseini and saw any other political actors as interlopers.⁸³ The Lebanese authorities sought to capitalize on this; in exchange for the residency permit that allowed Husseini to live in Beirut until his death, the state recruited him to pacify refugee discontent and potential nationalist agitation in the camps.⁸⁴

Reflecting on this period, al-Hout writes that the camps "were more like detention camps than centers for refugees." He recalls encountering the impact of Lebanese political oppression when he visited various camps in the mid-1960s to try to organize for the PLO. In Rashidieh camp in 1964, he found residents too scared of the DB to speak openly; in Ein el-Helweh

in 1965, they were banned from raising the Palestinian flag on the anniversary of the Nakba, and several young men were arrested and beaten after a public demonstration.⁸⁵ In similar recollections of his experiences in Nahr el-Bared at the time, Kotaish recounts how some of his friends and neighbors were forcibly disappeared, beaten, and threatened after they became involved in nationalist agitation. His school principal was even publicly whipped and deported for raising the Palestinian flag in front of the school and teaching students to sing the national anthem.⁸⁶ Meanwhile Bassam Abu Sharif, who was studying at AUB and secretly working for the ANM in Beirut in the 1960s, was arrested and deported from the country in 1966, deemed a “political undesirable.”⁸⁷

The repressive Lebanese policy had a multifaceted effect on UNRWA. In general, the Lebanese government looked kindly on the agency’s work, which it saw favorably on two counts. First, in the eyes of the government, UNRWA’s work helped prevent *tawtin* by underlining the Palestinian refugees’ separateness from the Lebanese population—something reinforced by the UNRWA regime’s non-Lebanese internationalism.⁸⁸ Second, the agency’s provision of basic services promoted stability among the refugees, and this, in theory at least, minimized the chances of agitation and violence. The Lebanese government therefore favored UNRWA’s services, insisting in the late 1960s that the agency continue to serve Palestinian refugees born in the country after 1965.⁸⁹ It also tended to support UNRWA more openly than the other host states;⁹⁰ indeed, it was the only one to join the UN Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA when this was set up at the end of 1970.⁹¹

At the same time, Lebanese policy toward the Palestinian refugees also had explicitly negative repercussions for UNRWA. The refugees’ difficulties in acquiring Lebanese work permits resulted in extremely high levels of Palestinian unemployment, which in turn generated a greater need for UNRWA’s relief programs.⁹² Of the three Arab host states, it was only in Lebanon that the proportion of the Palestinian population living in camps actually increased in the post-Nakba decades.⁹³ The refugees who did not live in the camps were those who had prospered sufficiently to move into permanent accommodation in towns and cities, and in Lebanon this group was notably smaller than in Jordan or Syria. As UNRWA faced rising financial problems from the 1960s, high demands on its services became an increasing problem.

Moreover, Lebanese repression served to curtail UNRWA's autonomy as an international regime. Although Lebanon was less intrusive in UNRWA's operations than either Jordan or Syria—partly because of the state's weakness—the agency was nevertheless subject to regular interference. As in Syria, this often concerned recruitment matters;⁹⁴ on one occasion, for example, Lebanon's Department of Affairs of Palestinian Refugees (DAPR) temporarily suspended communications with UNRWA in protest at its hiring decisions.⁹⁵ Lebanese repression of the refugees also involved frequent police interventions inside the camps, which impaired UNRWA's operations. Agency personnel were not exempt from police interrogations, and it was not uncommon for Palestinian staff to be arrested, questioned, or even expelled from the country.⁹⁶ On one especially difficult occasion in 1968, UNRWA staff were unable to access any camps in Lebanon after DAPR implemented particularly severe measures.⁹⁷ UNRWA's relationship with Lebanon was thus blighted by the same tensions over jurisdiction that existed in Syria, albeit to a lesser degree.

Notwithstanding this parallel, the late 1960s saw an increasing divergence between UNRWA's positioning in the two countries. As the *fida'iyyin* took charge of the camps in Lebanon, UNRWA's position there became increasingly precarious. Commissioner-General Laurence Michelmore noted in his report in 1970 that "the considerable growth in numbers, fire-power and influence of the Palestine politico-military organizations [in Lebanon], [and] the enhanced political consciousness of the Palestinian refugee community [has] raised basic questions of authority and identification."⁹⁸ Both Michelmore and his successor John Rennie reported that some of UNRWA's installations in the camps in Lebanon were now occupied by *fida'iyyin* groups.⁹⁹ The situation intensified after Black September in 1970, when thousands of *fida'iyyin* and their families entered Lebanon from Jordan and boosted the country's Palestinian population.¹⁰⁰ As the *fida'iyyin* became increasingly powerful in Lebanon from this point, UNRWA's autonomy and authority in the country were seriously challenged even before the civil war formally began in 1975.

Once the war was underway, the deteriorating security situation made UNRWA's operations almost impossible.¹⁰¹ As the central government increasingly lost its hold on much of the country, it also lost its authority in coordinating UNRWA's operations on the ground. Nowhere was this more evident than in the camps.¹⁰² Ostensibly UNRWA still recognized and

deferred to the government's authority, but in practice it increasingly dealt with the PLO, especially in southern Lebanon. While the government remained supportive of the agency's role—certainly not favoring a Palestinian takeover—this came to mean little in practice.¹⁰³ For much of the 1970s, then, UNRWA's key relationship in Lebanon was not with the central government, but with another nonstate actor: the PLO.¹⁰⁴

Jordan and UNRWA: Containment and Integration

Jordan is an unusual case in numerous ways. While Lebanon and Syria both have significant Palestinian populations, only in Jordan do Palestinians form the demographic majority. More than half the Jordanian population are of Palestinian origin, and around a third of the Jordanian population carry UNRWA registration cards.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, unlike either Syria or Lebanon, the Jordanian government had staked a claim to part of historic Palestine, having annexed the West Bank in 1950 to the chagrin of many Palestinians.¹⁰⁶ All this meant that Jordan was more intimately connected to the fate of the Palestinian refugees than any other Arab state.

Relatedly, the Jordanian state sought not to exclude or separate the Palestinian refugees, but rather to absorb them. Its pursuit of this objective predated the Nakba, with Abdullah I having made a secret deal with the Jewish Agency in the mid-1940s to divide Palestine between them.¹⁰⁷ The aftermath of the Nakba provided his government with an opportunity to push for this formally on the diplomatic stage. At a meeting of the UN Ad Hoc Political Committee in December 1950, the Jordanian delegation insisted that the "vast majority" of Palestinian refugees favored unification of the two banks—which of course had already been rendered a fait accompli by the Jordanian annexation of the West Bank earlier that year.¹⁰⁸ This went hand-in-hand with the regime's suppression of a distinctive Palestinian national identity; at the time of the annexation, Abdullah also issued a royal decree banning the use of the term "Palestine" in any official document in favor of "East Bank" and "West Bank."¹⁰⁹

Jordanian domestic policy toward the Palestinian refugees was grounded in the same principles. The regime wanted Palestinians to identify primarily as Jordanian citizens, not refugees, and even prohibited the use of the term "refugee" in political reports in the 1950s.¹¹⁰ While Jordanian citizenship was technically voluntary, the government placed strong pressure on the

refugees to take it by making citizenship a prerequisite for working in the public sector, registering births, and acquiring travel documents.¹¹¹ Such moves fueled suspicions that despite its calls for the refugees' return, Jordan really favored their permanent reintegration. Indeed, Western diplomats noted that, unlike every other Arab state, Jordan did not express any opposition to resettlement in early diplomatic meetings after the Nakba.¹¹²

After coming to the throne in 1952, King Hussein continued with the same approach amid the rise of the Palestinian nationalist movement.¹¹³ Opposing the nationalist affirmation of the refugees' separateness, in the early 1960s his government threatened to cancel the passports of anyone involved in Palestinian political agitation. As Leila Khaled recalls angrily in her autobiography, it also barred nationalist activists considered too "radical" from attending the Palestine National Congress (PNC) in Jerusalem in 1964.¹¹⁴

Jordanian concerns about Palestinian nationalism only intensified after 1967, as the PLO gained increasing power over the country's refugee camps. The government was particularly alarmed by the radical demands of the PLO's most hardline factions, the PFLP and the DFLP, which sought a full revolution in the Arab world and the overthrow of Hussein.¹¹⁵ Matters came to a head in 1970 when the PFLP ambushed Hussein's motorcade and then challenged Jordanian sovereignty by holding foreign hostages from three hijacked planes in the country. As the national army fought to free the hostages, Hussein declared martial law and went to war with the *fida'iyyin*, surrounding and shelling their bases—including the camps.¹¹⁶ Black September, as it came to be known, ended with the *fida'iyyin*'s surrender and exile to Lebanon and was thus a victory for Jordan. However, it caused lasting damage to Hussein's reputation among many Palestinians. As Abu Sharif describes it, "Our own Arab brothers had taken up arms against us: a catastrophe for the Palestinian cause."¹¹⁷ Turki later wrote that "the confrontations with Hussein's troops in September 1970 were the most traumatic experience in modern Palestinian history"—appearing to put it even above the Nakba.¹¹⁸

The Jordanian government's relationship with UNRWA unfolded within this context. Having signed an agreement with the agency in 1951, the government formally facilitated its operations in the country.¹¹⁹ Yet at the same time, UNRWA's work implicitly challenged the Jordanian objective of Palestinian integration, as it was ultimately premised on the refugees'



FIG. 3.2. New Amman camp in the aftermath of Black September. Photo courtesy of UNRWA.

distinctiveness within the host states. In 1956 King Hussein said that “the organizations which seek to separate Palestinians from Jordanians are traitors helping Zionism in its aim of undermining the Arab camp.”¹²⁰ UNRWA could arguably be seen as one such organization. In recognizing and treating the Palestinians as a group in their own right, it inadvertently preserved and boosted their separateness and with it their sense of unique identity.¹²¹

The refugees’ approach to UNRWA fortified such concerns. Many Palestinians in Jordan continued to identify primarily as refugees from Palestine, not Jordanian citizens. Indeed, they largely reacted uneasily to receiving Jordanian citizenship, for fear that it would undermine their right of return; some even petitioned the Arab League for the policy to be revised. Instead of a Jordanian passport, many refugees preferred the identification of their UNRWA registration cards, which affirmed their Palestinian nationality.¹²² This drew UNRWA directly into the politics of Palestinian-Jordanian identity and rendered it a potential hindrance to Jordanian objectives.

Yet at the same time, the Jordanian government was in no way equipped to get rid of UNRWA. In the 1960s the agency was feeding about one-third

of the country's population and thus relieving the government of a substantial responsibility.¹²³ Expelling UNRWA and taking over its services was simply not an option; like other host states, Jordan complained when UNRWA made cuts to its service provision.¹²⁴ Therefore instead of opposing it outright, the Jordanian government took the same approach as Syria and Lebanon, seeking to curtail the agency's autonomy and authority by continually asserting its own power.¹²⁵ Again, these efforts constituted encroachments on UNRWA's immunities, most often by way of searches and detentions of local staff.¹²⁶

After the Naksa, Jordanian criticism toward UNRWA manifested itself most clearly in conversations over the West Bank. Despite Jordan's loss of the territory in 1967, King Hussein did not formally relinquish his claim on it for another twenty-one years. In 1969 he stated, "I can never renounce the West Bank. . . . This idea of a so-called [separate Palestinian] entity has no reality."¹²⁷ Three years later he announced a plan to establish a federation of the two banks, to be known as the United Arab Kingdom.¹²⁸

On these grounds, Hussein was strongly opposed to UNRWA's designation of the West Bank as a separate Field of Operations after 1967, and to its establishment of a new Field Office in Jerusalem. In 1969 he joined with his Syrian and Lebanese counterparts to declare that "the East and West banks of Jordan are integral parts of one entity; therefore, the center of all the agency's operations on both banks should be confined to Amman." His government further alleged that in working with Israel in the West Bank, UNRWA was legitimizing the occupation.¹²⁹ Such contestations meant that UNRWA had to proceed with extreme care. Into the 1980s it was still issuing clarifications that its use of the term "east Jordan" referred to a geographical area and not a legal status and including a similar disclaimer in its annual reports.¹³⁰ As in Syria and Lebanon, UNRWA had to maintain a difficult balance in Jordan between cooperating with the government and trying to maintain its own autonomy.¹³¹

Israel and UNRWA: Suspicion and Self-interest

UNRWA's relationship with Israel may appear distinctive at first glance. Unlike the Arab host states, Israel was openly opposed to the refugees' return, instead favoring their permanent resettlement elsewhere. In this sense, Israel was fundamentally at odds with UNRWA, which formally

ascribed to UNGA Resolution 194. Moreover, the very premise of Israel's relationship with UNRWA, as an occupying power rather than a conventional host state, was antagonistic. Yet while this would appear to suggest that the relationship was relentlessly combative, the reality was again more nuanced. In fact Israel generally supported UNRWA's work, having voted for its creation in 1949 and requested the continuation of its services in the OPT after 1967.¹³² At the heart of Israel's policy lay the same paradox that characterized the Arab host states' approaches to UNRWA: it disliked the agency's alternative authority and the way its work underlined Palestinian national separatism, while recognizing that its programs ultimately served state interests.

For the first nineteen years of its existence, Israel had limited direct dealings with UNRWA. From 1950 to 1952 the agency provided services to around forty-five thousand refugees inside Israel—including approximately seventeen thousand Jews—who qualified for support as "refugees from Palestine" after the 1948 war.¹³³ UNRWA worked with the Israeli government to provide services to this group until 1952, when its programs inside Israel were discontinued at the latter's request. Aside from negotiations during the brief Israeli occupation of Gaza in 1956, the two bodies subsequently had minimal contact until 1967.

The events of that year dramatically changed their relationship. Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza brought more than half a million registered Palestinian refugees and twenty-seven camps under its military rule.¹³⁴ To continue providing services in these areas, UNRWA had to work with the Israeli authorities, but doing so came with risks. Any visible cooperation with Israel would damage UNRWA's reputation among the Palestinians, who blamed the Israeli state for their exile. It also risked jeopardizing the agency's relations with the Arab host states, who accused it of collaborating with the occupation, as discussed earlier.¹³⁵

The situation was made even more difficult by the long-standing Israeli perception that UNRWA was politically aligned to the cause of Palestinian nationalism. Michael Comay, the lead Israeli negotiator with UNRWA in 1967, remarked that this feeling was widespread: "We'd worked up a lot of grievances against UNRWA. In general we thought that UNRWA had simply become an instrument to perpetuate the Arab refugee problem."¹³⁶ Despite the government's subsequent decision to support UNRWA's work, such feelings never went away.¹³⁷ Senior Labor

politician Shimon Peres, who served in numerous Israeli governments over the decades, wrote in 1970:

Who, in fact, is an “Arab refugee”? The official answer is one who receives aid from UNRWA (in food and services valued at \$30 a year) and who is in possession of an UNRWA refugee-ration-card. The criterion for receiving such a card is not lack of means but the individual’s personal history. If he left his permanent home twenty years ago and proceeded to another land, he is a refugee. In fact, of course, a refugee is one who has no home, no employment, no freedom of movement, and no hopes of a better future.¹³⁸

In the same vein, successive Israeli governments continued to hold UNRWA responsible for the continuing existence of a large Palestinian refugee population.¹³⁹ In 1978 the Israel Information Center, which fell under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, issued a pamphlet claiming that UNRWA had compelled Palestinians to retain their refugee status and “refused to challenge the Arabs’ exploitation of refugee misery.”¹⁴⁰

At the same time, however, Israel realized that it would face serious problems if UNRWA were to cease its operations in the OPT.¹⁴¹ By providing quasi-state services to more than half the population there, the agency relieved Israel of the financial obligations it would otherwise incur as the occupying power (for the same reason, many Palestinian nationalists later accused UNRWA of facilitating the occupation).¹⁴² Furthermore, many Israeli officials believed that UNRWA’s services ultimately created stability in the OPT and lessened the Palestinians’ resentment of the occupation by improving their economic conditions.¹⁴³ Israel thus mirrored the Arab host states in its balancing act between critiquing UNRWA’s politics and welcoming its service provision. Like the Arab regimes, Israel was far more invested in the status quo than its rhetoric suggested.

Accordingly, Israel quickly reached an understanding with UNRWA in June 1967. In what became known as the Michelmores-Comay Agreement, Israel requested that UNRWA continue to provide services to registered refugees in OPT and agreed to facilitate its operations there.¹⁴⁴ To avoid accusations of partisanship from the Arab host states, UNRWA’s Legal Department explicitly stated that this agreement did “not imply any recognition” of the Israeli occupation as legitimate and continually emphasized

that it held to the UN's condemnation of the occupation in UNSC Resolution 242.¹⁴⁵

Nevertheless, there were problems inherent in the Michelmores-Comay Agreement from the beginning. Its ambiguous division of responsibilities in the refugee camps was particularly troublesome. In theory, tasks were divided such that UNRWA maintained "custody" rights and continued to provide services in the camps, while Israel took charge of affairs relating to security and law and order.¹⁴⁶ In practice, this left a great deal up to interpretation, and Israel and UNRWA clashed repeatedly over jurisdiction in the camps.

Like the Arab host states, Israel was keen to emphasize UNRWA's duty to provide services to the refugees and to play down its own responsibility. It therefore declared the camps to be "essentially the responsibility of UNRWA."¹⁴⁷ Yet while publicly distancing itself from responsibility for the camps, Israel nevertheless targeted them in its regular crackdowns on Palestinian nationalist activity. This frequently led to heightened tensions with UNRWA. While Israel insisted that its actions were consistent with Michelmores-Comay, it diverged from UNRWA in its interpretation of what came under the domain of "security." In the view of the Israeli state, this included the right to take measures against politically active camp residents who were hostile to it.¹⁴⁸ UNRWA management, however, argued that Israeli interventions in the camps failed to respect the UN-granted immunity of its installations.¹⁴⁹ In 1982 the UNRWA West Bank director complained to the commissioner-general that Israel was infringing on Michelmores-Comay by continually entering the camps, and that the Israeli Army's actions were impeding the agency from carrying out its work.¹⁵⁰

In turn, the Israeli authorities resented what they perceived as UNRWA's inappropriate interference in security matters. They accused UNRWA of showing bias in its willingness to condemn Israeli actions while not taking issue with perceived Palestinian aggression.¹⁵¹ Moreover, Israeli officials argued that their actions in the camps were justified in view of UNRWA's poor record on maintaining security. Protesting directly to the UN, the Israeli government declared not only that the camps were terrorist hotbeds, but also that UNRWA could not be trusted to maintain order inside.¹⁵² In 1984 the Israeli senior liaison officer for civil administration in the West Bank contended that "law and order in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank]

is under IDF responsibility,” on the grounds that “ever since 1967 experience has shown that UNRWA is not capable of handling security problems.”¹⁵³

Aside from questions of jurisdiction and security, it was UNRWA’s education program that proved the biggest source of tension in its relations with Israel. Successive Israeli governments complained that UNRWA schools taught a “Palestinian narrative.”¹⁵⁴ Specifically, they contended that the agency’s use of the Jordanian curriculum in the West Bank and the Egyptian one in Gaza constituted an endorsement of the content’s alleged hostility to Israel.¹⁵⁵ Israel also alleged that the textbooks promoted anti-Semitism through biased historical narratives and maps.¹⁵⁶ From 1967 it deemed UNRWA’s clearance system with UNESCO insufficient and ruled that all textbooks now had to be approved by the Israeli Education Ministry as well.¹⁵⁷ The latter regularly refused the importation of certain books even after UNESCO had cleared them, while some had to be reprinted with the offending passages left out.¹⁵⁸ As an added measure, Israeli school inspectors carried out regular spot checks on UNRWA schools in the OPT.¹⁵⁹ Again, the issue of jurisdiction was raised, with Commissioner-General Thomas McElhiney instructing field staff in 1978 to “maintain local autonomy . . . [and] maximum independence in our operations,” while avoiding action that would damage relations with Israel.¹⁶⁰

Matters were not helped by UNRWA’s status as a UN agency, particularly one mandated by the UNGA. Many Israelis believed that the UNGA of the 1970s was in the hands of the pro-Palestinian Third Worldist states and was therefore biased against them.¹⁶¹ They took as evidence of this UNGA Resolution 3379, which declared Zionism to be a form of racism.¹⁶² As one of only two UN agencies to report directly to the UNGA, UNRWA was closely tied to it and was therefore tarred with the same brush.¹⁶³ As the 1970s wore on, Israel increasingly complained that the agency was becoming enmeshed in UNGA politics, with its permanent representative contending in 1974 that “for years the annual debates in the General Assembly on the reports of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA have been exploited by Arab and other delegations for political and propaganda purposes.”¹⁶⁴ Here, then, we see conflicting interpretations of “internationalism” at play again. While UN management cited UNRWA’s UN affiliation as proof of its apolitical internationalism, and the Palestinians saw it as suspiciously entangled with the West, the Israeli state perceived the UN as an anti-Israeli body biased against it.

Accusations of anti-Israeli bias grew from 1974 onward, as the UNGA repeatedly called on UNRWA to report on Israel's compliance with resolutions.¹⁶⁵ Israel condemned this move, claiming that it contravened the agency's humanitarian mandate through inappropriate politicization. Yet Israel always stopped short of calling for UNRWA's dissolution, as the benefits of its work continued to outweigh the drawbacks. Moreover, like all parties, Israel itself drew UNRWA into a political role. For example, when protesting the presence of Palestinian nationalist ideology in UNRWA schools, Israel complained to UNRWA about students' political demonstrations.¹⁶⁶ It pressured the agency to dismiss head teachers who were perceived to be encouraging political disorder and even threatened to close schools for this reason.¹⁶⁷ Thus while Israel formally objected to the UN giving UNRWA a monitoring role in the OPT, it nevertheless called on the agency to perform acts of political monitoring when it wanted to see its policies enforced.

Like the Arab host states, Israel walked a tightrope in its relationship with UNRWA. On the one hand, it was highly suspicious of UNRWA's embedded role in the refugee camps, which it saw as nests of Palestinian militancy. On the other, UNRWA's operations in the OPT saved Israel millions of dollars in service provision. Israel's dealings with UNRWA were therefore complex and somewhat inconsistent, as it sought to limit UNRWA's power while always ensuring that its core programs could and would continue. Like the Arab host states, its relationship with the agency was characterized by clashes over sovereignty, jurisdiction, autonomy, and immunity—often rooted in resentment over the international regime's separatism. And like them, it ultimately perceived UNRWA as a political body and reacted to its activities through a political lens. In this regard, regional responses to UNRWA were determined less by political positioning and more by the commonalities of statehood.

From the outset, Palestinian refugee identity was a contested category. Palestinian refugees themselves overwhelmingly reacted to it as a political status, while the UNRWA regime insisted on framing it in apolitical humanitarian terms. These contestations directly informed the agency's relations with the regional and international actors on whose support its work depended, as their conflicting interpretations of "internationalism"

regularly came to the fore. By the 1970s the regime was continuously walking a tightrope between these different pressures while balancing its own claims to be international.

At the same time, UNRWA's distinctive place vis-à-vis the Palestinian refugee situation gave it a discernibly quasi-state positioning in many of its international relations. UNRWA often acted as the refugees' *de facto* diplomatic representative, and the host states and donor states tended to look to it to undertake matters of jurisdiction in the camps. While regularly complaining about its unreasonable politicization, they were all happy to use it to their own ends when it suited them. As this book's second part explores in depth, this setup had major ramifications for the refugees' own relationship with the agency, as they continued to resist its apolitical constructions of their plight.

PALESTINIAN PERCEPTIONS

The Jews got Israel and we got UNRWA.

—SALAH SALAH

Leading PLO figure Salah Salah once remarked that two major grievances have dogged Palestinian refugees' relations with UNRWA. The first is operational: the refugees have frequently complained that UNRWA's service provision is inadequate for their needs. The second is political: they have protested the agency's political positioning, or lack thereof, in representing and protecting their rights.¹ The nature of these grievances reflects the refugees' perceptions of UNRWA, as both a Palestinian quasi-state and a local address for the UN. Palestinian refugees overwhelmingly saw the UN as a political stakeholder in their situation, meaning that they perceived UNRWA as a fundamentally political organization. In this they were aligned with the relevant regional and international actors, as explained in the previous chapter. Such a viewpoint is also consistent with critiques of the politics of international humanitarianism.² Nevertheless, Palestinian refugees' political perception of UNRWA has remained at odds with the agency's formal status as an apolitical aid body. The resulting divergence in understanding UNRWA's purpose made its relationship with the refugees complex and paradoxical. Throughout, the agency's international status has been central to this.

As UNRWA has been intimately connected with Palestinian refugees' daily lives since 1950, its relationship with them has been vulnerable to the impact of wider changes in the region, including an array of political,

geographical, and historical factors. Such dynamics were especially heightened during the thawra era of the long 1970s. The setup is complicated further by the fact that neither the Palestinian refugees nor UNRWA itself are monolithic. The former are a diverse community whose experiences can vary considerably. The latter is a multifaceted hybrid of the Western states that fund it and populate its senior ranks, the Arab states that host it, and the Palestinian refugees that staff its junior levels and receive its services. As a result, UNRWA's relationship with the refugees has always been dynamic and mutable, not fixed or static. The paradoxical and at times even contradictory nature of the refugees' attitudes toward UNRWA has been mirrored in the agency's responses to them, as variously patronizing, dismissive, loyal, paternalistic, protective, and solicitous.

The relationship's complexities can be explained by disparities in the parties' respective understandings of the agency's role. While figures on all sides have described UNRWA as a "quasi-state," interpretations of what this means differ considerably. The agency—here meaning UNRWA senior management, who have always been exclusively "international" and in practice almost entirely Western citizens—have generally used the term to denote the governmental nature of UNRWA's health and education programs. By contrast, most Palestinian refugees saw UNRWA as a quasi-state not only in terms of its services, but in how it comprised a weak substitute for the real state lost in 1948—a feeling encapsulated in the opening quotation from Salah Salah that "the Jews got Israel and we got UNRWA." This perception is grounded in UNRWA's UN status, which led many refugees to see its work as compensation for the UN's original culpability in preventing their national self-determination and enabling the partition of Palestine in 1947–1948.³ According to this viewpoint, UNRWA signified international responsibility for the Palestinian plight; as such, it is not simply an aid agency but a symbol of their political rights.

Such ideas directly informed Palestinian refugee expectations when it came to UNRWA. They largely saw its services not as charity but as entitlements. Accordingly, any moves by the agency to reduce its services were greeted with horrified protests, as the refugees feared that their already limited political rights were being curtailed further. On the same grounds, many held UNRWA responsible for their protection and resented its perceived failure to advocate for them politically on the world stage. In some cases, this fueled Palestinian suspicions that the agency was a foreign

implant, working to serve the objectives of its Western donor states and the Western-dominated UN.

I argue here that UNRWA's international status was key to its relationship with the Palestinian refugees, driving their perceptions and interactions. While many scholars have acknowledged UNRWA's historical significance in the refugees' daily lives,⁴ as well as their relationship's complex dynamics,⁵ the existing historiography neglects the significance of UNRWA's internationalism in this regard. In fact, the complex intersection between UN-based internationalism and the Palestinian refugee situation was critical to shaping this relationship. More than any other factor, it can explain the refugees' paradoxical relationship with the agency, whereby they simultaneously regarded it as a manifestation of their political rights and a suspicious foreign implant. As such, UNRWA embodied many of the struggles at the heart of Palestinian refugee politics.

REFUGEE PERCEPTIONS: UNRWA AS UN BODY

For many Palestinian refugees, the circumstances of UNRWA's setup were pivotal to how they understood its significance. In particular, many of their judgments about the agency were based on its status as a UN body reliant on Western funding. Their grievances and sense of entitlement were regularly framed in terms of the agency's affiliation to the UN, which they understood in overwhelmingly political terms. This association did not bode well for the agency. The Palestinians had been largely hostile toward the UN ever since UNGA Resolution 181 had undermined their national sovereignty by approving Palestine's partition in November 1947.⁶ Resulting suspicion toward the UN from Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular was exacerbated by its decision to admit Israel as a full member state in May 1949, while the Palestinian refugees remained dispossessed and stateless.⁷

Nineteen years later, UNSC Resolution 242 caused further anger toward the UN when it ignored the Palestinian people's political rights and merely referring to "the refugee problem."⁸ Leila Khaled would later describe the Resolution as having "sanctified Israel's permanent conquest of my home in Palestine."⁹ Historian Rashid Khalidi, whose father worked at the UN Headquarters in New York at the time, has dubbed it "the third declaration of war on the Palestinian people by a great power."¹⁰

Resulting Palestinian hostility toward the UN extended to UNRWA. To many refugees, the agency was simply the local face of the Western-dominated “international community” that oversaw the United Nations.¹¹ They accordingly approached it with considerable mistrust and sometimes outright hostility, with many suspecting it to be a tool of imperialist Western diplomacy in the Middle East.¹² In his autobiography, Fawaz Turki disdainfully describes UNRWA as an agency of “the very body [the UN] that was responsible for our original displacement.”¹³ Hajj Amin el Husseini made the same point to the director of UNRWA affairs in Lebanon in 1963 when asked why so many Palestinians mistrusted the agency.¹⁴

Such suspicion even led some refugees to agitate against the agency. In 1960 a refugee group calling themselves the “Badge of the Arab Palestine Youth in Lebanon” issued the following statement to UNRWA: “The UN who is in the origin a cause in the disaster [i.e., the Nakba] cannot be considered the suitable Organization to solve the Palestine Problem . . . the Relief Agency [UNRWA] is a danger threatening [the Palestinian] cause particularly because it executes the many projects according to an Imperialistic Jewish plan.”¹⁵ In other words, the simple fact of UNRWA’s UN status automatically politicized it in the eyes of this group and undermined its claims to be a mere welfare agency. Such perceptions were fueled by the knowledge that UNRWA received the bulk of its funding from Western states that were allied to Israel, particularly the United States and the UK.¹⁶ In the eyes of many refugees, these were the two states most hostile to their interests.¹⁷ Their financial leverage over the agency therefore created suspicions about its real intentions.¹⁸

To make matters worse, UNRWA’s internal staffing structures ensured that power remained in the hands of its “international” employees, who were in reality nearly always Westerners. The Palestinian refugees who constituted the vast majority of UNRWA employees were consistently, if unofficially, blocked from positions of senior management.¹⁹ This caused considerable resentment and gave added weight to the feeling that the agency was ultimately a neocolonial body imposed on the Middle East by the West. Further evidence of the latter was drawn from the fact that until the appointment of Turkish diplomat İltir Türkmen in 1991, every UNRWA director and commissioner-general had been North American or Western European, and the same has been true since Türkmen’s departure in 1996.²⁰

The refugees' suspicions about UNRWA were thus closely tied to its international setup at the UN. Yet Palestinian feelings about the latter went beyond suspicion alone.²¹ As observed in chapter 1, UNRWA's status as a UN body also created a strong sense of entitlement. Many refugees held that UNRWA existed as an international obligation, even a meager form of compensation, for the world's abandonment of them in 1948.²² It was not only the refugees themselves who saw the UNRWA regime in this way; former commissioner-general John Davis (in post 1959–1963) later wrote that the agency was "one of the prices—and perhaps the cheapest—that the international community was paying for not having to solve with equity the political problems of the refugees."²³

In the eyes of the refugees, this made UNRWA an international signifier of their political and legal rights.²⁴ As such, its services were their entitlement, its registration cards proof of their political rights.²⁵ This idea remained pervasive despite UNRWA's denials of such an interpretation.²⁶ Consequently, the refugees were keen for the agency's work to continue, despite their criticisms of it, and tended to react with alarm to any suggestion that it might be dissolved before their plight was resolved.²⁷

Moreover, many refugees were keen to take advantage of having a "local address" for the United Nations in their midst, trying to use UNRWA as a medium for reaching the international organization. Thus in 1961 a group of refugees in Jordan wrote to the commissioner-general, first asking him for water and then requesting that he "inform the United Nations that we will never be able to forget our dear homeland, no matter how long we shall have to endure this miserable condition. We shall not accept any substitute for our homeland, nor relinquish it for any bribe."²⁸

This was not an isolated incident. The following year, on the fifteenth anniversary of the Partition Plan, a group of refugees in Lebanon distributed a pamphlet around the camps calling for a boycott of UNRWA services in order to "make our objections and persistence heard by the United Nations."²⁹ Similar conceptions of UNRWA's reach continued to hold sway in subsequent years. In 1968 Palestinian women's associations across the OPT sent petitions protesting the Israeli occupation to both Commissioner-General Michelmores and Secretary-General Thant.³⁰ Three years later, refugees in Gaza appealed unsuccessfully to UNRWA to compel the UN to stop Israeli house demolitions.³¹ The method of seeking to reach the UN via UNRWA was thus pervasive.

The refugees' biggest grievances against the agency reflect the simultaneous presence of suspicion and entitlement. Their complaints were usually expressed within the framework of UNRWA's international status, with the refugees pointing to the agency's place at the UN when complaining about its inadequacies. Their feelings of entitlement stemmed from the UN's failings in 1947–1948; their suspicion was based on the UN's perceived neo-colonial structures.³² Each of these elements had particular implications for the relationship between the refugees and the agency.

ENTITLEMENT AND OWNERSHIP: UNRWA AS QUASI-STATE

Palestinian refugees are by no means alone in probing the political meaning of aid programs. Many scholars have asked similar questions. In fact, anthropologist Liisa Malkki argues that humanitarian interventions intrinsically depoliticize refugees, by constructing them as individual humanitarian subjects stripped of their collective historical and geographical contexts.³³ Didier Fassin similarly writes that humanitarian regimes compel recipients to become “not political subjects but moral objects,” meaning they lose their agency and autonomy.³⁴ Such critiques have a particular applicability to the Palestinian case, in view of the tendency for post-1948 international political discourse to separate the humanitarian “Arab refugee” issue from the political Palestinian struggle.³⁵

As this indicates, debates over the politics of humanitarianism have often been especially fraught when it comes to Palestine. Numerous activists have criticized the phenomenon of “NGOization,” whereby civil society organizations and social justice movements are compelled to depoliticize their activities in order to attain funding from Western governments and donors. The resulting process undermines political dissent and mimics colonial power dynamics.³⁶ Linda Tabar calls this “the anti-politics of humanitarianism,” arguing that international humanitarian culture elides the political causes of Palestinian crises and resulting need for aid.³⁷ UNRWA is not an NGO and is therefore categorically distinctive here, but much of this discourse remains applicable to its work. Most notably, the UNRWA regime does risk undermining the refugees' political resistance, by presenting their plight in purely humanitarian terms.³⁸ This risk is one reason why the refugees themselves have insistently treated UNRWA as a political organization and rejected any suggestions to the contrary.

Historically, this approach was further fueled by the fact that many Palestinian refugees found the idea of receiving aid shameful and humiliating, especially if they had previously been self-sufficient agriculturalists in pre-1948 Palestine.³⁹ In 1953 notables from villages in southern Palestine held a conference for refugees in Gaza, where they asserted, “We want to return home. We do not want [UN] food and shelter.”⁴⁰ With these words, they made it clear that aid could never be a substitute for political action, and that they would not accept it as such. This would prove a lasting motif. Even the term “refugee” was unpopular among many Palestinians due to its connotations of powerlessness and denationalization.⁴¹

Such notions underpinned the refugees’ responses to UNRWA services. While they did not refuse the agency’s provisions, they were adamant in accepting them on their own terms, as entitlements rather than charity.⁴² Provisions such as rations were thus not considered welfare, but political proof of their refugee status and resulting political rights.⁴³ Accordingly, the aforementioned Badge of the Arab Palestine Youth in Lebanon proclaimed in its 1960 statement that “the services of our agency are our rights and not favors or charity from her.”⁴⁴ The language of this phrase is doubly telling, even in translation—not only do the refugees speak of services as rights, but they also refer to UNRWA as “our” agency (*wikalatna*), indicating a sense of ownership over its operations.

This framing reflects a long-running intimacy between the two, which was so pronounced that their relationship has sometimes been characterized in familial terms. Jalal al-Husseini calls it “a difficult but lasting marriage,”⁴⁵ while Turki uses the less positive moniker of “our contemptuous stepmother” to describe the agency.⁴⁶ Evidently there was a central divergence in how UNRWA management and refugee communities perceived their dynamics: the agency’s work is based on the apolitical provision of services, but the refugees conceptualize their situation in fundamentally political terms.⁴⁷ Strikingly, the refugees succeeded in continuously pushing forward their contrarian view of UNRWA’s services, despite their vulnerability and structural powerlessness.

UNRWA and Refugee Rights

The depth and nature of the refugees’ feelings of entitlement toward UNRWA’s services are indicative of its *de facto* role as their quasi-state

government. Salah's comment that "the Jews got Israel and we got UNRWA," quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, is highly revealing in this sense.⁴⁸ In juxtaposing the creation of Israel with the establishment of UNRWA, Salah alludes to the notion that the agency emerged directly out of the UN's failure to guarantee the Palestinian state envisioned in Resolution 181. He also invokes a deeper idea prevalent among many refugees: that UNRWA is an inferior compensation prize given to the Palestinians while their Jewish counterparts got a full-fledged nation-state with a full infrastructure and national army. Such thinking has fueled criticism of UNRWA as a toothless quasi-state that lacks sufficient funding and, in the eyes of many refugees, has failed to properly advocate for their rights on the world stage.

At the heart of such critiques lies the issue of what it really means to speak of UNRWA in state-like terms. There is some consensus on this: most parties agree that in taking responsibility for providing large-scale health and education programs to a particular group of people in certain demarcated territories, UNRWA holds some of the functions that would otherwise fall to a state.⁴⁹ Indeed, Matthias Schmale, a long-term UNRWA director in both Lebanon and Gaza, has relayed how Palestinian refugees regularly told him that they saw the agency as akin to a government in this regard.⁵⁰

At the same time, UNRWA is indisputably only *state-like*. It of course lacks the monopoly on force and coercion conventionally treated as an essential condition of statehood in European political thought, although its structural constraints may give it some alignment with postcolonial states that remain beholden to the Global North.⁵¹ With no security or policing apparatus to impose its will, UNRWA does not hold territory and remains a guest at the invitation of the various host states. UNRWA management have consistently highlighted these limitations when trying to distance the agency from the camps' militancy.⁵² Essentially, then, UNRWA holds some of the governmental features of a state without its security functions—hence being referred to here as a "quasi-state." Sociologist Sari Hanafi similarly speaks of it as a "phantom sovereign," highlighting the *effects* of state-like power that emanate from its services, and the way in which the refugees perceive its role as a result.⁵³

For many refugees, this has fed directly into their sense of entitlement regarding UNRWA. When unregistered Palestinian refugees in Syria

protested in 1970 at having to pay UNRWA school fees for their children, they did so on the grounds that “it is their *right, as Palestinians*, to have their education at UNRWA schools free of charge” (emphasis added).⁵⁴ The reference to their Palestinian nationality implies that UNRWA has an obligation to *all* Palestinians, just as a national government would to all its citizens. In a more explicit expression of this idea, the Lebanon Branch of the General Union of Palestinian Studies (GUPS) spoke of UNRWA’s “commitments towards its populace,” stating that the “right of tuition should be granted to all Palestinians who simply hold the Palestine nationality.”⁵⁵

This understanding of UNRWA’s responsibilities has withstood time. Former UNRWA commissioner-general Filippo Grandi, who oversaw the agency from 2010 to 2014, expounded a similar idea when defending its provision of free health care and education to all registered refugees, regardless of their individual financial circumstances. In an interview with the author, Grandi argued that all registered Palestinian refugees should be entitled to use UNRWA schools and hospitals, just as any Italian citizen can access free state education and health care in Italy. By using the Italian state analogy, he made a direct if unacknowledged reference to UNRWA’s quasi-state nature.⁵⁶ Schmale did the same when explaining the rationale behind universal entitlement to UNRWA’s health and education programs, as opposed to its more specialized needs-based and means-tested services.⁵⁷

This perception of UNRWA as a quasi-state has generated an expectation of protection from many Palestinian refugees, especially in times of particular vulnerability. Roy Skinner, the agency’s former director in Jerusalem, has said that the refugees instinctively look to UNRWA in times of trouble, and there is clear evidence of this from very early on.⁵⁸ As early as 1955, when Israeli forces killed a Palestinian boy during the Gaza raid, the community responded with demonstrations that targeted the agency as well as the Egyptian administration.⁵⁹ This is a highly telling indication that many Palestinians saw UNRWA as a form of government even on a par with the Egyptian state. It also shows how they understood the agency’s role in a way that extended beyond merely providing services; in their eyes, UNRWA’s quasi-state role meant that it was responsible for protecting them. The boy’s death was therefore a failing on the agency’s part as well as on that of the Egyptian government.

The response to the Gaza Raid was not a one-off but rather an early example of numerous lasting trends in the refugees’ relationship with

UNRWA. It exemplified their attempts to turn the conventional aid relationship on its head by using the agency to demand their rights. It also fed into their charge that UNRWA not only provided insufficient services but also failed to protect them. These themes only intensified after 1967, particularly in the OPT. As discussed in chapter 2, this period saw the Israeli occupying authorities demolish camp structures in Gaza and forcibly transfer refugees to new residences, sometimes outside Gaza altogether.⁶⁰ The refugees, highly vulnerable and lacking any substantive representative authority, implored UNRWA to take action on their behalf.⁶¹

UNRWA was not completely unresponsive to such calls. Senior management sometimes advocated for the refugees' rights—albeit not as frequently or forcefully as the refugees wanted. Successive commissioner-generals called for the implementation of the right of return in their annual reports to the UNGA, in keeping with Resolution 194. After the onset of the Israeli occupation, they also used their reports to highlight rights abuses in the OPT, such as restrictions on freedom of movement and militaristic punitive measures against the camps. In 1968 Commissioner-General Michelmores formally spoke out on disagreements over the status of those Palestinians displaced by the 1967 war, demanding that the right of return be implemented for *all* refugees from Palestine.⁶² Later years saw senior management take their complaints over the treatment of refugees in the OPT—including the aforementioned policies in Gaza—directly to the Israeli authorities.⁶³

With such acts of advocacy, UNRWA management fueled notions that the agency was a quasi-state representing the Palestinian refugees. In so doing, they also challenged—inadvertently or otherwise—the formal restrictions on the agency's role. Unlike UNHCR, UNRWA has never had a formal mandate for protection. Its forays into the field of protection were always ad hoc and informal. While this left the Palestinians at a disadvantage when compared to other refugees, it would be inaccurate to say that the agency did not pursue protection activities at all.⁶⁴ In practice, there were piecemeal advocacy efforts, usually driven by staff members who privately expressed sympathy and even outrage over the politics of the refugees' plight.⁶⁵

On occasion, staff sympathy for the refugees even extended to empathy for their criticisms of UNRWA. In his report to the UNGA in 1975, Commissioner-General Rennie wrote that the refugees' tendency to view

the agency's financial and logistic problems through a political lens was "understandable."⁶⁶ Four years later his successor Olof Rydbeck demonstrated a similarly clear grasp of the refugees' understanding of UNRWA's role when he wrote that "because of the quasi-governmental nature of the services that UNRWA provides, the acknowledged status as a refugee under UNRWA rules to many refugees has come to acquire the character of an internationally recognized proof of their Palestinian identity." It is particularly significant that Rydbeck acknowledged the implications of UNRWA's quasi-governmental nature here. In the same statement he noted that ceasing UNRWA's services before the refugees' situation had been resolved "would be seen by all refugees, yes by all Palestinians, as a failure of the international community to meet its moral and political obligations towards [them]."⁶⁷

While the cessation of UNRWA services did not come to pass, Rydbeck's concerns played out in another way. As the Palestinian refugee crisis remained unresolved across the decades, UNRWA faced increasing demands for its services, juxtaposed with insufficient funding. The agency responded by making a range of serious cuts to its services. As Rydbeck had intimated, these moves were met with large-scale opposition from refugee communities, who argued that such reductions violated their rights. The combination of suspicion and entitlement accordingly reached new heights.

UNRWA Services: Demands, Complaints, and Cuts

UNRWA's provision of services constituted its *raison d'être* in the camps and was in many ways the backbone of its relationship with the Palestinian refugees. In an interview with the author, Maria Kekeliova, a former UNRWA employee in Gaza, commented on the direct correlation between the agency's provision of services and the level of harmony in UNRWA-refugee relations. Whenever cuts in the former were announced, problems in the latter ensued.⁶⁸ Again, this was based on the notion of services as rights, with the refugees usually arguing that they were entitled to more than they were receiving.⁶⁹ In this regard, refugee communities fundamentally distinguished between UNRWA services (entitlements) and any provisions received from NGOs (charity).

This understanding was sufficiently deep-seated for the refugees to organize formal protests on its basis from early on. In 1961 the chair of the

Damascus branch of the GUPS wrote to the UNRWA area director, complaining about the agency's "trifle assistance" and calling for increased services for the refugees. He framed these demands in terms of the latter's political entitlements, writing: "It is the duty of UNRWA to alleviate the pains of [Palestinian refugees]. . . . The responsible persons in UNRWA are called not to forget that the people of Palestine have been wronged and oppressed. It is the duty of humanity which caused this oppression to secure for this people the means of tranquility and easiness."⁷⁰ In other words, UNRWA services were a form of penance from the international community, and as such there could be no excuse for their inadequacy.

Accordingly, any reductions in UNRWA services were met with not only fierce protests from the refugees, but outrage and alarm over the implications. If the services were evidence of international duty toward Palestinian refugees, it followed that service reductions may be a sign of this duty being relinquished. UNRWA management themselves were long aware of the dominance of this idea. As early as 1956, Director Henry Labrousse had expressed his concern that the refugees would perceive program cuts as "part of a politically inspired program of gradual withdrawal of UN support."⁷¹ Around the same time, the Jordanian government protested UNRWA's investigations into its registration rolls, fearing that the move would precipitate mass protests.⁷² This intervention by a host government shows how such ideas were not only long-standing, but significant enough to be noted by numerous parties.

The refugees' alarm over cuts tended to be particularly acute when it came to moves by the agency to restrict its eligibility criteria, which generated fears of a greater plan to dissolve UNRWA and abandon the refugees altogether.⁷³ As a result, the refugees were always quick to organize against any such measures. In November 1967, for example, the West Bank camp residents refused rations in protest at intensified eligibility checks and attempts by UNRWA to reduce its recipient lists.⁷⁴ Six years later unregistered Palestinian refugees in Syria protested an UNRWA directive for them to pay school fees, insisting that an UNRWA education was their right as Palestinian refugees.⁷⁵

Such anxieties intensified after UNRWA began making systematic service cuts in the 1970s, in an attempt to tackle its funding shortfall. This fed directly into fears that its work was being gradually dissolved. Agency

management were aware of this but reasoned that the deficit left them with no other option. Voicing internal concerns about the possible repercussions, UNRWA official Thomas Jamieson wrote to a colleague that any termination in services “would most probably create major despair . . . and suspicion.”⁷⁶

Unsurprisingly, he was proven correct. Over the course of the 1970s, Palestinian camp communities organized a series of protests against the UNRWA cuts, doing everything possible to voice their opposition. The agitation took various forms, comprising demonstrations, sit-ins, petitions, and strikes. It was most marked in the West Bank, where the cuts had the most severe impact. The protests were on such a large scale that local UNRWA staff reported to the UN Secretariat in New York that their operations were being hindered as a result. In one 1976 cable, the Jerusalem office reported being “inundated with cables, petitions, representations and press reports received almost daily . . . from all over West Bank” protesting the service cuts.⁷⁷

In the same cable, the Jerusalem office described how delegations of refugee community leaders had been visiting UNRWA’s field and area offices to discuss the grievances. The cable’s author added that mayors from the Nablus and Hebron areas had been especially active in the campaigns. As discussed in chapter 2, local *mukhtars* (sometimes referred to as “mayors” in English) had been key figures in refugee campaigns against Israel’s moves to permanently resettle refugees outside the camps in post-1967 Gaza. This evidence shows that the mukhtars’ leading role in political organization transcended time and space. In view of their long-running significance in Palestinian refugee politics, it is worth briefly considering here the role and significance of the camp mukhtars.

The position of mukhtar can be traced back to pre-Nakba Palestine, where it referred to the village headman. In Mandate Palestine, the mukhtar drew his power—it was nearly always a “he”—from both the colonial state and local patronage networks, usually based in kinship. Before 1948 the mukhtar’s role involved local administration and mediation.⁷⁸ Afterward, much of this transferred over directly into the camps, and camp mukhtars—themselves refugees who had been displaced during the Nakba—became important figures in mediating between refugee communities, host states, host communities, and UNRWA.⁷⁹ The resulting dynamics played out in the meetings between camp mukhtars and UNRWA officials in the West

Bank over service cuts in the 1970s. At the same time, camp mukhtars were active in organizing strikes and sit-ins to protest the cuts.⁸⁰

According to UNRWA's records, one of the most prominent mukhtars in discussions at this time was Abdullah Jibril el-Bishawi of Balata camp.⁸¹ Located close to Nablus, Balata is the most populous refugee camp in the West Bank, despite being one of the smallest in area size. Originally intended to shelter five thousand refugees, by the 1970s it was home to twice this number. The camp's active civil society, combined with its large population, meant that it often played a key role in political campaigns, and this period was no exception. In 1979 Bishawi wrote a series of letters to the UN Secretariat, complaining about UNRWA's insufficient provision of services, including ration reductions, and the unacceptable conditions in which Palestinian refugees were forced to live. He highlighted problems in Balata, including unsound buildings, inadequate sanitation, and overcrowding in schools, and implored the secretary-general to visit in order to see for himself.⁸² His communications reached New York and solicited several replies from the under-secretary-general for special political affairs, in which the latter sought to assure him that the UN and UNRWA were aware of the situation and shared his concerns.⁸³

Bishawi also appealed directly to UNRWA management. In October that year, he wrote to the UNRWA commissioner-general:

I submit this letter to your Excellency appealing to you and to all men of conscience and God-fearing people to come to the rescue of the Palestine Refugees in the West Bank who dwell in houses or rather dilapidated huts which may collapse at any moment. . . . You have reduced relief and cut down the food of the poor and miserable people who have become street beggars. The schools can no longer cope with the number of students. . . . The roads in the camps are muddy and neglected . . . we are approaching a hard winter and where is the relief which is mentioned in the very name of your agency? Instead, it has become the Agency of starvation, destitution, bankruptcy, injustice and tyranny. We are your responsibility and you should provide us with relief, care and services.⁸⁴

Bishawi thus reiterated the refugees' feeling of rights-based entitlement regarding UNRWA, imploring it to fulfill its responsibilities while also acting in good conscience.

Again, Bishawi received a reply, although this one was blunter in its tone. Shortly after Bishawi had penned his letter to the commissioner-general, UNRWA director John F. Defrates responded: "Contrary to your belief, the Commissioner-General has drawn attention to the plight of the Palestine refugees in his Annual Report to the UN General Assembly and has just appealed once again to Member States of the UN for the funds necessary to maintain and improve UNRWA's services to the refugees."⁸⁵ Defrates's tone here reflects widespread frustration among senior agency management. Many saw themselves as compelled to perform an impossible juggling act in order to satisfy the various parties to which they were answerable, receiving the refugees' complaints without having the power to properly address them.

The content of Defrates's reply to Bishawi is also revealing. While rebutting the suggestion that UNRWA was doing nothing to support the Palestinian refugees, he also highlights the agency's structural limitations, implicitly pointing out that UNRWA is ultimately dependent on the UN's member states to provide it with the necessary funding to provide sufficient services. In making this point, Defrates seeks to assert the agency's concern for the refugees while at the same time emphasizing the limitations of what it can do. Such protestations from agency management failed to quell the refugees' complaints.

As the cuts continued, camp communities reacted with particular alarm to reductions in the UNRWA education program—unsurprisingly, in view of the special importance many refugees placed on it.⁸⁶ In the 1970 refugees at two camps in Jordan organized strikes in response to rumors that eligibility for registration at UNRWA schools was to be restricted.⁸⁷ The rumors turned out to be false; UNRWA management were aware of education's importance to the refugees and accordingly tried to protect it from the cuts for as long as possible.⁸⁸ However, they could not do so completely. The 1970s saw the agency decrease its education grants, prompting student sit-ins at schools in Lebanon.⁸⁹ As its financial situation worsened, UNRWA introduced double- and triple-shifting in its schools from 1978, meaning that two or three different groups of students would be taught over the course of a single day. This allowed UNRWA to save resources but reduced the students' access to teaching. In 1981 the agency went even further, distributing provisional termination notices to five thousand teachers in Jordan and Syria. In keeping with their long-term concerns, many refugees



FIG. 4.1. Double-shifting at an UNRWA elementary school in Gaza, 1975. Children who have finished the morning shift prepare to leave as the afternoon shift of pupils line up to enter the school. Photo courtesy of UNRWA.

took this as the first move in a greater plan to liquidate the agency completely and consign their cause to international oblivion.⁹⁰

The variation in the assistance that host states provided to the refugees meant that the UNRWA cuts did not have an equal impact across the fields. Yet the refugees' opposition to the cuts, and the grounds on which it was based, was often universal. Across the agency's fields, the refugees maintained the line that its services were their right. Accordingly, they consistently rejected UNRWA's defense that its funding shortfall compelled it to distinguish between them and prioritize some beneficiaries over others.⁹¹ Ironically, such universalism marked one way in which UNRWA helped maintain the refugees' shared Palestinian consciousness across the borders of the host states—even when it was being facilitated by widespread opposition to the agency.⁹²

Disputes over UNRWA's service cuts were also tied to the agency's limitations as a quasi-state. As the agency's "citizens" were aid recipients, they lacked any financial or democratic leverage over its operations. Put simply, the Palestinian refugees did not fund UNRWA's work through taxes or any

equivalent payment and as such did not have the direct investment that would have created accountability in the relationship.⁹³ Instead UNRWA was funded by, and answerable to, the Western donor states. This created a lopsided dynamic whereby the refugees saw UNRWA as “their” agency but did not have the financial leverage to call it to account or make it genuinely answerable to their demands, fueling the notion that the agency was really a foreign implant controlled by the West.

SUSPICION AND HOSTILITY: UNRWA AS FOREIGN IMPLANT

Western domination of international politics at the UN led many Palestinian refugees to fear that UNRWA was positioned against their political interests. The agency itself has always insisted that it has an entirely apolitical mandate, consistently rejecting calls to take on a political role.⁹⁴ There is a fundamental incompatibility, however, between UNRWA’s claims to be apolitical and its engagement with such a highly politicized arena—an incompatibility that the agency has sometimes privately acknowledged.⁹⁵ Aware of this and skeptical of UNRWA’s claims to be apolitical, the refugees have long called for it to be more active in political campaigning and advocacy.⁹⁶ UNRWA’s perceived shortcomings in this area, combined with its UN affiliation and Western funding, have fueled concerns among many refugees that it might be a foreign implant with antagonistic ulterior motives. This suspicion has sat uncomfortably alongside the aforementioned intimacy with the agency as a state substitute, and the resulting paradox has generated many of the relationship’s inconsistencies and complexities.

UNRWA’s early involvement in the “reintegration” projects of the 1950s did nothing to allay such suspicions. The projects, while ultimately unsuccessful, played a formative role in the refugees’ impressions of UNRWA and did lasting harm to the relationship.⁹⁷ They also served to highlight the inherent contradiction between the UN’s ostensible commitment to repatriation and UNRWA’s mission of economic development.⁹⁸ As a result, the refugees concluded that UNRWA’s actions were not only political, but politically hostile to their own interests—particularly as the United States supported the reintegration program.⁹⁹ The episode proved pivotal to the refugees’ long-running suspicion that UNRWA was operating with a hidden political purpose foreign to their interests.

UNRWA's paternalistic approach did nothing to diminish perceptions that it was a neocolonial body. The agency's frequent failure to consult the refugees about its programs had been a major grievance during the "reintegration" schemes, and it remained a sore point thereafter.¹⁰⁰ In its 1960 statement, the aforementioned Badge of the Arab Palestine Youth complained about UNRWA's paternalism, writing, "The Relief Agency behave [*sic*] as if it was a Government having a fixed aspect, enacting rules and regulations to apply to the emigrants (as if they were its subjects)."¹⁰¹ With this they expressed a very common grievance among many refugees, namely, that UNRWA imposed its policies imperiously, with no recognition of the former's rights or agency. Even two decades later, this remained a problem. In an interview with U.S. journalist Milton Viorst in the 1980s, Commissioner-General Rydbeck said that UNRWA had made too many decisions over the years on behalf of the Palestinians.¹⁰² Such paternalism is of course particularly problematic in a setting where many refugees already feared that UNRWA had been sent in as a foreign implant to suppress their national cause.

This representation of UNRWA appeared to be exemplified by its internal staffing structure. While registered Palestinian refugees formed the bulk of the agency's personnel, they were consistently denied senior positions.¹⁰³ Although this was not an official rule, management spoke openly in internal communications of the need to exclude Palestinians from high-level roles. In 1957 UNRWA's chief administrative officer wrote to the UN chief of purchase and transportation: "Most of the [UNRWA] staff is locally recruited and their training and approach to any situation follows the customs and practices of the Middle East. The same results cannot be obtained from locally recruited staff as could be expected from a European or American staff. We find this to be true at our own Headquarters here [in Gaza], I regret to say."¹⁰⁴ Such condescension was typical and not confined to the period. Ten years later, when navigating the new reality of Israeli occupation, the director of education wrote to the commissioner-general that UNRWA education in the OPT should be headed by "an Arabic-speaking non-Arab International," as the required relationship with the Israeli authorities would "be beyond the capacity of a Palestinian Area staff member to cope with satisfactorily."¹⁰⁵

In turn, Palestinian staff often resented the perceived snobbery and arrogance of their international colleagues, seeing the latter's behavior as

disrespectful.¹⁰⁶ While the levels of tension between Palestinian and international staff ebbed and flowed, the causes were fairly consistent, always stemming from their differential statuses and salaries.¹⁰⁷ This meant that UNRWA's international staffing system tended to come in for particular criticism at times of service cuts. Knowing that international staff received higher salaries, many locals felt that funds were being wrongly allocated to the top tier of wages rather than going to services for the refugees.¹⁰⁸ In 1973 the Jordanian publication *Al Lewa* claimed that the UNRWA deficit was "imaginary" if one considered the gross inequality between the salaries of foreign staff and the costs of services to refugees.¹⁰⁹ Tensions were exacerbated by the short-term nature of most international postings with the agency, which hindered the potential for staff familiarity and acclimatization.¹¹⁰

The positionality of UNRWA's Palestinian employees encapsulated many of the paradoxes of the agency-refugee relationship. They tended to identify primarily as Palestinian refugees rather than UN staff—an identification that was reinforced by UNRWA's exclusive two-tiered structure. As such they were often unable to separate themselves from the complicated feelings that many refugees had about the agency and generally did not differ from the rest of the Palestinian community in being frequently critical of it.¹¹¹ Palestinian UNRWA staff often spoke with a dual voice, switching between "us" (refugees) and "it" (UNRWA), with "them" used to denote the agency's international staff.¹¹²

Despite this sense of separateness, Palestinian staff's UNRWA affiliation could still affect how they were perceived in the community. On occasion they were cast as "traitors" for colluding with a body perceived to be pro-Western or even pro-Israeli.¹¹³ More often, Palestinian UNRWA staff were the subject of envy for their benefits.¹¹⁴ Recalling his childhood in 1950s at Deir al-Balah camp in Gaza, Abdel Bari Atwan writes that "getting a job at UNRWA was the dream of every refugee, offering security and a good salary, and those lucky enough to have one were envied."¹¹⁵ Al-Hout has similar recollections.¹¹⁶ Again, complexity and paradox dominated the situation.

After 1967: UNRWA as Israeli Collaborator

The notion of UNRWA as a foreign implant, and accompanying criticisms of its political positioning, grew legs after 1967. There were two key reasons

for this. First, the new reality in the OPT meant that UNRWA was now working with the Israeli authorities to implement its services there. Some regarded this as an act of collaboration, or even an endorsement of the Israeli occupation.¹¹⁷ Second, the Palestinian *thawra* in the camps outside the OPT led to increasingly overt politicization and activism among the refugees. This created new difficulties for the supposedly apolitical agency.¹¹⁸

UNRWA's Palestinian staff were positioned at the heart of both issues. Accusations of "treachery," rare before 1967, now became more common, albeit still unusual. In late 1967 one refugee employee of UNRWA in Gaza even received a written death threat, with the sender referring to his work on the agency's census in the OPT as "the biggest crime [against the] Palestinian people."¹¹⁹ In a less extreme example, a Palestinian official at the UNRWA Jerusalem office reported that the Askar camp mukhtar had called him a "collaborator with [the] occupation authorities" during a sit-in protest in 1976.¹²⁰

Yet beyond this, Palestinian staff themselves increasingly expressed concern about the agency's political positioning. A particular point of tension in the OPT concerned Israeli interference in the running of UNRWA schools. The introduction of new screenings and school inspections was taken as evidence that the agency was in league with the refugees' enemies. The UNRWA schoolteachers were themselves overwhelmingly Palestinian; they were also unionized and already in regular conflict with the agency over pay and conditions.¹²¹ Unsurprisingly, they quickly became central to the controversy. Many joined the students in going on strike to protest the Israeli interventions.¹²² Certain Israeli policies heightened tensions further, as UNRWA teachers found themselves screened for security, with the agency unable to stop the practice.¹²³

Some of the biggest tensions erupted over the Israeli authorities' insistence on inspecting textbooks before they could be used in UNRWA schools. This created long delays that left teachers without the resources they needed to work. In February 1970 teachers' committees in the West Bank sent a series of letters and petitions to UNRWA complaining that the terms of the agency's agreement with Israel were leaving them unable to do their jobs. The UNRWA Education Officer for the West Bank noted that "the tone of all [the teachers' communications] was full of bitterness."¹²⁴ A memo from the Nablus Area Teachers' Committee also accused UNRWA of failing to

fulfill its obligations, in another manifestation of the refugees' underlying views of the agency as their de facto government.¹²⁵

In the same period, UNRWA was facing related tensions with its Palestinian staff outside the OPT. As the thawra took hold, the struggle to liberate Palestine came to dominate the discourse in many refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan.¹²⁶ UNRWA's Palestinian staff increasingly took issue with the agency's refusal to formally engage with the politics of their plight. While they were prohibited from politicizing their work for the agency, many were unwilling to stay out of politics altogether. In fact, they did the exact opposite, seeking to fuse their humanitarianism with nationalism, for example by informally incorporating nationalist ideas into their teaching.¹²⁷ This trend was significant enough for UNRWA to acknowledge it publicly. An issue of its newsletter *Palestine Refugees Today* in 1970 stated that local staff's attitudes had come to reflect the rise of "the Palestine politico-military organizations" in the camps, raising concerns about how to maintain the agency's apolitical status in Lebanon and Jordan.¹²⁸ That same year, Commissioner-General Michelmores stated rather euphemistically in his report to the UNGA that the rise of the fida'iyyin as an alternative authority had created "developments in the attitude of the Agency's local staff."¹²⁹

Tensions came to a head in 1970 with the so-called memorandum controversy. Following the PFLP's high-profile plane hijackings, Secretary-General Thant at the UN issued a statement condemning such activities as "deplorable criminal acts [that] are savage and inhuman."¹³⁰ Many Palestinians, regarding the PFLP as a resistance movement, took umbrage at what they saw as the latest case of the UN siding with Israel. In response, 125 Palestinian staff at the UNRWA Headquarters in Beirut sent a memorandum to Thant and Commissioner-General Michelmores condemning the former's statement. The memo was also published in the Arabic press.¹³¹

The reaction from management was severe. Both Michelmores and the UN Secretariat in New York ruled that the memo was irreconcilable with the signatories' positions as UN staff members, contending that they were required to act with impartiality and independence regardless of their private political beliefs.¹³² The agency ordered those who had signed the memo to withdraw their signatures immediately; those who refused to do so were dismissed.¹³³ From the perspective of UN management, the matter was straightforward and even obvious: employees could not engage in

political activism contrary to the stance of the agency, much less openly condemn the secretary-general, while they served as its staff. Yet for the staff members involved, the incident exemplified the difficulties of their positions and the complexities of their affiliation to the agency.

In the eyes of many Palestinian employees, the reaction of UNRWA management to the memo typified the dismissive and patronizing attitude prevalent in the culture of international development work in the later twentieth century—an attitude that further aggrieved many refugees.¹³⁴ When dealing with the controversy, Michelmores commented to Thant that some Palestinian staff members may have signed the memo in question under duress, and that many others had refused to sign it. While this may or may not have been true—Michelmores provided no evidence—the dismissive tone does not suggest any engagement with the strength of feeling behind the memo, or the reasons for it. This was not helped by the fact that like many other commissioners-general, Michelmores did not speak Arabic and therefore could not communicate directly with many of the refugees.¹³⁵ In the same cable, he mentions that he has been informed of several translation options for the memo, without being sure of which is the most accurate.¹³⁶ The controversy thus encapsulated many of the tensions at the heart of the relationship between the UN, UNRWA, the Palestinian refugees whom it served and the Palestinian refugees who served it.

The memorandum controversy was far from the end of the problems. The following year, further political confrontations erupted when refugees at camps across the five fields went on strike in solidarity with Palestinians in Jordan. The strikes targeted UNRWA on the grounds that it was allegedly in league with the political enemies of the *fida'iyyin*. In a statement, the General Union of Palestinian Teachers (GUPT) condemned the agency's "conspiracies" to "liquefy this revolution" and contended that the strike was a "warning" to UNRWA's "malignant methods."¹³⁷ The "revolution" in question was of course the Palestinian *thawra* in Jordan, although the statement did not specify what the agency's "malignant methods" were. The GUPT's hostility toward UNRWA was particularly significant in view of its members' simultaneous standing as registered refugees, UNRWA employees, and nationalist activists. In this sense it served as another case study of the fundamental difficulties of the relationship.

In 1974 Commissioner-General Rennie took the unusual step of raising with the UNGA the agency's tensions with its local staff. In his annual report, he stated that "staff relations weigh heavily" and that "a disquieting feature of the year has been increasing resort by staff to action intended to coerce the agency into meeting their demands."¹³⁸ That Rennie chose to raise this issue at such a high official level is indicative of its seriousness. As he himself noted, the problem could not be easily overcome as it was rooted in the foundations of the situation, which made it extremely difficult for Palestinian staff members to be indifferent to political flashpoints. The following year, he reported to the UNGA that the staff now "relied on reasoned argument and orderly procedure . . . rather than the more coercive tactics."¹³⁹ Yet while Rennie presented this as a calming of relations, the essence of the situation remained unchanged. There would be many more incidents to come.

Relocation of HQ: UNRWA as Neocolonial

Palestinian suspicions that UNRWA was a foreign implant were heightened when the agency moved its headquarters from Beirut to Vienna in 1978, following a previous temporary transfer out of Lebanon two years earlier.¹⁴⁰ Commissioner-General Thomas McElhiney had expected the move to be uncontroversial, in view of the muted Arab response to the 1976 transfer and the evident impossibility of continuing to operate in the middle of the Lebanese Civil War.¹⁴¹ He was quickly proven wrong. When the move was announced, all three Arab host states, along with Egypt and Qatar, publicly voiced their opposition to the UN secretary-general, citing "psychological, political and financial" grounds.¹⁴² They argued that the presence of UNRWA headquarters in an Arab country indicated the UN's continuing involvement in the Palestinians' plight and "helped to counter rumors that UNRWA might be relinquishing its responsibilities."¹⁴³ In making such a statement, the Arab governments tapped into the Palestinian refugees' long-running anxieties and situated the issue of the headquarters' location within wider political concerns.

This became a definitive strategy for the Arab host states when it came to the struggle over UNRWA's location. The Jordanian foreign minister

subsequently sent a note to Secretary-General Waldheim expressing his government's disapproval of the headquarters' transfer and arguing that the agency could have found suitable premises in Amman instead. He contended that the transfer "has implications connected with a tendency [for UNRWA] to disengage gradually from its responsibilities towards the refugees."¹⁴⁴ While UNRWA dismissed such suggestions as unjustified, international nonstate actors including Oxfam endorsed the Jordanian stance.¹⁴⁵

The refugees themselves were deeply unhappy about the move, none more so than UNRWA's Palestinian staff. In keeping with the Arab states' protestations, they feared that the headquarters' transfer signified UNRWA's long-suspected manipulation by the West and was designed to usher in its gradual withdrawal of services ahead of the international abandonment of the Palestinian refugees.¹⁴⁶ Aligning itself with such feelings, the PLO responded to the transfer announcement by sending its own direct note to Waldheim, arguing that the terms of UNRWA's work required it to be based in the Middle East:

This decision involves serious political and social consequences and seems to imply that, henceforward, UNRWA will progressively abandon the provision of humanitarian services to the Palestinian refugees. . . . The PLO believes that this decision has been taken in response to pressures from imperialist and Zionist forces to compel UNRWA to shirk its international responsibilities and obligations towards the Palestinian refugees. . . . There is now a widespread fear among the Palestinian refugees that UNRWA might soon completely abolish all the services it provides, and the decision of the Commissioner-General to transfer UNRWA's headquarters to Europe has especially increased this fear.¹⁴⁷

Dismissing the agency's security concerns about remaining in the Middle East, the PLO called on Waldheim to reverse the relocation. Its campaign had some success at the UN level: in 1978 and 1979 the UNGA passed resolutions requesting that UNRWA headquarters be reunified in its area of operations as soon as possible.¹⁴⁸ Yet although the agency agreed to do so in theory, its headquarters remained in Vienna until 1991, when it was relocated to Gaza in the context of the Oslo Agreement.¹⁴⁹ This long stretch in

Europe did nothing to alleviate the refugees' anxieties and suspicions about UNRWA's true political purpose and affiliation.

The nature and tensions of the Palestinian refugees' relationship with UNRWA are central to their national history. While the refugees were consistently marginalized in structural terms, they gained important informal leverage from the fact that UNRWA needed their acceptance and cooperation to be able to function. In some respects such cooperation was forthcoming: with the occasional exception, Palestinian refugees generally supported UNRWA's existence and favored its continuation until their plight was resolved. Indeed, many deeply feared its dissolution and vehemently protested any sign that UNRWA might be diminished. At least in this sense, the refugees strongly supported the agency and its work.

Problems arose not over the *fact* of UNRWA's work, but rather its nature and purpose. Tensions stemmed from a fundamental divergence, as the refugees and the agency held different interpretations of the agency's role. From the perspective of its senior management, UNRWA was a purely humanitarian body that existed to provide apolitical welfare services. For the refugees, including many of those who worked for the agency, this was a misnomer; their situation was essentially political and an organization like UNRWA could not engage with it so intricately while purporting to be apolitical. As a result, many Palestinian refugees criticized UNRWA for insufficiently advocating for their rights, worrying that it was operating with the ulterior motive of undermining their political interests.

The complexities of UNRWA's relationship with the Palestinian refugees challenge many common assumptions about refugees and aid more generally. At its core, Palestinian history provides a clear rebuttal to the idea that refugees' vulnerability necessarily engenders passive welfare dependency. In fact, the Palestinian refugees actively resisted the formal terms of their relationship with UNRWA and insisted on remaking it along their own preferred lines. Rejecting any suggestion that UNRWA services constituted aid, they framed UNRWA's services as legal entitlements and evidence of their political rights as internationally-recognized refugees. In the process, Palestinian refugees set themselves up as active parties in shaping the UNRWA regime, despite their structural vulnerability.¹⁵⁰

The notion of UNRWA services as rights meant that the agency's work inevitably took on a more loaded and politicized meaning, despite senior management's insistence to the contrary. As otherwise routine services such as education and rations were treated as political evidence, the agency's work was drawn into the developing Palestinian nationalist campaign and its demands. It is within this framework that UNRWA became inextricably linked with the overtly political nationalist movement that took hold in the refugee camps after 1967. As the *de facto* quasi-government for a stateless people whose environs were increasingly politicized, UNRWA's interactions with their nationalist movement would become a key facet of the camps' international history.

AGENTS OF THE NATION

We repudiate all Israeli atrocities which . . . are in discord with all international conventions and Security Council resolutions and the United Nations Charter and the simplest of the rights of man. . . . Our plea is that firm measures be taken [by the UN] to do away with violating international and human laws by calling for [Israel's] immediate evacuation from all occupied territories including Jerusalem.

—PALESTINIAN PETITION TO UN SECRETARY-GENERAL, 1968

With the *thawra* rising to prominence, the Question of Palestine received increasing attention on the world stage. Its rising global profile was multifaceted: while international media coverage of the PFLP's plane hijackings generated a negative image of Palestinians in much of the West, there was growing transnational solidarity with the Palestinian cause among decolonization movements in the Global South (see chapter 6).¹ Nor was the attention one-directional, as the same period saw the Palestinians increasingly taking their cause to the world stage. Institutionally, they focused primarily on the United Nations, calling on it to enforce its resolutions and conventions when it came to Israeli activity.² Petitions like the one quoted in the epigraph to this chapter framed the Palestinian cause in the UN's explicitly internationalist terms, seeking to position the Palestinians as aligned with international norms.³

Unsurprisingly, these shifting dynamics raised a series of questions about UNRWA's positionality vis-à-vis Palestinian nationalist politics. The nature of the UNRWA regime meant that its work could not remain entirely detached from camp politics. As the *de facto* government in the camps, it inevitably came to influence the development of Palestinian political identity, albeit inadvertently, as nationalism, regionalism, and internationalism all became enmeshed in these spaces.⁴ UNRWA was accordingly one of several factors that shaped Palestinian nationalism and national identity in

the camps, primarily in how its presence helped *internationalize* these concepts.

This occurred in several ways. First, UNRWA's registration criteria and its provision of official identity cards helped formalize notions of Palestinian refugee identity. Crucially, these measures transcended the state borders of the five geographical fields where the agency worked, meaning that its operations also facilitated a shared national consciousness across the Palestinian diaspora. Second, UNRWA had a key role through its large-scale education program. Its schools constituted a formative part of the refugees' experiences of exile, creating another common experience across state borders. The content of the education program further epitomized the fusion of nationalism and internationalism that characterized the UNRWA-administered camps. As successive generations of Palestinians received their education through an internationally managed program, their ties with the wider world were magnified, fueling the internationalist tilt of the Palestinian nationalist movement. While there has been considerable discussion of the PLO's role in popular Palestinian nationalism, there is little scholarship examining the role of the Palestinians' other "surrogate state": UNRWA.⁵

Critically, it was usually the refugees themselves driving this process. UNRWA's education program was predominantly staffed by Palestinian refugees, who frequently led the way in infusing the schooling system with a local, national, and regional consciousness. Meanwhile the identity card system was a regular point of contention, with refugee camp communities pushing for a more inclusive definition of Palestinian refugee identity within the UNRWA regime. Overall, then, camp refugees were key agents in both driving the Palestinian nationalist movement and shaping its internalization—far more so than has been typically understood.⁶

This chapter excavates the UNRWA regime's position as a site of intersection between the international sphere and the Palestinian nationalist movement in the refugee camps. It focuses not on UNRWA's interactions with the PLO nationalist leadership, but instead on the refugee camp grass roots, examining how they resisted and sought to remake UNRWA's programs as tools of their political struggle. Their struggles and partial success in doing so demonstrate the complexities of UNRWA's unique entanglement with Palestinian politics in the camps.

UNRWA'S CONCEPTUAL ROLE:
WHO IS A PALESTINIAN REFUGEE?

When the Nakba made the Palestinians a stateless people, it destroyed the structures of their national society and upturned their bases of national identity.⁷ Thereafter, Palestinian collective consciousness was characterized by the shared experiences of loss, dispossession, and exile.⁸ Previously all-important identifiers like class and region were accordingly subjugated as the notion of the "Palestinian refugee" became central to post-1948 national identity, in a process that has been called the "re-creation of identity."⁹ This process was not fixed but mutable, and the identity category of the Palestinian refugee was continually shaped by the impact of subsequent changes like the Naksa and the thawra. Yet alongside these changes was another factor that also informed the development of this new identity category: UNRWA.

UNRWA's influence on Palestinian identification practices was often unofficial. None of the UN resolutions detailing its mandate to serve "Palestine refugees" ever defined the latter term.¹⁰ As detailed in chapter 1, UNRWA instead used a narrow "operational" definition, which excluded significant numbers of people who nevertheless considered themselves Palestinian refugees, and who continued to be perceived as such by the majority of the Palestinian diaspora.¹¹ Accordingly, registration with UNRWA was never synonymous with identification as a Palestinian refugee—a point that the agency itself had noted in its first annual report.¹² Yet UNRWA registration remained hugely important in affirming and codifying Palestinian identity in the absence of any formal governmental structures.

UNRWA senior management, ever mindful of the dangers of potential politicization, continually downplayed the importance of the definition, insisting that it was not legal and merely served to aid the agency's operations.¹³ Yet in practice the definition had a much wider significance. As a new conceptual category, UNRWA registration became a key characteristic, if not a necessary condition, of Palestinian refugee identity.¹⁴ Ilana Feldman contends that UNRWA's categorization practices directly shaped Palestinian experiences of exile by determining whether they were entitled to assistance, protection, and recognition.¹⁵ I argue here that the content of UNRWA's definition had a conceptual as well as a practical impact,

helping construct notions of who the Palestinian refugees were and how they identified themselves.

UNRWA's definition functioned as a process rather than a singular event. As ever, the Palestinian refugees themselves were actively involved in this, frequently challenging the agency's classification policies and pushing their own definitions of who constituted a refugee. They particularly disputed the exclusions generated by UNRWA's narrow definition, regularly demanding that the agency provide services to *all* Palestinian refugees, regardless of their registration status.¹⁶ This kind of activism underlines the significance of the UNRWA definition and the complex ways in which many Palestinians perceived their refugee status, as a signifier of both loss and entitlement.¹⁷

Defining a "Palestine Refugee": UNRWA's Identity Cards

The meaning of UNRWA's definition was manifested practically through the official identity cards issued to registered refugees. The cards were originally designed to be used as evidence of eligibility when refugees went to collect rations from the agency's offices. As such, they were a core element of the Palestinian refugee experience and the new forms of national consciousness that emerged in exile. By recording the refugees' places of origin in pre-Nakba Palestine, the cards also transcended the impact of Palestinian dispossession and dispersal and codified the refugees' deep-seated attachments to their ancestral towns and villages.¹⁸ While UNRWA did not invent such attachments, policies such as this did serve to underline and systematize them.

In keeping with international political sensitivities, UNRWA continually emphasized that its ID cards were simply a practical means of establishing eligibility and held no further significance. Management reiterated that the issuance of such cards was standard humanitarian practice, pointing out that UNHCR did the same.¹⁹ UNRWA itself had adopted the practice from aid agencies that preceded it on the ground, particularly the Red Cross.²⁰ Recalling his work with the ICRC in the West Bank in 1948, Wasif Jawhariyyeh details how the agency would record the refugees' details and issue them cards for claiming food and clothing.²¹

UNRWA underlined the cards' operational function through their increasing stratification over the years, as budgetary restraints compelled



FIG. 5.1. UNRWA ration card verifying the entitlements of Hassan Ismail Hussein and seven members of his family. Photo courtesy of UNRWA.

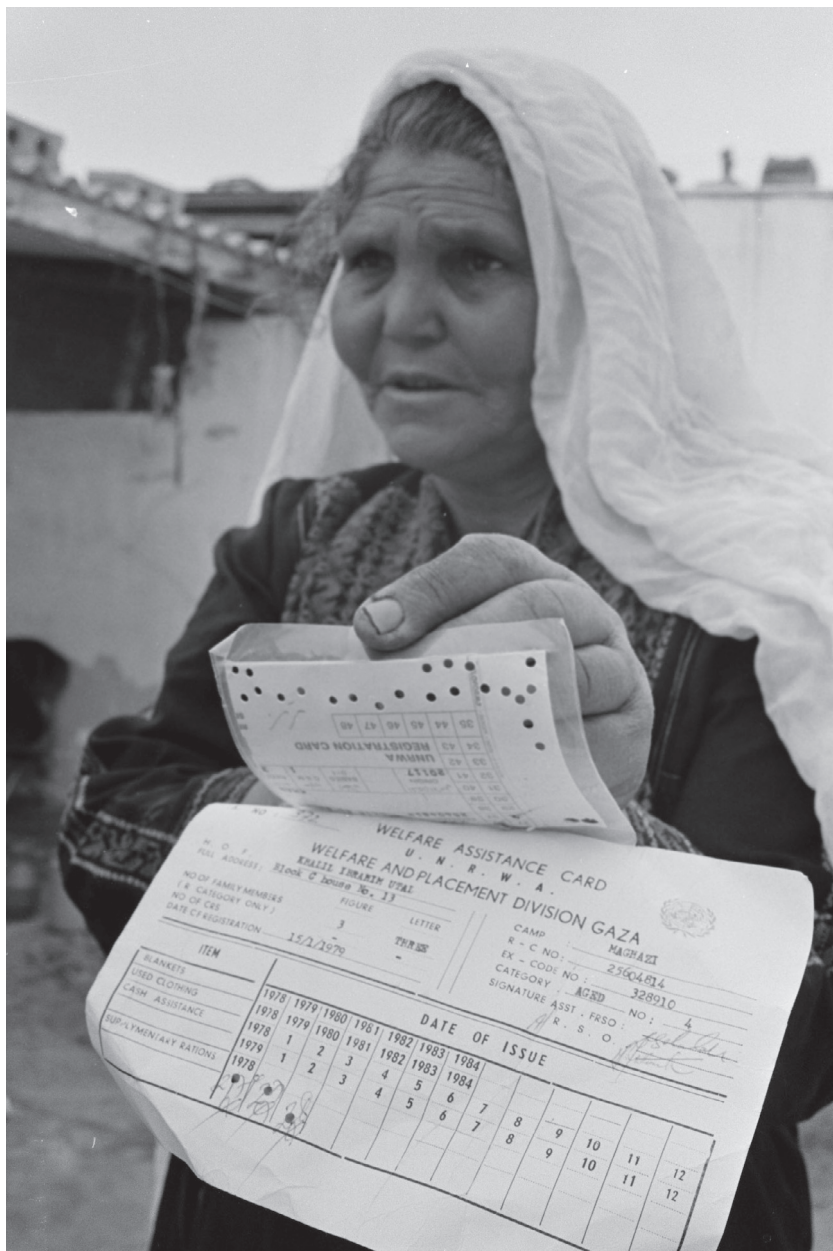


FIG. 5.2. A member of the Ibrahim family showing their ration entitlement document, 1978. Photo courtesy of UNRWA.

the agency to restrict the refugees' levels of entitlement. From 1956 refugees were not simply marked as "registered" but also issued a letter (R, E, M, or N) to denote their entitlements, including whether they could claim rations. "R" indicated eligibility for rations and services; "E," for services; and "M," for medical aid. "N" meant that a refugee was registered with UNRWA but no longer eligible to receive services.²² The result was that despite the continuing nomenclature "ration cards," numerous card-carrying refugees were not in fact able to claim rations.²³ Over time, the term "ID cards" was increasingly used instead.

Despite UNRWA's claims, however, it is clear that the cards' significance was not simply operational. The majority of Palestinian refugees were stateless, their Palestinian passports having lost formal international recognition after 1948.²⁴ In fact, Jawhariyyeh recalls that immediately after the British Mandate state was dissolved, the Jericho military governor ordered that people should be issued with identity cards to fill the void.²⁵ With the exception of those who took Jordanian citizenship in the 1950s, most registered Palestinian refugees subsequently lacked any official identification, except for their UNRWA cards.²⁶ Describing this reality in his account of Deir al-Balah camp in the 1950s, Abdel Bari Atwan writes that each family's "plastic coated [UNRWA rations] card . . . further served as their proof of identity, since we were all now officially 'stateless persons.'"²⁷

In subsequent years, refugees used the cards not only to claim UNRWA services but also to verify their identity to host states when applying for a *laissez-passer* or for permission to work.²⁸ In this sense the cards took on the status of *de facto* passports, as vital documents in the processes of state bureaucracy. In fact, some Palestinian refugees in Jordan opted to use their UNRWA cards instead of Jordanian passports, preferring a document that explicitly declared their Palestinian identity.²⁹

UNRWA management were aware that the refugees attached this symbolic meaning to the cards.³⁰ They were further aware of the practical implications, with many refugees unwilling to give up their cards for fear that they would be left with no evidence of their political status and attached rights.³¹ As early as 1961 UNRWA's acting director in Jordan had internally described the ration card as a "status symbol" among refugees. He observed to a colleague that refugees whose circumstances had improved would not mind a reduction in their entitlements but would "resist most strongly" the loss of the card itself, with petitions and protests likely to ensue if this

happened.³² Outsiders observed the same phenomenon. In a study for AUB in 1968, Usama Khalidi noted that some refugees had refused employment because of anxieties about being removed from the ration rolls.³³

UNRWA senior management held continual discussions over the decades about the possibility of creating a separate identification document that would verify the refugees' status without automatically entitling them to services. Such a possibility was first raised with the introduction of registration category "N" in 1956, denoting refugees who remained registered but had lost their entitlement to UNRWA rations and certain other services because of increased income.³⁴ This paved the way for later discussions about the possible introduction of a card that would serve to simply recognize refugee status and nothing else. In 1979 the Commissioner-General's Office acknowledged that the rations card had become "primarily political" in its purpose and floated the possibility of replacing it with a simple registration card.³⁵ From UNRWA's perspective, this would have the practical benefit of enabling them to rectify the ration rolls without triggering wider political anxieties among the refugees.³⁶

The idea of a registration card for all Palestinian refugees gathered momentum as nations sympathetic to the Palestinians came to join the UNGA in the postcolonial era. In 1982 the UNGA formally requested that UNRWA issue identity cards to *all* Palestine refugees displaced in 1948 and 1967, as well as their descendants, "irrespective of whether they are recipients or not of rations and services from the agency."³⁷ Such a move would definitively separate the issue of UNRWA services from that of Palestinian refugee status while also verifying the size of the global Palestinian refugee population. As such, many Palestinian nationalists and their supporters welcomed it as a step toward the realization of the right of return. Yet the plan was hampered by the practical difficulties of identifying Palestinian refugees worldwide, the attached political controversies, and the debates over whether such a move was beyond the agency's mandate.³⁸

While the UNGA's request was not implemented, recent decades have seen less comprehensive changes made to UNRWA's registration system. Following the Sabra-Shatila massacre in 1982, the UNGA mandated UNRWA to expand its services to unregistered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, albeit without changing its core practices of registration and

identification.³⁹ Then, in 1993, UNRWA eligibility rules were expanded to allow the belated inclusion of people who fit its definition but had not registered in the early years after the Nakba.⁴⁰ These changes, however, were ultimately tweaks rather than comprehensive reforms, meaning that the UNRWA cards continued to be the only official identification available to many stateless Palestinian refugees.

Aspects of Refugee Identity: Geography, Generations, and Gender

The restrictive nature of UNRWA's definition of a "Palestine refugee" was juxtaposed with the breadth of its work across five geographical fields. In this regard, the agency's regime was not only international but transnational, bringing all Palestinian refugees in the Levant under the same organizational system.⁴¹ By constructing a standardized arrangement for Palestinian refugees in five different areas, UNRWA transcended state borders and helped combat geographical differentiation. A "Palestine refugee" by UNRWA's definition was the same whether the individual in question lived in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, the West Bank, or the Gaza Strip. This was significant in preserving Palestinian refugee identity as both distinctive and communal. It helped unite Palestinians across the fragmentation of dispossession and reinforced the transnationalism that characterized Palestinian political history ever since the Nakba. Palestinian nationalists quickly picked up on the implications, with PLO official Shafiq al-Hout describing UNRWA as a "crucial hub" for the organization's work.⁴²

The breadth of UNRWA's registration system was not only geographical but also intergenerational. Its hereditary rules enabled registered refugee men to pass the family ID card on to their children.⁴³ In one of the clearest examples of how UNRWA functioned as a quasi-state, refugee children born in exile could be issued with an "UNRWA birth certificate." These certificates further illustrated UNRWA's fusion with Palestinian refugee identity, as they were annotated with the UNRWA emblem and the family's card number and were signed by the relevant UNRWA registration officer. Along with the ID cards, the birth certificates were used to verify the children's refugee status when they enrolled in UNRWA schools.⁴⁴ UNRWA justified its hereditary policy on both principled and pragmatic grounds, arguing that the alternative would generate hierarchies even within families.⁴⁵

The policy had a multifaceted significance. Most obviously, it made possible the continuation of UNRWA's work across generations. In the process, it facilitated UNRWA's centrality to many refugee families, which was particularly significant in a setting where the family was a key social unit. It also codified existing notions of Palestinian refugee identity as something that could be removed only by resolution of their plight and not simply phased out over time.⁴⁶

At the same time, the registration system's patrilineal nature also fueled gender inequality. It meant that while women could register with the agency, they were denied the right to pass that status onto their children and were thus effectively second-class "citizens" under the UNRWA regime.⁴⁷ This bias manifested the gendered inflection of UNRWA's construction of the Palestinian refugee identity; under the regime, the normative Palestinian refugee was a man. This was reflected in UNRWA's "working definition," which referred to eligible Palestine refugees by way of male pronouns only.⁴⁸ The UNRWA regime thus reinforced patriarchal social structures, both by subjugating the position of women and by operating on the basis of the family unit, always headed by a man, rather than on equal individual rights. Indeed, until 1983 UNRWA issued its ID cards to families, not individuals.⁴⁹

UNRWA justified the sexism of its hereditary policy on "cultural" grounds, claiming that it needed to be consistent with norms in the Arab host states, where citizenship was passed down exclusively through the male line.⁵⁰ This analogy to Arab state nationality laws is highly revealing. It shows the extent to which UNRWA functioned as a quasi-state, with its registration taking the place of citizenship and its ID cards serving as sub-standard passports. By contrast UNHCR—and accordingly all other refugees—uses a registration system that does not distinguish on the basis of gender and allows both men and women to pass on their status to their children.⁵¹

It is striking that neither the UN Secretariat nor the Western donor states have objected to this sex-based discrimination (and contemporary critics of the UNRWA regime's exceptionalism almost never mention this discrepancy). While the reasons for their acquiescence are unspecified, it may be driven by support for any measure that restricts eligibility for UNRWA services and thus keep costs down. Criticism of the UNRWA registration system has focused not on its sexism but on its intergenerational nature.



FIG. 5.3. Palestinian refugee children displaying their documentation while queuing outside school in Sbeineh camp, Syria. Photo courtesy of UNRWA.

Critics contend that this has enabled the continuance of the Palestinian refugee situation by hindering their integration into the Arab host states and perpetuating their Palestinian self-identification.⁵² The evidence, however, belies this argument. Palestinian national identity long predated UNRWA's arrival on the scene in 1950. The fact that the refugee camp grass roots continually resisted UNRWA's apolitical strictures shows that it was the refugees themselves, and not the agency, driving Palestinian political nationalism. To suggest otherwise is to deny the activism and agency of Palestinian refugees themselves, in favor of erroneously presenting them as mere puppets.

UNRWA'S PRACTICAL ROLE: EDUCATION

Of all UNRWA's programs and activities, the most important has always been its standardized education system.⁵³ In his memoir, former commissioner-general John Davis describes the education program as UNRWA's "most significant contribution towards solving the refugee problem."⁵⁴ Kotaish similarly describes it as "the only valuable thing that we as

[Palestinian] refugees got from the United Nations. It is a gift that even today I am grateful for.”⁵⁵ In particular, it was crucial in aiding the formation of a community in exile. Fawaz Turki, himself a graduate of UNRWA schooling, described the agency’s education as one of the factors that “preserved and buoyed” the refugees’ Palestinian consciousness in exile.⁵⁶ Scholars have similarly characterized UNRWA’s education program as the most influential of all its services, emphasizing its transformative impact on literacy levels and employment opportunities.⁵⁷

However, the importance of UNRWA’s education program was not only socioeconomic.⁵⁸ Education is most accurately understood as a political force, not least in the nationalist context; modernist theorists of nationalism have identified it as a crucial factor in disseminating a shared national consciousness.⁵⁹ In the Palestinian case, the importance of education was especially loaded, as nationalists regularly and explicitly tied it to their political struggle. In 1960, for example, the head of the Arab Higher Committee (AHC) office wrote in the Syrian newspaper *Al Ayyam*, “The only weapon with which the Palestinians arm themselves . . . is education . . . which kindles enthusiasm in their hearts to return to their usurped homeland and liberate it from its usurpers. . . . [Without education] the blazing spirit of patriotism will be extinguished.”⁶⁰ Nine years later the PLO made a similar statement in its charter, affirming that education was a national duty, vital to the struggle for Palestine.⁶¹

Crucially, such ideas were not limited to the leadership structures of the PLO and AHC. They were also prevalent among the grass roots, most notably in the Palestinian refugee camps. From early on, the poorest refugees had prioritized the need for education in order to improve the individual prospects of their children and the collective future of their people.⁶² As the years in exile rolled on, many expressed this explicitly.

One of the most striking such expressions came in 1971, from a refugee group calling itself the Palestinian Organization for Solidarity and Moral Guidance. The group was based in Gaza, which at that time was grappling with the early years of the Israeli occupation, including moves to dismantle the camps and disperse their residents. Partly in response, many Palestinians in Gaza had turned to the *thawra*, with cases of teenage boys leaving school early to join the *fida’iyyin*. In this context, the Palestinian Organization for Solidarity and Moral Guidance distributed in 1971 a tract

around UNRWA schools in the Strip, calling on refugees to commit themselves to education as the ultimate act of patriotism:

To you who ridicule and ignore education when you know that it is our way for success. This is the suitable time for education. We are not fighting the treacherous enemy with words void of action and work. Education is first necessary requirement [*sic*]. It is the lamp which lights the way for us and makes us reach our holy aim successfully with all security and certainty. Care to acquire education in order to fulfil the required ends. . . . Also, you who claim that you are patriots when at the same time you throw stones at schools and glass bottles at walls. The grounds of patriotism have no room for such things. Patriotism will never be maintained if it stands on chaos and barbarian riotings. If you are patriots indeed, stand altogether as one hand full with education and culture in order to understand life and know the way for success. . . . Palestinian, stand with us and work in solidarity with your fellow students so that we may counter-combat any body [*sic*] who may combat education. This does not mean to forget the motherland, but it is true expression for our love to our beloved usurped home. Do not follow the way of chaos. Do not use words which have no meaning other than the conception of weakness and disorder.⁶³

While unusually emphatic and explicit, the organization's rhetoric chimed with a long-running view among Palestinian refugees that education was a critical element of the national struggle.

Moreover, the organization's claims were borne out by both Palestinian experiences and external observation. In their study of the first intifada, Israeli journalists Zeev Schiff and Ehud Yaari remarked on the importance of the UNRWA education system in Palestinian activism. They observed that it had helped give many young Palestinians an awareness of injustice and a motivation to improve their situation.⁶⁴ Their observation is particularly striking in view of the fact that many nationalist figures—Naji al-Ali, Khalil Wazir (better known as Abu Jihad), Ghassan Kanafani, and countless *fida'iyyin*—were graduates of UNRWA schools. Similarly, in her memoir, Ghada Karmi recalls meeting *fida'iyyin* in 1970s Lebanon who had all been educated in UNRWA schools.⁶⁵ The UNRWA education program's connection to Palestinian national identity and the nationalist movement is accordingly a subject worthy of greater investigation.

The UNRWA Schools Network

One of UNRWA's greatest contributions to the Palestinian nationalist movement was structural. Its standardized transnational system helped maintain a shared Palestinian consciousness among the refugees, despite their dispersal across state borders. Yet it did not only do so in conceptual terms: UNRWA also established institutions that helped maintain a Palestinian identity, among which its schools were the most important.⁶⁶ The details of the buildings often reinforced this, with individual schools and even classrooms frequently named after towns and villages in pre-Nakba Palestine.⁶⁷ In physical terms, the UNRWA schools were the first permanent structures to be built inside the refugee camps, meaning they helped institutionalize the latter and reinforce their function as separate Palestinian spaces.⁶⁸

The physicality of the schools was fused with a more ideational significance. As structures, the schools offered both the space and the means to reconstitute the fabric of Palestinian society in exile, by creating new networks of solidarity.⁶⁹ They thus brought Palestinians together in spaces where their identity and collective consciousness were heightened. Accordingly, many refugees found in the schools a means to transmit a Palestinian national identity, and the result, unforeseen by UNRWA, was that its education program inadvertently helped prepare a generation for the *thawra*.⁷⁰

Put simply, the UNRWA schools were effective as a means for transmitting nationalism because they functioned as spaces that were almost entirely Palestinian in both personnel and ethos, with the added bonus of being internationally legitimized.⁷¹ In this sense one of UNRWA's most important contributions to the nationalist movement was indirect and inadvertent. By establishing common institutions for the Palestinian refugees in exile, it provided spaces where both ideology and strategy could be disseminated among a community whose presence was defined primarily by their Palestinian identity.

Even UNRWA management acknowledged this. In an article in the *Journal of Palestine Studies* in 1973, UNRWA public information officer George Dickerson wrote: "One of the by-products of the UNRWA/UNESCO education program has been its contribution towards the preservation of the Palestine refugees' identity with the Palestine culture and within the wider context of Arab culture. This is partly because so many of them have been

able to attend schools in which almost all the children are Palestine refugees and virtually all of the teachers are also Palestinians.”⁷² The importance of such majority-Palestinian environments should not be underestimated. Palestinian refugees, and especially those in the camps, were usually marginalized within the structures of their host states. Although they composed the demographic majority in the camps, these spaces were not formally institutionalized in the same way as state structures. The existence of internationally sanctioned majority-Palestinian institutions was thus vital in bestowing some sense of official recognition and even affirmation, whether intentionally or not.

Most important, these institutions could be found across the Palestinian diaspora, or at least across those parts of it where UNRWA operated. In this way the schools served as another manifestation of UNRWA’s standardization of the Palestinian refugees’ experiences, with individuals everywhere participating in the same education program (albeit with some regional variations). UNRWA management themselves described the program as a “national system of education,”⁷³ operating “across frontiers” and thus providing Palestinian refugees with another shared feature of their experiences in exile.⁷⁴ As such it constituted another common frame of reference, and another means by which Palestinians could create a network across the diaspora.

Educating Girls

It was not only the existence of UNRWA’s transnational education program that came to intersect with refugee politics. The agency’s guidelines over *who* could be taught and *what* they were taught were also vitally important. Regarding the former, the UNRWA school system mirrored its registration system in connecting notions of gender to Palestinian refugee identity. However, it did so in a very different way. Unlike its registration system, UNRWA’s education program operated on a gender-blind basis, with schooling available free of charge to *all* registered refugee children, regardless of sex.⁷⁵ This meant that families did not have to choose which child they could afford to send to school, with such choices often inflected by gendered norms.⁷⁶ This had previously been common practice; Fatima Ibrahim Zankari recounts how she was not sent to school in 1930s Palestine because “farmers only sent their boys.”⁷⁷

UNRWA's open policy meant that rates of female education among Palestinians increased hugely in both relative and absolute terms in the decade after the Nakba.⁷⁸ By the 1960s UNRWA had achieved nearly full enrollment in basic education for all registered refugees.⁷⁹ This upsurge was one of several contributing factors that gave girls of the thawra generation a greater voice in both family affairs and the resistance campaign.⁸⁰ Indeed, women played a vital role in the latter, by organizing demonstrations and petitions, carrying secret messages, transporting arms, and in some cases carrying out militant attacks directly.⁸¹

This is not to say that social conservatism disappeared completely with the onset of girls' education. On the contrary, conservative ideas remained influential even within the UNRWA education program. UNRWA schools were nearly all single-sex, with spaces and resources divided accordingly. UNRWA management claimed that boys and girls were separated because of their parents' wishes, and it was certainly the case that some parents objected to the prospect of coeducational classes.⁸² Other parents, however, were concerned that the gender segregation risked disadvantaging their daughters, and they expressed opposition to the strategy. In fact, when schools were closed during the first intifada, some Palestinians in the OPT developed grassroots community education systems with coeducational classes.⁸³ Despite this clear sign of parents' openness to educating boys and girls together, UNRWA continues to separate its schools by sex to this day. In reality, it has pursued this policy in deference not to refugee parents but to the host states—once again indicating the structural restraints on the regime.⁸⁴

Further social conservatism on the agency's part could be found in how the curriculum was organized along gendered lines when it came to vocational subjects. Thus in the decades after the Nakba, boys received training in woodwork and metalwork, while girls learned domestic science.⁸⁵ In 1971 UNRWA's West Bank director deemed the latter to be "more vital to girls' education perhaps than any other subject," signifying the presence of conservative ideas on gender at high levels of the agency.⁸⁶ In this policy, the UNRWA regime showed consistency with both the Arab host states and numerous Western education curricula at the time.

Notwithstanding the gender separation in schools, UNRWA management proudly cited the education program's equality as one of its most positive effects. Former commissioner-general John Davis recalled in his



FIG. 5.4. Domestic science class for girls at New Amman School, Jordan. Photo courtesy of UNRWA.

memoir in 1970 that the agency had made major positive progress toward girls' education among the refugees.⁸⁷ That same year the UNRWA education director traveled to Marrakech to address the Third Regional Conference of Ministers of Education and Ministers Responsible for Economic Planning in the Arab States. In his speech he highlighted how the agency's program gave "equal educational opportunities" to boys and girls, leading to a significant increase in female enrollment and access to higher education.⁸⁸ His successors similarly cited the gender parity in UNRWA schools as a key achievement, and the point was also highlighted in the agency's newsletter *Palestine Refugees Today*, sent to donors.⁸⁹

The story, however, was not entirely positive. Writing in 1973—three years after the education director had spoken in Marrakech—scholar Ibrahim Abu Lughod argued that the gender gap in UNRWA schools remained unsatisfactory. Enrollment figures in the early 1970s continued to show more boys than girls, albeit at a declining rate. The gender gap widened at higher levels, due to bigger drop-out rates among more advanced female students.⁹⁰ Writing in response to the critique, UNRWA public information officer George Dickerson contended that Abu Lughod had overstated the gender inequality in the agency's education program, while conceding that as late as 1964, boys accounted for 73 percent of UNRWA's secondary pupils.⁹¹ It is thus clear that UNRWA's impact in facilitating gender parity should not be overstated, particularly in view of the fact that its promotion of female education was juxtaposed with its sexist registration policy. Nevertheless, the large-scale education of refugee girls was undeniably significant in helping enable the increasingly public role of refugee women. The enrollment of girls as well as boys in UNRWA schools was particularly important in Lebanon, where the education program went furthest in its dissemination of Palestinian nationalism.

"Palestinianizing" the Curriculum

UNRWA's school curriculum had long been a source of tension. From the beginning, the agency had adopted the curricula of the respective host states in its schools.⁹² This was in keeping with the policy implemented by the Red Cross before UNRWA took over and was justified on the grounds that it would enable Palestinian refugee children to later integrate into the higher education institutions and job markets of the countries in which they lived.⁹³ Yet Palestinian nationalists had long argued that the policy undermined their cause by ignoring the need to teach younger generations about their own history and the reasons for their plight.⁹⁴ The Arab host state curricula covered Palestinian events only as a fleeting part of wider Arab history—or, in the case of Lebanon, not at all.

Voicing these criticisms, Turki wrote in his memoir:

The schools that UNRWA sponsored were designed—unwittingly or not—to raise Palestinian children on, and educate them in, accepting their plight of

life as a preordained thing. They degraded the minds of Palestinian youngsters and trained, indeed pressured, them into viewing their reality as the norm of existence, never transcendable in its dimensions. . . . No attempt was made to explain the situation and the forces behind it that ruled their lives, or how they were to respond to them. . . . No courses were offered to show where they came from, the history of Palestine.⁹⁵

Turki's recollection typifies Palestinian complaints about the UNRWA curriculum. Describing his time at an UNRWA school in the 1950s and early 1960s, Kotaish similarly writes, "We studied the whole world, but of our actual homeland we could not utter a word."⁹⁶ Such critiques were often fiercest in Lebanon, where the history of Palestine was entirely absent from the curriculum. They came to the forefront in the 1970s, in the context of the *thawra*.

The *thawra* did not create pressures on the UNRWA curriculum that had been hitherto nonexistent. Palestinian civil society had long been active in camp education, ever since refugees had pioneered the early makeshift camp schools in the 1940s.⁹⁷ After UNRWA took over in 1950, the vast majority of teachers in its schools were still registered Palestinian refugees themselves.⁹⁸ Many remained politically organized and active, often involved in the fledgling Palestinian nationalist movement as well as the broader Arab nationalist cause; among them were also Ba'athists and communists.⁹⁹ Applying their politics to their work, they formed the activist UNRWA Teachers' Association in 1952.¹⁰⁰

There were numerous high-profile examples. Fatah cofounder Abu Iyad, communist activist Mu'in Basisu, ANM official Ahmad Husayn al-Yamani, and PFLP figure Ghassan Kanafani all worked as UNRWA teachers in the 1950s, the former two in Gaza and the latter two in Lebanon.¹⁰¹ Similarly, Atwan recalls how the majority of teachers at his UNRWA primary school in Deir al-Balah camp were highly politicized nationalists, including some activists. Their political commitments had a direct effect on how they conducted their work; Atwan describes how the teachers regularly spoke to the students about the Palestinian cause.¹⁰² This also drove their activism vis-à-vis UNRWA.

The teachers' activism extended to efforts to reform the curriculum in UNRWA schools. As early as 1949 Palestinian educators, including Khalil Totah, Wasfi Anabtawi, and Abdul Latif Tibawi, appealed to UNRWA and

UNESCO for a national Palestinian education.¹⁰³ The 1950s saw both Basisu and Yamani, among others, lobby UNRWA to introduce Palestinian history and geography into its schools. When these efforts proved unsuccessful, they set about developing such curricula informally themselves.¹⁰⁴ Although the agency later fired Basisu and Yamani for their political activities—the latter after distributing a pamphlet accusing UNRWA of serving Zionism—their efforts had a long-term legacy.¹⁰⁵ In 1954 students at UNRWA schools in Nahr el-Bared camp in Lebanon demonstrated against the curriculum, demanding instruction in the geography and history of Palestine.¹⁰⁶ The following year UNRWA teachers in Lebanon put this at the forefront of their demands during a strike, which would be a recurrent tactic over the years.¹⁰⁷

That so many teachers sought to further the nationalist cause through their work is typical of Palestinian refugees' ongoing attempts to challenge the situation in which they found themselves and reshape it along their own preferred lines. It is also indicative of the depth of their attachment to Palestinian nationalism—particularly in view of the fact that they risked dismissal from UNRWA if caught engaging in overt political activism.¹⁰⁸ Although the teachers were unsuccessful in their attempts to formally change UNRWA's curriculum in the 1950s, they nevertheless succeeded in inflecting the education system with nationalist ideas. For example, Yamani and his colleagues had their students recite national anthems and a Palestinian oath, and rehearse nationalist plays.¹⁰⁹ Atwan recounts teachers going beyond the Egyptian curriculum to tell him and his classmates about the Nakba; Kotaish has similar accounts of a teacher laying out a huge map of Palestine and announcing, "You have the right to know about your own history."¹¹⁰ Others recall starting the day with patriotic songs at the teachers' urging.¹¹¹ In these ways, teachers were able to create a national context for learning, despite the people's exile, dispersal, and statelessness.¹¹²

The teachers' politicization, which had been present from the camps' early days, gained a new resonance after 1967. In the OPT, the onset of the Israeli occupation triggered a renewed attention on what was taught in UNRWA schools. While the agency continued to use the Jordanian curriculum in the West Bank and the Egyptian curriculum in Gaza, the Israeli government was now involved in monitoring the content.¹¹³ Under the new arrangements, textbooks had to be approved by Israeli inspectors, who censored any material deemed bellicose or hostile to Israel.¹¹⁴

Meanwhile in the Arab host states, the same period saw the *thawra* give a new impetus to long-running Palestinian grievances about the curriculum. This was particularly pronounced in Lebanon, where the *thawra* was centered and where the nationalist movement was most powerful.¹¹⁵ In 1969 teachers and students at UNRWA schools in Lebanon went on strike to demand that Palestinian history and geography be included in the curriculum.¹¹⁶ They received formal support from the Arab League, which officially recommended in November that year that the refugees should be taught in UNRWA schools about their rights to their land, “its usurpal [*sic*] and aggression by the Zionists, and the fight for its redemption.”¹¹⁷ The PLO was also vocal on the issue, after a study by its Palestine Planning Centre (PPC) found that UNRWA’s history and geography textbooks were deficient and even inaccurate.¹¹⁸

The persistence and accumulation of these demands eventually bore fruit, at least in Lebanon, with efforts by the agency to enhance the curriculum with more Palestinian-specific teaching. Numerous factors combined to make Lebanon the site of UNRWA’s “Palestinianization” efforts in this regard. Not only was it the center of the Palestinian nationalist movement at this time, but it also had a state curriculum with significant flexibility. Although there was one formal national curriculum for all Lebanese public and private schools, the latter could choose their own textbooks. In keeping with the country’s sectarian system, they often opted for books that reflected the relevant community’s political culture; for example, it was not uncommon for Maronite schools to teach the history of France rather than Lebanon. Schools in Lebanon therefore often reinforced separate communal identities—and in such a setting, the idea of having a different Palestinian curriculum did not seem especially strange.

A combination of political and practical circumstances thus meant that UNRWA selected Lebanon as the testing ground in which to develop a new “Palestinianized” curriculum for its schools. From UNRWA’s perspective, it was the ideal field for this potentially controversial change, in view of both the fragmentation of the Lebanese curriculum and the weakness of the Lebanese state. The plan was for the agency to begin the initiative in Lebanon, with the intention of later rollout across all its fields of operations.

The speed with which UNRWA began addressing this issue after the *thawra* began is indicative of the issue’s long-running nature. In 1969 UNRWA’s head of press stated to the Beirut weekly *Al Ahad* that the agency

had no objection to teaching Palestinian history and geography in its schools in Lebanon.¹¹⁹ In fact, archival documents indicate that it had already quietly started looking into ways to adapt the curriculum.¹²⁰ In October that year, UNRWA's deputy commissioner-general wrote to the UNESCO director-general seeking his formal agreement to teach the history and geography of Palestine to the refugees in Lebanon. In his letter, he cited pressure from both teachers and the Arab League as factors behind the change, showing once again the effectiveness of the former's persistent tactics.¹²¹

With the conditional agreement of the UNESCO director, UNRWA then formed several committees to examine how to "Palestinianize" the curriculum.¹²² The decision was made to teach Palestinian history and geography as a "special expanded subject" within the existing social studies framework, thus avoiding the need to either replace Lebanese content or create additional periods.¹²³ At the same time, the UNRWA/UNESCO Institute of Education in Beirut¹²⁴ hired Palestinian educators to develop a Palestinian history syllabus for the elementary and preparatory levels. The resulting syllabus, which is now held in UNRWA's Central Registry in Amman, covered Palestinian history from ancient times to the twentieth century and also provided instruction on Palestinian cities, agriculture, archaeology, holy places, and social life.¹²⁵ The institute produced several new textbooks, and one of the consultants, Ali Othman, developed a teachers' guide for teaching Palestinian history.¹²⁶

There is some uncertainty over exactly when these new subjects were introduced to UNRWA schools in Lebanon. A UNESCO booklet from 1967 claimed that the changes were made as early as the 1965–1966 school year, but most of the evidence belies this.¹²⁷ The new syllabus could not be implemented until both UNESCO and the Lebanese government had approved it, and documents from the UNRWA archive show that this process involved significant delays stretching into the 1970s.¹²⁸ As late as 1973 there was still material pending clearance from either the Lebanese Ministry of Education or the UNESCO director-general.¹²⁹ While Commissioner-General Michelmore stated in his 1970 report to the UNGA in 1970 that the subjects had been introduced from January that year, some parts of the new syllabus were still awaiting approval.¹³⁰

Moreover, many refugees continued to complain about UNRWA's curriculum in the early 1970s. The long waits for approval from UNESCO and the Lebanese government prompted further agitation from teachers and

students, with accusations that UNRWA was indulging in delaying tactics. The hostility was so severe that UNRWA's acting commissioner-general requested that UNESCO treat the clearance as a priority to speed up the process.¹³¹ Abu Lughod's aforementioned critique of UNRWA's education system, in which he argued that its curriculum served to "weaken Palestinianism," was published as late as 1973.¹³² Such evidence indicates that the implementation of the new syllabus was a drawn-out and difficult process. This may have been due to the turmoil and nervousness surrounding such a sensitive issue, exacerbated by the complexities involved in implementing change across a large bureaucracy.

Just as the date of the syllabus's introduction is unclear, so it is similarly uncertain when Palestinian history and geography disappeared from the UNRWA curriculum in Lebanon. After the commissioner-general's comments on the new syllabus in his reports to the UNGA in 1970 and 1971, there was no further mention of the subject in UNRWA annual reports in the later part of that decade and the 1980s. The subjects are not taught at UNRWA schools in Lebanon today.¹³³ It is unconfirmed exactly when and why they were removed, but the evidence points to a likely presumption that it was soon after 1982. As the PLO's departure from Lebanon that year marked a downturn in the nationalist pedagogy that had characterized UNRWA schools during the *thawra*, it is likely that Palestinian history and geography disappeared from the UNRWA curriculum around the same time.¹³⁴ This is a reasonable assumption, not because demand for the subjects would have lessened, but because the Palestinians in Lebanon lost considerable leverage when the PLO's power base collapsed.

The teaching of these new subjects was limited geographically as well as temporally. Despite early suggestions that UNRWA's "Palestinianized" curriculum would eventually be rolled out across its five fields of operation, after using Lebanon as a testing ground, there is no evidence that this ever happened. Formally, the agency justified the geographical containment on the grounds that Lebanon was the only host state whose curriculum included no mention of Palestine, while the Jordanian, Syrian, and Egyptian curricula all featured some discussion of the Nakba (albeit fleetingly).¹³⁵ In reality the agency's reasoning may also have had a political element; Lebanon was the home of the *thawra* and the only field in which the PLO held power by formal agreement, meaning that UNRWA was under more pressure to listen to Palestinian demands there. This gave added leverage

to the threat of teachers' strikes in Lebanon, as UNRWA feared that staff across the region would follow suit.¹³⁶ In other words, it was no coincidence that UNRWA agreed to change its curriculum at the time and in the place where the *thawra* was most powerful.

At the same time, this is not to say that the "Palestinianized" UNRWA curriculum had no wider significance. In fact, the curriculum's adaptation along nationalist lines is emblematic of the history of both the agency and the Palestinian refugee camps across the Levant. It demonstrates the refugees' ongoing political agency. They rarely accepted conditions that they considered intolerable, and UNRWA often found itself in the crossfire of the resulting agitation. The unionized teachers were particularly effective in utilizing their leverage against the agency, seeking to counter the potentially depoliticizing impact of humanitarianism by politicizing UNRWA's services in practice. The power of their political organization was acknowledged at a high level: Commissioner-General Michelmores stated on more than one occasion that the agency had opted to introduce Palestinian history and geography to its schools in response to pressures from the teachers.¹³⁷ UNRWA was the agency in charge, but it was Palestinian refugees themselves who were undeniably the agents of the nation.

The history of Palestinian nationalism in the refugee camps both enriches and complicates conventional understandings of the relationship between nationalism and the state. In the Palestinian case, nationalism developed in the absence of a state and was fueled by a popular longing for it. At the same time, UNRWA emerged as a flawed surrogate to fulfill some of the state's usual functions in a setting of statelessness. While the agency did not create or intentionally fuel Palestinian nationalism, its setup in the camps gave it an important role in the development and communication of nationalist ideas in these spaces. The intimacy and longevity of the agency's presence and operations thus tied it inextricably to the shaping of the Palestinian national identity in exile.

As well as being the closest thing to a government for the refugees, UNRWA was also the only structure common to all Palestinian camps across the Levant. Although the Nakba leveled and unified Palestinian society, the population subsequently endured decades of geographical dispersal whereby they were separated by state borders and subject to the laws of

their respective host governments. As the decades of dispossession unfolded, UNRWA provided some consistency, its existence reinforcing the identity of the Palestinian refugees and helping standardize their experiences regardless of where they lived. The resulting commonalities were vital in facilitating a collective Palestinian national consciousness across the diaspora, as the agency provided a common frame of reference for the refugees. Regardless of whether they lived in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, or the OPT, registered Palestinian refugees held the same UNRWA identity cards and used the same service programs (albeit with some variation in the education system in Lebanon during the thawra).

Most important among these was UNRWA's education program, which the agency itself acknowledged was in many ways equivalent to a national schooling system. Both its structures and its curriculum had a particular importance in transmitting the notions of Palestinian nationalism. It helped shape the refugees' identity not only in overtly nationalist terms, but also through its norms in regard to concepts like gender. The latter is especially worthy of consideration when studying an era that saw the increasing participation of women in public life, particularly in the context of the thawra.

Moreover, UNRWA's acquiescence to refugee lobbying about its curriculum is a further example of how dynamics in the camps were characterized by the refugees' agency. Their political organization and expression were constant features of the camps' history; despite the refugees' formal structural disempowerment, they exerted a considerable influence over their surroundings, including the UN agency responsible for their welfare. The melding of UNRWA's programs with Palestinian nationalism is indicative of the agency's intimate involvement with the camps. This aspect of its setup is crucial for understanding the symbiotic process whereby UNRWA became increasingly "Palestinianized" as the Palestinian the nationalist movement became "internationalized" in its objectives and strategy. In the 1970s this phenomenon became most noticeable in the very institution set up to embody the Palestinian national movement: the PLO.

PALESTINE AT THE UN

UNRWA was a crucial hub for the Palestinian refugees. . . . It became very important for us [in the PLO] to focus on those who constituted its cadres [and] take advantage of the means that UNRWA could offer.

—SHAFIQ AL-HOUT, PLO REPRESENTATIVE AT THE UN, 1974–1991

From the late 1960s the PLO served as the structural representation of the Palestinian nationalist movement, both in the Middle East and on the world stage. In the same period, the organization's new prominence and authority in the Palestinian refugee camps brought it into direct contact with UNRWA. The temporal coincidence of these two developments is revealing and raises questions about the nature and significance of the relationship between the agency and the organization. How did the PLO interact with UNRWA, and vice versa, at the very time that the organization was seeking formal UN recognition?

Despite increasing scholarly engagement with the PLO's international diplomacy efforts in this period, little attention has been paid to the question of how UNRWA fit into the picture.¹ I argue here that the PLO's relationship with UNRWA constituted an important component of its overtures to the UN. As such, the latter cannot be understood without the former. Moreover, the PLO's relationship with UNRWA is best examined within the context of its internationalist strategy in the 1970s, when it sought global solidarity and formal recognition on the world stage.

The PLO perceived and approached UNRWA as an international organization of political significance; in this sense it was aligned with the views of the host states, the donor states, and the refugees themselves. Like the

grass roots in the camps, the PLO saw UNRWA's political significance as tied to its UN status. Accordingly, it sought to use its connections with the agency in the camps as a way of furthering the Palestinian nationalist cause in the international arena. This made UNRWA an important component of the PLO's internationalist strategy. While analyses of the latter have largely focused on the UNSC and UNGA, a truly comprehensive understanding must also account for the role of UNRWA. The PLO's multifaceted nature was mirrored in its complex relations with the UN's various bodies; its particular relationship with UNRWA during the *thawra* epitomized its attempts to connect the everyday realities of the Palestinian plight to the high politics of international diplomacy.

INTERNATIONALISM, HIGH POLITICS, AND DIPLOMACY

By the time of the *thawra*, the PLO had long been operating in an internationalist context. Palestinian national politics had been entangled with international institutionalism ever since the League of Nations affirmed the British Mandate in 1922.² After the League of Nations was discontinued as a result of the Second World War, international intervention in Palestinian politics continued with the UN Partition Plan of 1947, and the numerous UNGA and UNSC resolutions that followed the Nakba.³ The UN's role in the creation of Israel, which became a member state in 1949, led later Israeli prime minister Golda Meir (in office 1969–1974) to describe the country as “the first born of the United Nations.”⁴ Meanwhile on the Palestinian side, the establishment of UNRWA and the continuation of its work typified the UN's ongoing presence in national affairs.⁵

Arafat's PLO quickly grasped both the general relevance of internationalism to Palestinian politics and the particular role of the UN. Observing the extent to which Palestinian affairs had been determined on the world stage, the PLO leadership realized the importance of attaining international legitimacy for the Palestinian national cause, not least at the UN. It accordingly managed its relationship with UNRWA within the wider context of an internationalist strategy. From the late 1960s the PLO twinned its military campaigns against Israel with a diplomatic offensive on the world stage.⁶ It was strongly influenced in this regard by the precedent of the Algerian FLN, which had achieved much of its success by way of international alignments.⁷

The importance of international diplomacy within the PLO's strategy is conveyed clearly in its communications from this period. It defined itself in the context of an international revolt, writing in one communication that it was "part of the world liberation movement and the shared struggle."⁸ This positioning had a particular resonance in the anticolonial atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s, a time when colonized nations across Africa and Asia were gaining independence and asserting their right to sovereignty—developments that had their own impact on the dynamics of the UN.⁹ As Steven Salaita had shown in detail, the emergence of Third Worldism in this period as a self-consciously internationalist movement had crystallized the notion of progressive solidarity across the Global South.¹⁰ By characterizing Israel and Zionism as part of the Western imperialist order, the PLO cast itself in the resistance mold of the global anticolonial movement.¹¹

Such positioning was a continuous theme in the PLO's messaging. In 1969 Fatah declared the Palestinian *thawra* "a model of resistance to neo-imperialist domination," thus asserting both its solidarity and its wider relevance.¹² The PLO also regularly highlighted its commonalities with other revolutionary movements, printing posters to celebrate the emergence or victories of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and the Polisario Front, among others.¹³ Meanwhile its leftist contingents, the PFLP, the DFLP, and the Arab Liberation Front (ALF), expressed their solidarity with workers and oppressed groups around the world by paying tribute to international leftist commemorations like May Day and International Women's Day.¹⁴

There was a strategic purpose to the PLO positioning itself in this way. As Daniel Meier argues, the idea that the Palestinian struggle was part of a broader revolutionary movement was powerful as a means of mobilizing support.¹⁵ When Arafat claimed solidarity with popular movements in Zimbabwe, Vietnam, and South Africa—as he did when addressing the UN in 1974—he fortified myths around the *thawra*'s potency.¹⁶ The Palestinian nationalist movement carried far more weight as an active component of a global movement than it did as a geographically contained campaign with limited means and little relevance outside its own sphere. This transnational approach to positioning a nationalist cause was not uncommon among stateless peoples; indeed, parallels can be drawn with the Kurdish and Armenian nationalist movements in this regard.¹⁷ In taking such an approach, the PLO added weight and value to its own actions and

credentials and greatly increased its potential for garnering international support, both diplomatically and in terms of resources.

It was with this in mind that the PLO pursued a series of international alliances in the 1960s and 1970s. It paid particular attention to the successful revolutions in Algeria and later Iran, which it celebrated as fellow popular uprisings against Western-backed imperialist regimes in the same region.¹⁸ Their solidarity was manifested in the sharing of arms and training facilities.¹⁹ Fatah cofounder Abu Iyad recalls in his memoir how the newly independent Algerian government of the 1960s became the first state to supply Fatah with arms and also authorized the opening of a representative office in Algiers.²⁰ After the Iranian revolution in 1979, Arafat was the first foreign leader to formally visit the new regime in Tehran—an alliance that the PLO fervently celebrated in its communications.²¹

The PLO did not only align itself with Arab and Islamic countries. Its political opposition to the West, particularly the United States, facilitated links to the Soviet bloc as well.²² As early as 1956 Arafat and Abu Iyad had traveled to Prague to attend a meeting of the International Students' Congress, with Arafat donning what would become his trademark *kufiyya*.²³ Over the decades, ties to the Soviet bloc became a mainstay of the PLO's international relations, with Arafat visiting Moscow for talks and continually referring to the USSR as a friend and ally.²⁴ The PLO also forged close alliances with communist regimes in Romania, China, and Cuba; the PLO's Havana office openly provided significant diplomatic and material support.²⁵ Yugoslavia was another close ally, and one that would prove highly significant for the PLO's international strategy. It was Yugoslavian president Tito who first suggested that the PLO go to the UN in the 1970s, ushering in a watershed moment for the Palestinian nationalist movement's international standing.²⁶

Palestine at the UN

The PLO's internationalist strategy was not limited to foreign states. Recognizing that the United Nations had played a central role in Palestinian politics for decades, the PLO realized that it would also need to win over the supranational organization in order to truly gain legitimacy on the world stage. Winning UN recognition and even endorsement thus quickly became a central plank of the PLO's strategy. In 1976 it stated in its

publication *PLO Information Bulletin* that “exposing the Zionist-imperialist enemy to world opinion through the UN bodies” was one of three strands of its struggle, the other two being defending the *thawra* in Lebanon, and “resisting the Zionist occupation forces in occupied Palestine.”²⁷ The *PLO Information Bulletin* itself contributed to this “first strand.” Published from 1975 to 1991 in English, French, and Spanish, it helped bring the PLO’s cause to a wider international audience.²⁸

Fatah, which dominated the PLO from 1968 onward, was the driving force behind this UN-focused approach. The Fatah contingent had long been aware of the importance of international diplomacy, having sent their first recorded communication to the UN secretary-general in June 1965, only a few months after formally launching their armed struggle.²⁹ After taking over the PLO, Fatah continued to pursue opportunities at the UN. A Fatah document for political planning from 1980, later seized by Israeli occupying forces in southern Lebanon, lists the aim of securing more pro-Palestinian UN resolutions among its objectives.³⁰

This approach provoked considerable censure from some of the Palestinian diaspora, among whom there was a long-running suspicion of the UN.³¹ Shafiq al-Hout, who represented the PLO at the UN from 1974 to 1991, recalls in his memoir how some Palestinians saw the organization’s overtures to the UN as a betrayal and demonstrated against the moves.³² Yet despite their opposition, the PLO—or at least the dominant Fatah contingent—insisted that winning over the UN was vital to the nationalist movement’s success. The rationale was simple: while many in the PLO leadership shared the general Palestinian suspicion toward the United Nations, they also recognized that it had been crucial to historical Israeli successes and Palestinian defeats. They accordingly concluded that in order to reverse Palestinian fortunes, they would need to persuade the UN of their case.³³ Many argued that the content of the UN’s charter and resolutions provided a good basis for their struggle, as they supported ideas of national self-determination and the right to repatriation. The PLO liked to reiterate this by referring regularly to UN norms, for example, in its charter of 1968 and in documentary films like the Palestine Cinema Institution’s *Atfal min filistin* (Children of Palestine).³⁴

In the 1970s the PLO’s view on the United Nations was further influenced by the changes that had occurred in the latter’s membership.³⁵ As several leading Palestinian officials noted, by this time the UN’s composition looked

very different from that in the 1940s. The large-scale decolonization of Africa and Asia had precipitated the entry of dozens of newly independent states, which were largely sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. As a result, the UNGA, once dismissed by U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt as a place for “small nations to blow off steam,” was repositioned as an arena for international anticolonial solidarity.³⁶ Many of its newer members now sought to reinterpret international law to this end, contesting its supposed separation from the political order. In so doing, they pushed to make the UN’s internationalism truly universal, reflecting the interests and aspirations of the global majority.³⁷

These shifts benefited the Palestinians both practically and ideationally. In practical terms, the PLO had ties with many of the postcolonial governments now represented at the UNGA, which were often made up of former liberation movements with whom it identified.³⁸ Moreover, the Palestinian cause itself became a central facet of Third Worldist anti-imperial ideology in this period. Accordingly, the UNGA became especially active on the issue from the late 1960s. George Tomeh, Syrian ambassador and permanent representative to the UN from 1965 to 1972, described this as a return to the UN’s earlier preoccupation with the politics of the Palestine Question, which had dominated the early years of the UNGA and UNSC before slipping off the agendas of both.³⁹

From 1969 the UNGA passed a slew of resolutions in the Palestinians’ favor. Importantly, these focused on the Palestinians’ political situation rather than a depoliticized construction of their humanitarian plight. Thus in 1969 UNGA Resolution 2535 reaffirmed the Palestinians’ right of return and condemned Israeli policies in the OPT.⁴⁰ In the same year the UNGA voted by a two-thirds majority to establish the UN Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories (UNSCIIP). Framing Palestine as a political problem requiring a political solution, UNSCIIP was mandated to analyze the nature of the Israeli occupation and investigate rights violations.⁴¹ The following year two more resolutions upheld the Palestinians’ right to self-determination, with one drawing explicitly on ideals of Third Worldist solidarity by comparing the Palestinians’ situation to that in southern Africa.⁴²

In 1970 the PLO gained a new voice on the world stage when its representative participated in a discussion on the question of Palestine, held by

the UNGA's Special Political Committee.⁴³ Subsequent years saw further affirmations of this kind, with UNGA Resolution 2787 even calling on states to provide the Palestinians with "political, moral and material assistance" in their struggle for self-determination—the strongest indication yet of the discursive shift toward an overtly political framing of the refugees' situation. As the text of this resolution was explicitly grounded in UN values around human rights, liberation, and territorial integrity, it was taken to reaffirm the views of the PLO leadership that the UN could be used to further their cause.⁴⁴

The UNGA's shift towards a pro-Palestinian stance reached its apogee in 1974.⁴⁵ After the Arab League formally recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate Palestinian representative at the Rabat Summit that year, the impetus quickly moved to the UN. In October the UNGA voted by 105 to 4 to invite the PLO to participate in its plenary discussions on Palestine.⁴⁶ Then in November UNGA Resolution 3237 formally recognized the PLO as a UN observer entity, giving it a similar status to the Vatican.⁴⁷

While UNGA Resolution 3237 had huge significance for the Palestinians, its impact was initially dwarfed in the global consciousness by another event that same month, when Arafat accepted a formal invitation from the UNGA to address the assembly in New York. Israel vehemently opposed the invitation, but to no avail.⁴⁸ On November 13, 1974—nearly twenty-seven years to the day of the Partition Plan—Arafat took to the podium. His speech articulated the PLO's internationalist strategy, calling on UN member states to implement the Palestinians' national and political rights. Presenting the Palestinians' national struggle as perfectly aligned with UN ideals, he contended that international support for their cause should follow:

[Ours] is actually a just and proper struggle consecrated by the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. . . . In my formal capacity as Chairman of the PLO and leader of the Palestinian revolution I appeal to you to accompany our people in its struggle to attain its right to self-determination. This right is consecrated in the United Nations Charter and has been repeatedly confirmed in resolutions adopted by this august body since the drafting of the Charter.⁴⁹

The speech, which was broadcast around the world amid simultaneous fanfare and controversy, won the PLO an unprecedented level of global

publicity. It was also hugely important in boosting Palestinian morale. Despite their widespread opposition to the UN, the refugees largely reacted with pride to the sight of their *de facto* leader formally addressing the world stage. On the day of Arafat's speech, UNRWA recorded nationalist demonstrations across the OPT in celebration.⁵⁰ The UN's particular history in Palestine gave it a special resonance. As Fawaz Turki later wrote, "There was cogent symbolism in the idea of the United Nations, the very international body that had caused the dispersal of the Palestinian people by partitioning the land in 1947, inviting them back to address it on their aspirations."⁵¹

The developments in New York also had firmly practical consequences. Resolution 3237 gave the PLO a higher level of UN recognition than any other nonstate actor at the time, allowing it to participate in the UNGA's work and sessions. As such it made the organization much harder to ignore. There were limitations; the PLO was not a full UN member and remained excluded from the UNSC, which held the far greater power in world politics. Yet it was now unmistakably part of the UN. To reinforce this, the UNGA used its clout to push for the PLO's recognition in other parts of the UN; in the same month that Arafat spoke in New York, UNGA Resolution 3236 requested that the secretary-general establish contacts with the PLO in order to help further Palestinian rights.⁵²

The PLO was quick to take advantage of its new opportunities, appointing permanent observers to the UN Headquarters in both New York and Geneva.⁵³ Two years after its induction into the UNGA, Soviet pressure led to the PLO's inclusion in UNSC deliberations on the Middle Eastern conflict.⁵⁴ In a major diplomatic victory for the PLO, its representative was also invited to address the UNSC and had a private meeting with the secretary-general in 1976.⁵⁵ The PLO now regularly appealed to the Secretariat and other member states for support and assistance on issues ranging from the nature of the Israeli occupation to the right of return. In 1978 Arafat wrote to Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim calling for the refugees' "right to return to their homes and property in accordance with the rules of international law, the Charter of the United Nations, United Nations resolutions, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."⁵⁶ His invocation of the UN Charter and UN resolutions was highly telling. By deliberately framing his argument by way of international norms, he implied that it is the UN's natural duty to support the Palestinian national cause.

While the Secretariat never formally endorsed the PLO's case, the latter's new status at the UN marked a greater diplomatic discussion of the "Palestine question," as Tomeh observed. In 1975 the UNGA established the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (informally known as the "Palestinian Rights Committee"), which was charged with producing a program for the implementation of the Palestinians' fundamental rights.⁵⁷ The following year, UNGA Resolution 31/110 called on the secretary-general "to prepare and submit . . . a report on the living conditions of the Palestinian people," in consultation with the PLO as "the representative of the Palestinian people"—a clear sign of the latter's growing international legitimacy.⁵⁸

The PLO leadership acknowledged that their victories at the United Nations in this period were largely attributable to the membership changes engendered by decolonization. In fact, Arafat had explicitly mentioned this when he addressed the UNGA:

The United Nations of today is not the United Nations of the past, just as today's world is not yesterday's world. Today's United Nations represents 138 nations, a number that more clearly reflects the will of the international community. Thus today's United Nations is more nearly capable of implementing the principles embodied in its Charter and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as being more truly empowered to support causes of peace and justice. Our peoples are now beginning to feel that change.⁵⁹

In a statement to the UNGA dated the following day, AHC representative Issa Nakhleh made the same points.⁶⁰

Algeria's presidency of the UNGA in 1974 was particularly significant to the UN's changing composition. Al-Hout cites this in his memoir as a key factor behind the PLO's decision to go to the UN that year.⁶¹ Algeria was a beacon of anticolonial struggle to liberation movements everywhere and to the Palestinians in particular, which made its UNGA presidency both symbolically and practically important.⁶² Indeed, the Algerians' victory against the French Empire is commonly mentioned as a point of aspiration in Palestinian refugee accounts of this period. Describing life in the camps in the 1960s, Turki recalls the widespread feeling that "if the Algerian people can stand up to the might of the colons in their country, so can

we resist the might of the Israelis.”⁶³ Leila Khaled writes similarly that the Algerians were “a source of great inspiration to me.”⁶⁴ From the PLO’s perspective, the FLN’s success in using international alignments to campaign for Algerian independence appeared to validate its own strategy.⁶⁵

The PLO’s increasing recognition at the international level also came to influence its political stance in this period. In 1974 it adopted a political program that spoke for the first time of establishing a Palestinian state on part of historic Palestine, rather than returning to the pre-Nakba borders.⁶⁶ This paved the way for its later acceptance of a two-state solution. In this way, its increasing integration into the international order triggered changes in the PLO, as well as the other way around.⁶⁷ The question remains of what this meant for UNRWA, as the UN’s local address for Palestinians in the Middle East.

UNRWA and the PLO’s International Strategy

UNRWA’s existence served as a manifestation of the long-running connections between Palestine and the international order encapsulated in the UN. Specifically, its work was an expression of the particular involvement of the UNGA, which provided its mandate and to which it was answerable. As such, UNRWA was directly affected by the UNGA’s formal recognition of the PLO in 1974. Commissioner-General Rennie acknowledged this in his annual report the following year, stating that “the granting to the PLO by the General Assembly of observer status at the UN and the Assembly’s request to the Secretary-General to establish contacts with the PLO on all matters relating to the question of Palestine . . . were of significance to the Agency.”⁶⁸ This “significance” was distinctly political, despite UNRWA’s continual insistence that its work was completely detached from politics. The impact of Resolution 3237 saw the agency drawn into the international political discourse about Palestine in increasingly explicit terms.

Officially speaking, 1974 marked the beginning of UNRWA’s relationship with the PLO, as this could only be formally established once the UNGA had recognized the organization.⁶⁹ In reality, the agency had been dealing with the PLO ever since the latter had come to prominence in the camps in the late 1960s. It had loomed particularly large in Lebanon, where the Cairo Agreement of 1969 made the PLO the *de facto* governmental authority in parts of the country and meant that the agency could not avoid working

with it. Yet despite the realities on the ground, UNRWA had to proceed with care, as it could not forge any formal agreements with the PLO without the UNGA's endorsement.⁷⁰

The agency thus walked a tightrope in its relations with the PLO for the first five years after the Cairo Agreement. Its task was complicated further by the fact that even outside Lebanon, the PLO was gaining increasing prominence at this time. As a result, UNRWA faced further challenges and a new directness to its communications with the PLO in the years running up to Resolution 3237. In 1970 the Arab host governments requested that the PLO participate in meetings on UNRWA's education program.⁷¹ The agency had to negotiate this request in a setting whereby its largest funder, the United States, continued to classify the PLO as a terrorist organization. In 1973 UNRWA management in Beirut expressed concern to New York over whether the agency's work in Lebanon, where it was compelled to work with the PLO, was compatible with its status as a UN organ, and with the basis on which it received funding.⁷²

The UNGA's formal recognition of the PLO in 1974 therefore made things slightly easier for the agency. It now had an official framework within which it could justify its communications with the PLO. The aftermath of Resolution 3237 saw the UNRWA-PLO relationship formalized, and it was subsequently managed more openly.⁷³ Soon afterward, Commissioner-General Rennie called on Arafat in Beirut "to inform him more fully of the Agency's financial difficulties and their implications for services to the refugees." The UN formally reported his visit, in an indication of the newly sanctioned state of affairs.⁷⁴ From 1974 the two organizations held regular official meetings in Lebanon, chaired by Lebanese government representatives, to discuss operational issues regarding the refugees there.⁷⁵

The PLO's formal induction into the UNGA changed things for UNRWA in other ways as well. Although it continued to insist that its work was purely apolitical, the agency was now inevitably drawn into the UN's increasingly explicit engagement with the political dimensions of the Palestinian situation. UNRWA's annual reports had always aided UN discussions on the "Palestine problem" by providing detailed information about the situation in the camps. In this way they exposed diplomatic delegations at the UN to new aspects of the issue that they had not previously considered, and widened the UNGA debates on the matter.⁷⁶ Yet the events of 1974 elevated UNRWA's role to a new level. Its relationship with the PLO now fell under

the umbrella of Resolution 3236, which required the secretary-general to “establish contacts” with the organization.⁷⁷ As part of its fulfillment of this task, the Secretariat requested regular updates from UNRWA on its contacts with the PLO.⁷⁸

There was more to come. In a report on the Question of Palestine in 1976, the UN secretary-general cited the PLO-UNRWA relationship as a key part of his considerations, in view of the “direct interest” of the agency’s work to large numbers of Palestinians.⁷⁹ The following year, the UNGA called for the secretary-general to produce another report on the Palestinian situation, this time investigating the socioeconomic impact of the Israeli occupation by working with UN organs, “particularly the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.”⁸⁰ UNRWA’s work thus became increasingly enmeshed with the UNGA’s moves to address and excavate the Palestinian situation.

It was not only the UNGA that incorporated UNRWA’s work in this way. The PLO also sought to make use of the agency for its own purposes, sometimes quoting its reports in official speeches at the UN and other international arenas.⁸¹ When possible, the PLO cited statements by UNRWA officials as evidence of the justice of their cause. An issue of the *PLO Information Bulletin* in 1977 proudly proclaimed that the UNRWA Director in Gaza had “expressed his strong criticism of the Zionist authorities’ policies in the Gaza Strip,” particularly the forced relocation of refugees.⁸² The PLO was careful to include this in the *PLO Information Bulletin*, which was printed in European languages and designed to reach a Western audience. Evidently it perceived UNRWA to have sufficient clout and authority that its words were worth disseminating to this audience.

In these ways, UNRWA became increasingly entangled in the complex dynamics of the Palestinian issue at the UN. This was perhaps inevitable; despite its claims to the contrary, UNRWA’s work had never been devoid of politics. Moreover, its positioning gave it a particular importance. As the only UN body consistently present in the Palestinian setting throughout the second half of the twentieth century, it was in a unique place to provide firsthand information from the field.

Yet notwithstanding the UNGA’s endorsements and even requirements for UNRWA to work with the PLO, the subject remained a fraught one for the agency. Its dependence on voluntary donations meant that it could not afford to alienate its largest donor state, the United States, which

continued to classify the PLO as a terrorist organization until 1988.⁸³ As a result, UNRWA was careful to underplay its relations with the PLO in its communications with the United States and other major donors, which were nearly all Western states. This was especially pressing given that the United States had already attached to its funding the condition of total detachment from the PLA and fida'iyyin groups.⁸⁴ Accordingly, the UNRWA-PLO relationship was conspicuous by its absence from donor-targeted UNRWA communications such as the regular newsletter *Palestine Refugees Today*.⁸⁵ This did not reflect the reality in many camps, where this relationship was increasingly important to the agency's operations.

QUOTIDIAN CAMP POLITICS

While UNGA Resolution 3237 was transformative at the high diplomatic level, its impact on the ground was more muted. As already noted, it formalized a relationship that had already long existed, albeit informally. The question remains of how much of a difference this formalization made in practice. Regardless of its status, the PLO had been on UNRWA's radar since it was first created, ten years before Resolution 3237. For much of the 1960s the relationship between the two organizations was ambiguous. Formally, UNRWA prohibited its employees from publicly identifying with the PLO and protested the conscription of its staff into the PLA from 1965 to 1967. Yet the agency stopped short of opposing contact with the PLO altogether, knowing this would fuel preexisting perceptions among many refugees that it was anti-Palestinian.⁸⁶

The PLO's rising power in the camps in the late 1960s greatly complicated the situation for UNRWA, whose mandate remained the same despite the changes on the ground.⁸⁷ The agency first encountered the PLO directly when the latter sought to build a Palestinian para-state in Jordan in the late 1960s.⁸⁸ While this was short-lived, it precipitated new themes in the UNRWA-PLO relationship that would dominate the subsequent decade. After Black September, the PLO established its headquarters close to Sabra and Shatila camps in the Fakhani district of Beirut. The area became known informally as the "Fakhani canton" or "Fakhani republic," as the PLO established a para-state apparatus in Lebanon that included social, cultural, and educational institutions, medical organizations, welfare services, research centers, and economic planning boards.⁸⁹

As it gained legitimacy from the Cairo Agreement, the PLO demanded greater recognition from UNRWA, which had little choice but to engage with it directly in Lebanon. Relations gradually moved from “uneasy coexistence to active partnership,” in the words of al-Husseini.⁹⁰ From the agency’s perspective, the impact was mixed. There were some benefits: at a time when UNRWA was facing severe financial difficulties, the PLO’s provision of additional services in the camps helped relieve the level of need among the refugees and thus reduce pressure on the agency.⁹¹ Yet the legitimacy of the Cairo Agreement did not remove the challenges that UNRWA faced in keeping its Western donors happy while working with the PLO.⁹²

The PLO took a similarly multifaceted approach to UNRWA, reflecting the paradoxical views held by many refugees about the agency. Al-Husseini argues that from the mid-1970s the PLO’s policy toward the agency had two main aims: to maintain and increase UNRWA’s services and to ensure that its decisions were consistent with Palestinian interests.⁹³ Yet these aims did not always result in consistent policy. It is in fact possible to identify three key strands of the PLO’s relationship with UNRWA at this time. First, it loudly endorsed the refugees’ common grievances against the agency, seeking to align itself with their criticisms of its work. At the same time, the PLO recognized that UNRWA’s services were vital to the welfare and well-being of many refugees, and it campaigned behind the scenes for its work to continue. Third and most interestingly, it also sought to use UNRWA’s camp infrastructure and services for its own political and nationalist purposes, juxtaposing this approach with the two other strands that it simultaneously continued to pursue.

Criticizing UNRWA: The PLO as Opponent

The PLO leadership’s criticisms of UNRWA were largely grounded in the general complaints of the grass roots in the camps. By adopting their grievances, the PLO leadership—who mostly came from outside the camps—gained clout with the camp communities and underlined its claim to represent them. Like the camp refugees, the PLO always stopped short of calling for UNRWA’s abolition or questioning the grounds for its existence. Instead it endorsed the refugees’ usual grievances: that the agency was

patronizing toward the Palestinians, and that it was politically aligned with their enemies.⁹⁴ It also advocated long-running demands by the refugees for the agency to improve its health clinics and increase its ration provisions.⁹⁵

Many PLO officials were particularly keen to take up the charge that UNRWA was part of a Western-backed plot to resettle the refugees and thus undermine their political cause. UNRWA's refusal to participate in Palestinian national politics was taken as evidence of this. As early as 1965 the PLO had issued a questionnaire for Palestinian UNRWA staff in Syria, seeking information about their personal backgrounds and their potential to contribute to the nationalist movement, either financially or through activities. The questionnaire also asked recipients to name up to twenty acquaintances who could participate "in preparing for the battle of liberation."⁹⁶ The agency's refusal to distribute the questionnaire, on grounds of its inappropriate political and militant content, was cited as evidence that it was "conspiring" against the refugee cause—a claim that al-Husseini writes was included in "countless" PLO pamphlets over the years.⁹⁷ The PLO used similar claims to frame other issues over years, for example, depicting the relocation of UNRWA's headquarters to Vienna in 1978 as the result of "imperialist and Zionist pressures" on the agency.⁹⁸

Both the PLO and the refugees applied these conspiracy theories to UNRWA's service cuts, seeing them as a precursor to the agency's dissolution and the international abandonment of the refugees.⁹⁹ In a 1977 statement the PLO accused the agency and the United States of "playing with the life of Palestinians" by deliberately providing inadequate welfare services.¹⁰⁰ Four years later a PLO official warned the UNRWA field director in Damascus that service cuts would not be accepted, hinting that the PLO would unleash grievous demonstrations against the agency if it continued with its planned cutbacks.¹⁰¹ These moves had an impact, as PLO opposition became another factor that UNRWA had to consider when deciding whether to implement certain cuts.¹⁰² In fact, it was sometimes a decisive factor: in 1979 the deputy commissioner-general argued against education cuts as they "would cause a serious rupture in our relations with the PLO."¹⁰³ Evidently these relations were sufficiently important that they needed to be maintained even at a cost.

Despite this, the PLO's influence on UNRWA's work was ultimately limited. It failed to prevent many of the decisions it opposed, such as the

relocation of UNRWA's headquarters; it also failed to bring in many of the changes it demanded, such as the inclusion of protection activities within UNRWA's general mandate. This is a striking contrast with the frequent success of the refugees' grassroots campaigns, such as their demands for UNRWA to shift from its "Works" program to education in the 1950s, and their campaign for a "Palestinianized" curriculum (the PLO took up the latter cause, but teacher and student activism initiated and drove it).¹⁰⁴ This discrepancy may be explained by the PLO's minimal leverage against UNRWA. The organization's lack of territorial sovereignty and lowly status at the UN meant that it could never establish comprehensive alternatives to the agency's services and therefore threaten to replace it completely. As such, the PLO retained some elements of dependence on UNRWA's work.¹⁰⁵

The time and effort that the PLO expended on criticizing UNRWA's work also indicate that it saw the agency as a significant, if flawed, player; an insignificant body would surely not have warranted such exertions. Moreover, the PLO never crossed the line into calling for UNRWA's abolition. On the contrary, it again aligned itself with the refugees in insisting that UNRWA must continue its work until their plight was resolved. For the PLO, this insistence translated into action, as behind the scenes it worked furtively to ensure that UNRWA's programs could continue.

Supporting UNRWA: The PLO as Fundraiser

Officially, the PLO shared the Arab states' position that responsibility for funding UNRWA lay with the Western-dominated international community, on the grounds of its political accountability for the refugees' plight.¹⁰⁶ In private, however, the PLO recognized that UNRWA's work was crucial to the refugees' well-being and as such could not be allowed to flounder. UNRWA staff themselves stated internally that "there can be no doubt whatsoever about desire of Arab host governments and PLO that UNRWA should continue provide [*sic*] services to refugees."¹⁰⁷ In the PLO's case, this was not simply a desire but a driving force behind active fundraising work on UNRWA's behalf in the Arab world at this time.¹⁰⁸

UNRWA first formally approached the PLO for help in raising funds in 1974, when it was facing a serious deficit.¹⁰⁹ It asked the PLO leadership to seek emergency funding for its work from the Gulf states, where the agency

had previously had difficulties even getting appointments to see high officials.¹¹⁰ It also considered asking the PLO to approach Cuba and other communist states on its behalf.¹¹¹ The agency's overtures to the PLO on this front provide an example of how their relationship was symbiotic, with each seeking to use the other to its own advantage whenever possible. It is also a clear case of UNGA Resolution 3237 making a difference on the ground; without it, UNRWA would not have been able to appeal to the PLO for fundraising assistance.

The PLO leadership was receptive to the agency's requests. From 1974 to 1975 it helped secure large emergency contributions to UNRWA from various Gulf states. Although these states refused to commit to regular contributions to UNRWA's General Fund, their emergency donations helped keep UNRWA afloat that year.¹¹² UNRWA acknowledged the PLO's vital role in raising these funds. In 1975 Commissioner-General Rennie reported to New York that "reconsideration by Arab Foreign Ministers of increased contributions to UNRWA is result [*sic*] of approach to PLO."¹¹³ Nor was this a one-off: in 1975 Arafat asked to be kept informed of UNRWA's financial situation.¹¹⁴ Indeed, it was Arafat in particular who was responsible for many fundraising efforts on UNRWA's behalf. Over the 1970s he traveled to numerous Arab and Muslim states to appeal for donations. The PLO made further efforts to fundraise for the agency at the Baghdad Summit in 1978 and also directly donated money for use in UNRWA's facilities.¹¹⁵

Archival records indicate warm and solicitous relations between the PLO and UNRWA leaderships over this issue, which was at odds with the criticisms previously discussed. In one letter in 1979, Arafat addressed Commissioner-General Rydbeck as "dear brother."¹¹⁶ In another, he wrote:

We cannot but express our appreciation for your concern and interest in seeking solutions to the financial crisis faced by UNRWA, in order to muster sufficient support for the maintenance of its activities inside and outside occupied Palestine. We are in fact exerting efforts through our contacts with the responsible international circles concerned with a view to participating in helping UNRWA financially. I wish also to emphasize that I am keen to meet with you and hope that the circumstances will permit such a meeting. . . . Please accept our respect and appreciation.¹¹⁷

Their fundraising partnership remained active throughout this period. In 1980 and 1981 Rydbeck met with Arafat repeatedly in Beirut to discuss the UNRWA deficit, and the PLO chair promised to again help raise money.¹¹⁸ Arafat subsequently approached Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and even Japan on the agency's behalf. Farouk Kaddoumi, head of the PLO's political department, also appealed to France to increase its contribution.¹¹⁹ Again, emergency donations helped stave off total disaster for UNRWA.

Paradoxically, these fundraising efforts occurred at the same time that the PLO was criticizing UNRWA for being part of an international plot to liquidate the "Palestinian problem."¹²⁰ This apparent inconsistency is a sign of the divisions that existed within the PLO, sometimes to the degree of generating incompatible policy positions. The internal tensions were exacerbated by the fact that, like UNRWA, the PLO had to navigate the pressures of numerous parties. For the PLO, this meant assuring an Arab audience that it was not "selling out" on the principle of Western responsibility for funding UNRWA. It publicly held fast to the official Arab line; when asked in a 1975 interview, PLO spokesperson Abdulmohsen Abu Mayzar denied reports that the organization had appealed to Saudi Arabia to help fund UNRWA, stating that such funding was an international responsibility that lay with the Western states.¹²¹ These public denials were necessary for the PLO to maintain its credibility and hold together despite internal conflict. Yet the reference to international responsibility belied the fact that on the ground, this international agency was becoming increasingly entangled with local Palestinian affairs.

PLO Politics: UNRWA and the Fakhani Republic

The establishment of the Fakhani republic meant that in Lebanon, the PLO came to present UNRWA with many of the problems it usually faced from the host governments. Questions of access, personnel, and the use of facilities all became topics of potential disagreement between UNRWA and the PLO at this time. The huge controversy that surrounded the PLO—not least in the eyes of UNRWA's major donors—rendered this especially sensitive for the agency.¹²² In this sense, UNGA Resolution 3237 made little difference; on the ground in Lebanon at least, the Cairo Agreement and the thawra acted as far more meaningful turning points.

Randa Farah characterizes the UNRWA-PLO relationship at this time in largely positive terms, contending that hostilities between the two were rare even though the PLO briefly “overshadowed or competed with UNRWA.”¹²³ Much of the evidence, however, suggests that this depiction, while not inaccurate per se, may be overly simplistic. The difficulties were in fact plentiful. As Farah identifies, an increasing competitiveness between the PLO and UNRWA took hold as the former gained power in the camps.¹²⁴ The PLO’s new authority meant that its patronage became as important and desirable to the refugees as connections with UNRWA, if not more so. This in turn undermined UNRWA’s authority, disrupting its previously exclusive status as the camps’ de facto government. There was a new surrogate state on the scene.

In practical terms, the PLO increasingly came to use the same sites and installations as UNRWA, albeit for different purposes. For example, the PLO’s Higher Political Committee sought the use of UNRWA schools to hold nationalistic classes for Palestinian children.¹²⁵ Farah writes that this was sometimes due to a lack of alternatives.¹²⁶ It is true that in the case of the schools, there were not many other buildings in the camps of suitable size and design, yet the reasons were not merely practical. As the epigraph to this chapter shows, the PLO was well aware of the strategic potential that the agency’s work provided. From the late 1960s it accordingly sought to use UNRWA’s infrastructure to extend its own authority, legitimacy, and support in the camps.¹²⁷

The PLO’s efforts on this front took different forms. Al-Hout recalls in his memoir that it particularly targeted UNRWA employees in its recruitment drives, aiming to use them to take advantage of the agency’s network and accordingly reach as many Palestinians as possible.¹²⁸ For this reason, the PLO was keen to align itself with UNRWA’s Palestinian staff in their tensions with the agency, as a way of winning their trust and loyalty. Al-Husseini argues that it was here where the PLO actually enjoyed its greatest influence over the agency, albeit informally. By loudly endorsing the demands of organizations like the General Union of Palestinian Teachers, it could turn small-scale grievances into national issues and win itself a place at the negotiating table in the process.¹²⁹ It accordingly endorsed the teachers’ demands for higher salaries and supported their complaints about the prohibition of political discussion in schools.¹³⁰ The latter issue was of particular interest to the PLO, as UNRWA’s regulations on staff neutrality,

and specifically its ban on employees joining the PLO, severely limited its scope for recruitment.¹³¹

The PLO also took up the refugees' desire for a "Palestinianized" curriculum as a key issue.¹³² An issue of the PLO organ *Falastin al-thawra* in 1974 wrote of the agency's "suspicious attempts to keep the people ignorant."¹³³ More formally, at the UNESCO General Conference two years later, PLO observer Ibrahim Souss spoke of the need to "re-evaluate" UNRWA's education system, as part of the burgeoning relationship between the two organizations.¹³⁴ This is a key example of how, in league with the refugees, the PLO sought to influence the agency's educational policies and professional training programs along its favored nationalistic lines.¹³⁵ Souss's intervention is also demonstrative of how the UN's formal recognition of the PLO could intersect with the refugees' demands on the ground, in this case by giving them a voice on the world stage and boosting their leverage.

UNRWA's own records suggest that at this time, the PLO was quite successful in making use of the agency's structures to recruit and organize the refugees for its own purposes. When Arafat addressed the UNGA in 1974, for example, the PLO instructed UNRWA staff in Lebanon to suspend work so as to participate in demonstrations of solidarity. UNRWA reported that nearly all field staff left work early in the morning in response.¹³⁶ To a lesser degree, it was also able to mobilize refugees in Gaza for the same cause using the structure and organization of UNRWA schools; the agency reported agitation in Jabalia and Shati camps on the day of Arafat's speech.¹³⁷

From UNRWA's perspective, the PLO's encroachment on its facilities and services caused both political and practical problems. Hasna Rida, who worked as a research assistant for UNRWA in Lebanon at this time, recalls that the agency's relationship with the PLO was an anxious one. UNRWA management were nervous about the PLO's power in the camps and the accompanying desire of many refugees to be actively involved in the *thawra*.¹³⁸ This, of course, caused concern for the agency, which was keen to keep its services detached from any political affairs—an increasingly unfeasible objective in the camps at this time. The PLO's use of UNRWA's installations for its own purposes also caused serious practical problems, as these buildings were increasingly targeted in Israeli air raids.¹³⁹

UNRWA's inability to prevent the PLO's infringement on its spaces is perhaps the clearest sign of the *thawra*'s impact on the balance of power in

the camps. It contrasts starkly with UNRWA's previously straightforward refusal in 1965 to distribute a PLO questionnaire that was deemed inappropriately political. By the 1970s the impact of the *thawra* had greatly increased the PLO's leverage, and the situation was much more difficult for UNRWA, particularly in Lebanon. Its problems worsened as the Lebanese Civil War escalated and UNRWA's field office in Beirut found itself frequently cut off from both headquarters and area offices. As a result, it became increasingly dependent on the PLO, the only security force to which it could appeal. Thomas McElhiney, who served as UNRWA deputy commissioner-general from 1974 to 1977 and commissioner-general from 1977 to 1979, spoke positively of the PLO's role in helping the agency function in Lebanon at a time when the country was ruled by chaos and terror.¹⁴⁰ Yet the actions of the PLO in Lebanon at this time also caused untold problems and serious reputational damage for UNRWA.

The disorder of the Lebanese Civil War saw the PLO take its use of UNRWA installations to new heights. It infamously used the agency's Vocational Training Center (VTC) in Siblin to store and retool weapons and hold military training for *fida'iyyin*.¹⁴¹ When the agency discovered this obvious breach of UN regulations, it protested to the PLO, temporarily closed the VTC, and disciplined the staff members responsible.¹⁴² Yet the damage was done. The Israeli discovery of Siblin in 1982 caused a furor in Israel and the United States and created serious problems for UNRWA's relationships with both states.¹⁴³ Occurring in the final year of the Fakhani republic, the controversy marked the culmination of UNRWA's long-running, complex, and contradictory relationship with the PLO in the camps.

The historical relationship between UNRWA and the PLO provides an important perspective on the trajectory of the Palestinian nationalist movement in the refugee camps. The realities of the situation in the camps during the *thawra* compelled UNRWA to engage with Palestinian nationalism in various forms, at the grassroots level as well as that of institutional leadership. When it came to the latter, the PLO used this engagement to pursue its strategic goals while bolstering presentations of its cause as self-consciously global, forward-looking, and interconnected to contemporary movements around the world.

The PLO's perceptions of the agency further show that UNRWA was universally seen as a political body, despite its claims to the contrary. The overt politicization of the camps during the thawra, most notably in Lebanon but to a lesser degree elsewhere as well, brought the reality of the situation into stark relief and rendered UNRWA's ostensibly apolitical stance increasingly untenable. Indeed, perhaps the only common idea shared by Israel, the Arab host states, the donor states, the refugees themselves, and the PLO was that UNRWA was essentially a political organization, not merely an aid agency. This commonality between the PLO and so many states highlights its close integration with the situation and indeed its attempts to function on a quasi-state level.

Finally, the PLO's use of UNRWA as part of its internationalist strategy shows decisively how the Palestinian refugee situation was inextricably tied to the international arena, and particularly the UN. The fact that so much of this relationship played out in the refugee camps constitutes another element of these spaces' historical importance to the Palestinian nationalist movement—in this case, as the site of its intersection with internationalism. The relationship between UNRWA and the PLO is a microcosm of how these apparently contrasting notions were juxtaposed in Palestinian history, at both the institutional and the grassroots levels, and in ways that brought together global governance, international standards, and modern constructions of nationalism.

EPILOGUE

Resistance After Revolution

In August 1982 Arafat and an estimated fifteen thousand PLO cadres left Lebanon by boat.¹ Their departure, brokered by the United States, formed part of an agreement to end Israel's siege of Beirut, which had devastated much of the city and destroyed the infrastructure established by the PLO over the previous decade. While the PLO leadership portrayed their departure as a triumph, in reality it was a disaster for both the nationalist movement and the Palestinian people.² As the PLO regrouped more than a thousand miles away in Tunisia, the Palestinian refugee camps were left unprotected as multinational forces left and the Israeli Army moved into West Beirut. Over the course of September 15–17, Israeli troops encircled and blockaded the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps while their Lebanese allies in the Kata'ib militia massacred more than a thousand unarmed civilians inside.³

The Sabra-Shatila massacre was one of the most traumatic events in Palestinian history. As survivors struggled with the losses of their loved ones and their homes, the horrors of the massacre signified the camps' return to a state of total vulnerability. Having lost the protection and leverage that the PLO's power had brought them, the camps that had acted as bases of the nationalist movement since the late 1960s were now reduced to spaces of exclusion and defenselessness. While this was most pronounced in Lebanon, the effects of the PLO's expulsion were felt in refugee camps across the

region. The zenith of the Palestinian nationalist movement in exile was decisively over.

The events of 1982, however, did not mark the end of the refugee camps' political significance. Just five years after the PLO was routed from its base in Lebanon, the first Palestinian intifada began in the OPT. Importantly, it started in a refugee camp. Protests broke out in Jabalia camp in Gaza on December 9, 1987, after an Israeli military truck killed four Palestinian workers, including three refugees from the camp, in a collision. The demonstrations quickly spread and engulfed the entire OPT, developing into a large-scale civil disobedience movement that lasted years and ultimately compelled the Israeli government to recognize the need for concessions. It was no coincidence that this resistance was driven by refugees from the camps, some of whom lived only a short distance from the homes they had been forced to flee in 1948. The strands of refuge and resistance remained entwined four decades after the onset of Palestinian dispossession.

This remains true into the twenty-first century. Starting in 2018, grassroots activists in Gaza organized a series of demonstrations that they called the Great March of Return. Every Friday, demonstrators marched to the Gaza-Israel border fence demanding an end to the blockade and the realization of the right of return.⁴ While Gaza is often discussed in terms of recent events— Hamas winning elections in 2006; the blockade imposed since 2007; the Israeli wars on the Strip in 2008–2009, 2012, 2014, and 2021—these demonstrations drew attention back to the origins of the Strip's protracted crisis. By highlighting the direct line between the mass displacement of 1948 and the chronic problems of the Gaza Strip today, they positioned it within a longer historical framework that centered the ongoing Palestinian refugee crisis.

Additionally, such demonstrations at the Israeli border have often been used to enact transnational Palestinian solidarity across the shatat. In October 2000, for example, Palestinians in Lebanon traveled to the country's southern border to demonstrate against Israel and declare unity with OPT Palestinians in the context of the second intifada.⁵ Eleven years later Palestinians in Lebanon, Syria, and the OPT marched en masse to Israel's borders to demand their right of return on the anniversary of the Nakba; their counterparts in Jordan and Egypt attempted to do the same but were thwarted by government forces in these states.⁶ Coming at the time of the Arab Uprisings of 2011, these protests were intended to remind the region

and the world of the Palestinians' own long history of activism and contentious politics. Nor was that the end of it. As recently as 2021, Palestinians in Lebanon and Jordan marched to those countries' respective borders with Israel (and in Jordan's case, the OPT), in solidarity with their compatriots after heightened violence in the OPT and Israel.⁷ In all cases, the Palestinians' protracted displacement and dispersal lay at the heart of their political organization across the region.

This in turn points to the other key element of Palestinian history since the thawra; alongside continuing activism, there has been continuing refugeehood. In fact, like the settler colonialism that drives the Israeli state, Palestinian displacement has proven to be a structure and not an event.⁸ As such, it has continued to reoccur. In the period after the end of the thawra, Palestinian refugee communities were expelled from Kuwait in 1991 and from Libya in 1995. In the following decade, the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 caused the further displacement of Palestinian refugees there. Palestinian refugees in UNRWA's fields of operation were far from exempt from the pattern. Not only did Jordan and Lebanon host significant numbers of expellees from Kuwait, Libya, and Iraq, but the long-standing Palestinian refugee populations in the Levant also faced repeated upheavals themselves. With those in Lebanon having already experienced numerous displacements during the fifteen-year civil war, around sixteen thousand were internally displaced during the Israel-Hizbollah War of 2006.⁹ Meanwhile, Palestinian refugees in the OPT have continued to lose their homes and land due to the ongoing Israeli military occupation, with its regular house demolitions and settlement construction projects.¹⁰

Most momentously, the outbreak of the Syrian war from 2011 has caused one of the biggest refugee crises in not only the region but the world, with the UN calling it the worst such crisis since the Second World War.¹¹ In 2016 Syrians overtook Palestinians as the largest registered refugee population in the world. As of 2021 there were 6.7 million Syrian refugees and 5.7 million Palestinian refugees registered with the UN.¹² Strikingly, the Syrian refugee crisis includes twice-over Palestinian refugees, with 120,000 Palestinian refugees having fled the country since 2011. The majority of those Palestinians who remain inside Syria have been internally displaced at least once.¹³

Throughout these repeated displacements, many Palestinians have continued to engage with various forms of internationalism. Since its official

founding in the West Bank in 2005, the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement has appealed to the wider world to join with Palestinians in nonviolent resistance of the Israeli occupation.¹⁴ In calling for international solidarity against racialized oppression, its strategy echoes the anti-colonial internationalism that dominated the UNGA in much of the 1960s and 1970s. Like the anticolonial voices of that era, BDS figures implore peoples around the world to unite against an injustice in the Global South that is ultimately grounded in colonial-era inequities.

Palestinian resistance has also continued its transnational links with minority groups in the Global North, particularly people of color. These connections were seeded even before the thawra. In 1964 the African American revolutionary and radical internationalist Malcolm X traveled to the Gaza Strip, where he visited refugee camps including Shati and Khan Younis. His time in Gaza fueled his belief in the importance of transnational solidarity between African Americans and nations in the Global South. Shortly afterwards he said:

The point and the thing that I would like to impress upon every Afro-American leader is that there is no kind of action in this country ever going to bear fruit unless that action is tied with the over-all international struggle. . . . The African representatives, coupled with the Asians and Arabs, form a bloc that's almost impossible for anybody to contend with. The African-Asian-Arab bloc was the bloc that started the real independence movement among the oppressed peoples of the world.¹⁵

Malcolm X was assassinated less than a year later, but successive Black Power leaders continued to enact his calls for international solidarity with nations in the Global South, including the Palestinians. Again, this continues into the twenty-first century. In 2020 the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States engendered a new wave of anti-racist international solidarity with the Palestinians. Activists drew parallels between the extrajudicial police killings of George Floyd and Iyad Halak, an unarmed autistic Palestinian man who was shot dead by Israeli police in Jerusalem after he misunderstood their orders to halt. Subsequent demonstrations in the West Bank, Israel, and the United States protested the two killings together, with slogans including “Palestinian Lives Matter” and “Justice for Iyad, Justice for George.”¹⁶

Despite the relative decline of Third Worldist solidarity at the UNGA,¹⁷ Palestinian internationalist initiatives have also continued to engage with the UN, in this case led by the PA rather than the grass roots. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, this engagement took a particularly institutionalist form that showed both continuity and change from the PLO's UN initiatives of the 1970s. While the PLO had sought UN recognition of the legitimacy of its struggle, now the PA seeks UN recognition of Palestinian statehood. Thus in September 2011, nearly forty years after Arafat's infamous speech at the UNGA, his successor Mahmoud Abbas implored the same body to accept Palestine as a full UN member state. Like Arafat, Abbas couched his appeal as consistent with the UN's own norms and values of peace, justice, and international legitimacy.¹⁸

The international dynamics around both leaders' speeches were marked by considerable continuity. In 1974 Arafat's PLO was welcomed and recognized by the UNGA but disregarded by the UNSC. It became an observer entity at the UN, with the right to attend and speak at UNGA meetings, but not to vote on resolutions. In 2011 Abbas's call for UN state membership was again welcomed by the UNGA but blockaded by the UNSC's failure to agree on a recommendation. This continuing discrepancy, combined with the UN's unequal power structure, meant that Abbas's application for Palestine to join the UN as a full member state had only limited success. In 2012 the State of Palestine officially became a nonmember observer state at the UN—an upgrade from its previous status of “entity,” but one with little material difference. Despite the passage of four decades, Palestinian national politics on the world stage has remained entangled with the divergent forms of “internationalism” that find institutional expression across the UN's General Assembly and Security Council.

Where does UNRWA stand in all this? In the setting of the Palestinian people's long-running and multifaceted exchange with internationalism, the UNRWA regime may be most distinctive in how it straddles the latter's variant forms. The hybrid tensions discussed in this book continue to dominate the agency in the twenty-first century. While the nature and particulars of Palestinian displacement have altered over time, the refugees' relationship with UNRWA remains dominated by the same dynamics that drove it in the early 1950s: calls for the regime to properly represent the political nature of their plight and fierce opposition to any moves to reduce its provisions.

In fact, UNRWA has remained central to the international presence in the Palestinian refugee setting. The first paragraph of Abbas's speech to the UNGA in 2011 explicitly referenced this, highlighting UNRWA's role in forming an "intricate link" between Palestine and the United Nations. Of course, it is precisely this link that attracts criticism from some commentators, most notably when the Trump administration defunded the agency in 2018. Although the Biden administration reinstated U.S. funding for UNRWA in 2021, the agency remains subject to intense criticisms of its role, work, and positioning. What receives far less attention is the fact that many of its problems are the direct result of how it was deliberately set up after the Nakba—an issue that Palestinian refugees themselves identified from the beginning.¹⁹

As this signifies, a close examination of UNRWA's history can challenge and complicate many common underlying assumptions about not only the regime but the Question of Palestine more broadly. To take one basic example, UNRWA's work reflects the geographical scope of the Palestine issue and its ultimate grounding in dispossession, displacement, and dispersal. While commentators in the post-Oslo era often restrict discussions to Israel and the OPT, fixating on borders and land, the refugees' struggle has always been at least as much about rights as it is about territory.

Moreover, while standard narratives on the issue are usually framed around a binary construction of "Israel versus the Arabs," UNRWA's international relations often involve very different alignments, albeit unacknowledged. Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria have always shared similar interests in their dealings with the agency; they want to maximize its provision of services while minimizing any challenges its work might pose to their overall control of Palestinian refugee populations. By contrast, the Western donor states, led by the United States, have always sought to limit UNRWA's services while deploying the agency as an instrument of soft power in the Levant. At the same time, all state parties are aligned in seeking to use UNRWA to contain Palestinian nationalist politics, while refugee communities themselves want the exact opposite. In this way, we see how a focus on UNRWA can reshape broader understandings of both the Question of Palestine and the Middle East beyond it.

There are further implications for conceptualizations of Palestinian refugee communities themselves. Like refugees everywhere, Palestinians have often been positioned as posing a problem to others—Israel, the Arab

host states, the “international community,” and the UN itself. In this discourse, they are generally constructed as either victims draining limited resources or a dangerous threat to security—with aid sometimes rationalized as a necessary measure to prevent the former from becoming the latter. Discussions around state support for UNRWA’s work tend to reflect this discourse—and UNRWA management themselves have sometimes fueled it by imploring Western states to fund the agency’s work in order to avoid instability across the Middle East. Even the PA leadership appeared to embrace this discourse in 2018, when lead negotiator Saeb Erekat stated publicly that the closure of UNRWA schools provided “gifts for radical forces and terrorism.”²⁰

Of course, this construction elides the reality of Palestinian refugees as historical actors, a more complex framing that accommodates the multiple facets of their protracted displacement. This book has shown how not only Palestinian history but international history writ large can be enriched by centering the perspectives and experiences of the refugees themselves. In particular, it has contested the conventional construction of Palestinian refugees as a separate entity from UNRWA, who receive its services and demand more from an external position outside of its regime. Instead, we have seen how Palestinian refugees, particularly the grass roots in the camps, were from the outset key agents in shaping and determining the regime. This is why the agency can be fully understood only as a hybrid body, not a top-down institution.

Often discussed in terms of its distinctions—the longest-running UN refugee agency; the only one to still serve one group of people exclusively—UNRWA is arguably far more interesting in how it embodies the tensions of postwar internationalism. The agency’s hybridity reflects bigger tensions over what internationalism means, who it speaks for, and who drives it. These tensions continue to run through UNRWA’s work in the Levant to this day, but they are also present in areas far beyond the Question of Palestine.

Indeed, as this book has shown, any study of Palestinian refugee history raises questions that speak to international history writ large. In particular, this subject complicates and deepens how we understand a number of concepts that hold critical universal relevance. What does it mean to become a refugee, and to remain one for decades? What do we signify when we refer to an organization, a group of people, or an idea as “international”? What makes

something “political”? And perhaps most fundamentally, whose voices do we amplify and whose do we silence in our answers to these questions?

Three years after the Nakba, the political theorist Hannah Arendt famously wrote that nation-state citizenship is “the right to have rights.”²¹ The Palestinian people have spent more than seventy years struggling for this fundamental right, which remains denied to them well into the twenty-first century. Strikingly, they have often done so in the international arena, appealing to international organizations and invoking internationalist norms to gain recognition of their cause’s legitimacy. In this regard, the Palestinian struggle is fully a product of the modern era, with its consciousness of nation-state normativity and campaign for international legitimacy. In its grassroots alliances with anticolonial and antiracist movements across the world today, the contemporary Palestinian struggle remains deeply embedded in global conversations. It is, in the fullest sense, both national and international.

Long treated as exceptional within the scholarly field of refugee studies, Palestinian displacement is now being more properly integrated into the subfield of refugee history—partly in recognition of its inherently international character.²² With the impact of the Syrian crisis highlighting the interconnection between Palestinian displacement and other political disasters, the limitations of Palestinian exceptionalism are increasingly evident. What’s more, and as this book has shown, the long-term internationalization of the Palestinian refugee crisis makes it inherently tied to ideas and processes beyond Palestine itself.

In his pioneering work on refugee history, historian Peter Gatrell argues that “states make refugees, but refugees also make states.”²³ Based on the Palestinian case, we might add to this that refugees can *also* make international regimes. UNRWA was created by the UNGA at a time when only a minority of the world’s nations were represented there. It was initially constructed for the shared U.S.-UK goal of permanently resettling Palestinian refugees in the Arab host states by way of jobs schemes and thus “resolving” their displacement. Yet refugee communities, particularly in the camps, deployed their leverage as recipients and employees to determinedly reshape the regime along their preferred lines. In the decades after the Nakba, they not only rejected the jobs schemes but also successfully lobbied for an alternative focus on education, all the while pushing the need for their political rights to be recognized alongside their socioeconomic needs.

In the twenty-first century Palestinian refugees across the Levant remain structurally disempowered and institutionally unprotected. As pressures have tightened on UNRWA, the agency's management has sometimes intensified its rhetorical focus on the humanitarian aspects of its work, amplifying the construction of its services as essential and apolitical. Yet all the while, Palestinian refugees have continued to contest this apolitical framing of their crisis and in doing so have underscored *both* key elements of their modern history: refuge and resistance.

PALESTINIAN REFUGEE FIGURES

This book draws in depth on the accounts of the following individual refugees:

Matar Abdelrahim, born in Nahaf village, near Acre. He was exiled to Syria with his family during the Nakba, and spent much of his life in a refugee camp there. Initially working for the Syrian police, he was fired when he refused to spy on the fida'iyyin. He later became a fida'i himself and was active in the thawra across the Levant. Abdelrahim's testimonials here are taken from a publication by anthropologist Rochelle Davis, who interviewed him in 2005 on the basis of his two autobiographical novels.

Bassam Abu Sharif, born 1946 in Jerusalem. His family was living in Amman at the time of the Nakba. After 1967 he was unable to return to the family home in Jerusalem. He operated as a fida'i with the PFLP in Lebanon in the 1970s before leaving the PFLP in 1987 and becoming a senior advisor to Yasir Arafat. He later wrote about his work with Arafat in his political memoir, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine*, and coauthored a dual autobiography, *Tried by Fire*, with former Israeli intelligence officer Uzi Mahnaimi.

Salman Abu Sitta, born 1937 in Ma'in village, southern Palestine. He and his family lost their land during the Nakba and were exiled to Gaza. He

later trained as an engineer and lived in Egypt, the UK, and Kuwait. He became a leading researcher of Palestinian historical and political geography, mapping out a plan for the realization of the refugees' return. In 2016 he published his autobiography, *Mapping My Return*.

Shafiq al-Hout, born 1932 in Jaffa. His family fled to Lebanon during the Nakba, and he subsequently attended AUB. He was one of the founders of the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) in 1961 and later became a leading figure in the PLO, serving as its representative at the UN from 1974 to 1991. He died in 2009 in Beirut. Al-Hout recorded many key life events and experiences in his political autobiography, *My Life in the PLO*.

Abdel Bari Atwan, born 1950 in Deir al-Balah camp, Gaza, to a refugee family from Isdud in southern Palestine (now Ashdod, Israel). He grew up in Deir al-Balah and Rafah refugee camps before leaving the Gaza Strip in 1967 following the onset of the Israeli occupation. After spending time in Egypt, Libya, and Saudi Arabia, he eventually settled in the UK and established a successful career as a journalist. His accounts here are drawn from his autobiography, *A Country of Words*, alongside an interview he granted to the author.

Ghada Karmi, born 1939 in Jerusalem. Her family lost their home during the Nakba and sought refuge with relatives in Syria. They later relocated to London, where she spent much of the rest of her life. She trained as a medical doctor and later worked as an academic in Jordan and the UK, becoming an active campaigner for the right of return. She recorded her life testimonies in two personal memoirs, *In Search of Fatima* and *Return: A Palestinian Memoir*.

Salah Khalaf, also known as Abu Iyad, born 1933 in Jaffa. His family escaped by boat to Gaza during the Nakba and he later worked as a teacher there. He cofounded Fatah as second-in-command to Yasser Arafat and went on to become a leading figure in the PLO. In 1981 he collaborated with journalist Eric Rouleau to record his life story in the book *My Home, My Life: A Narrative of the Palestinian Struggle*. Khalaf was assassinated in Tunisia in 1991.

Leila Khaled, born 1944 in Haifa. Her family fled to Lebanon in 1948 and she grew up in Beirut outside the camps. She joined the ANM and later the PFLP, coming to international attention after she took part in international plane hijackings in 1969–1970. She was one of the most high-profile Palestinians of the thawra era. Like Khalaf, Khaled shared her life

story with a writer, publishing the resulting autobiography, *My People Shall Live*, in 1973.

Ahmed Kotaish, born 1952 in Nahr el-Bared camp, Lebanon, to a refugee family from Haifa. He grew up in the camp and joined the fida'iyyin as a teenager during the thawra. As a young man he worked as a teacher in Beirut before leaving Lebanon in the 1970s to study civil engineering in the USSR. He later worked as an engineer in Morocco, Libya, Algeria, and Senegal before settling in the UAE. In 2014 his wife Jana Kotaishová self-published the life testimonies of Kotaish and his mother, Fatima Ibrahim Zankari.

Fawaz Turki, born 1940 in Haifa. His family was forced to leave their home during the Nakba and traveled to Lebanon by foot. They sought shelter in Burj al Barajneh camp outside Beirut, where Turki spent the rest of his childhood. After studying in the UK and Australia, he moved to the United States and became a successful writer. He went on to publish extensive works, including three memoirs and several articles about his experiences.

Fatima Ibrahim Zankari, born c. 1930 in northern Palestine. After marrying, she moved with her husband to Haifa, which they were forced to flee during the Nakba. Pregnant at the time, she gave birth during the flight to a baby son who died soon afterward. After being expelled into Lebanon, she and her husband sought shelter in a cave near Tyre, then in an early camp in the Beqaa, before eventually settling in Nahr el-Bared camp outside Tripoli. In the camp she gave birth to thirteen more children, ten of whom survived. In 1982 she and her family were again displaced by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and forced to migrate to Deraa, Syria. She chose to remain in Syria during the post-2011 civil war, saying that she has already survived many conflicts and displacements. Her accounts here are drawn from her daughter-in-law Jana Kotaishová's self-published work, *Nahr Al-Bared*.

PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMPS

The following are camps in the Levant officially recognized by UNRWA.
All were established after the Nakba, unless otherwise indicated.

GAZA STRIP

Bureij
Deir al-Balah
Jabalia
Khan Younis
Maghazi
Nusierat
Rafah
Shati ("Beach")

JORDAN

Amman New ("Wihdat")
Baq'a*
Husn*
Irbid
Jabal el-Hussein

Jerash (“Gaza”)*
 Marka (“Hitten”)*
 Souf*
 Talbieh*
 Zarqa

**Established after the Naksa*

LEBANON

Beddawi
 Burj al-Barajneh
 Burj Shemali
 Dbayeh
 Ein el-Helweh
 El Buss—*originally built in 1939 to house Armenian refugees*
 Jisr el-Basha—*destroyed in 1976*
 Gouraud—*evacuated c. 1963*
 Mar Elias
 Mieh Mieh
 Nabatieh—*destroyed in 1974*
 Nahr el-Bared—*destroyed in 2007, then rebuilt*
 Rashidieh—*originally built in 1936 to house Armenian refugees*
 Shatila
 Tel al-Zaatar—*destroyed in 1976*
 Wavel (“al-Jalil”)

SYRIA

Dera’a
 Ein el Tal (“Hindrat”)**
 Hama
 Homs
 Jaramana
 Khan Dunon
 Khan Eshieh
 Latakia**

Neirab
Qabr Essit
Sbeineh
Yarmouk**

***Unofficial camps established by the Syrian government, still receiving most UNRWA services*

WEST BANK

Aida
Am'ari
Aqbat Jabr
Arroub
Askar
Balata
Beit Jibrin ("Azza")
Camp Number One ("ein Beit el-Ma")
Deir 'Ammar
Dheisheh
Ein el-Sultan
Far'a
Fawwar
Jalazone
Jenin
Kalandia
Nur Shams
Shu'fat
Tulkarm

GLOSSARY

<i>ard</i>	land
<i>awda</i>	return
<i>ayyam al-UNRWA</i>	days of UNRWA; used by some refugees to refer to the 1950s
<i>falahin</i>	peasants, farmers
<i>fida'iyyin</i>	popular term for Palestinian militants, lit. "those who sacrifice themselves." Singular <i>fida'i</i> (m), <i>fida'iyya</i> (f)
<i>filastin</i>	Palestine
<i>ghurba</i>	exile, dispossession from home
<i>hijra</i>	lit. emigration; used by some Palestinians to describe their journey out of Palestine in 1948
<i>intifada</i>	uprising by Palestinians, first in 1987 and then in 2000
<i>jil al-Nakba</i>	the Nakba generation
<i>jil al-thawra</i>	the generation of the revolution
<i>karama</i>	dignity
<i>kufiyya</i>	traditional Arab peasant headdress, adopted as symbol of the Palestinian nationalist movement and popularized by Yasir Arafat
<i>mukhtar</i>	head of a town or village; used for local refugee camp leaders, sometimes translated as "mayor"

<i>Nakba</i>	disaster or catastrophe; used to denote the 1948 Palestinian dispossession
<i>Naksa</i>	setback; Arab term for the 1967 defeat
<i>shatat</i>	the dispersed; sometimes translated as “diaspora”
<i>sumud</i>	steadfastness; used to denote Palestinian political constancy
<i>tahrir</i>	liberation
<i>tawtin</i>	integration or naturalization, lit. “becoming a national”
<i>thawra</i>	revolution; sometimes used to denote the Palestinian uprisings in the camps in 1969, and/or the nationalist movement of the long 1970s
<i>watan</i>	homeland

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

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1. BECOMING REFUGEES

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 21. Flapan, *The Birth of Israel*, 94–96.
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 23. Abu Sitta, *Mapping My Return*, 62.
 24. Rosemary Sayigh, *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Books, 2007), 86. Frances Hasso, "Modernity and Gender in Arab Accounts of the 1948 and 1967 Defeats," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32, no. 4 (2000): 492–93.
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 32. Isabelle Humphries and Laleh Khalili, "Gender of Nakba Memory," in *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod and Ahmad H. Sa'di (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 213. This is by no means unique to Palestinian history. Less than a year before the Nakba, the refugee crisis engendered by India's Partition involved large-scale sexual violence against women. Again, nationalists saw this as a symbolic attack, while the women who experienced it were left with the stigma of shame and consequent silencing. See Urvashi Butalia, *The*

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33. Humphries and Khalili, "Gender of Nakba Memory," 207–27; Rosemary Sayigh, "Palestinian Camp Women as Tellers of History," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27, no. 2 (1998): 42–58; Hasso, "Modernity and Gender," 492–95.
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 35. Quoted in Kotaishová, *Nahr Al-Bared*, 82–83.
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 37. Al-Hout, *My Life in the PLO*, 12.
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 39. While many earlier works on the Nakba tended to overlook this, recent decades have seen an increasing scholarly focus on the agency of the Palestinians themselves. Rashid Khalidi and Issa Khalaf both emphasize the importance of Palestinian actions, pointing out that Palestinian society was not merely the static recipient of external events. A similar approach can be found in some ethnographic works. See Khalidi, "The Palestinians and 1948"; Issa Khalaf, "The Effect of Socio-economic Change on Arab Societal Collapse in Mandate Palestine," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 1 (1997): 93–112; Sayigh, *The Palestinians*; Rosemary Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies: The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon* (London: Zed Books, 1994); Rochelle Davis, *Palestinian Village Histories: Geographies of the Displaced* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011).
 40. Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 136; Adriana Kemp, "'Dangerous Populations': State Territoriality and the Constitution of National Minorities," in *Boundaries and Belonging: State and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Local Practices*, ed. Joel Migdal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 78; Chatty, *Displacement and Dispossession*, 208–10.
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51. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 41.
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69. "Refugee Reminiscences III."
70. See, for example, Abu Iyad, *My Home, My Land*, 13.

71. Wasif Jawhariyyeh, *The Storyteller of Jerusalem: The Life and Times of Wasif Jawhariyyeh, 1904–48*, ed. Salim Tamari and Issam Nassar, trans. Nada Elzeer (Northampton, Mass.: Olive Branch Press, 2014).
72. Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, 35–36.
73. In 1951 UNRWA recorded that one-third of the refugees were living in the camps. See John Blandford Jr., report of the UNRWA director, A/1905, September 28, 1951, <https://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/o/8d26108af518ce7e052565a6006e8948>. Two years later, Dr. Leslie Houseden recorded a figure of 36 percent for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. See Houseden, 1953 report, MECA.
74. On the connection between exile and nationalism, see Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, chap. 9; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), chap. 6; Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995); Ruba Salih, “From Bare Lives to Political Agents: Palestinian Refugees as Avant-garde,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2013): 66–91.
75. Confidential memo from P. Haycock to Director of Relief Services, OP/AD/100, March 3, 1970, File RE400 II [No Box], UCRA. The Council for the Relief of Palestine Arab Refugees provides a list of the Christian charities supplying aid in the camps in its 1950 documentary *Sands of Sorrow*. See https://archive.org/details/sands_of_sorrow, accessed August 11, 2021.
76. Irene Gendzier, *Dying to Forget: Oil, Power, Palestine, & the Foundations of US Policy in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 208.
77. Jawhariyyeh, *The Storyteller of Jerusalem*.
78. Latif, “Making Refugees,” 260.
79. Edward Buehrig, *The UN and the Palestinian Refugees: A Study in Non-territorial Administration* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), 3.
80. UNGA Resolution 212, A/RES/212(III), November 19, 1948, <https://www.palquest.org/en/historictext/9902/unga-resolution-212-iii>.
81. For more on the ICRC’s work in the West Bank, see Dominique-D. Junod, *The Imperiled Red Cross and the Palestine-Eretz-Yisrael Conflict 1945–52* (New York: Kegan Paul, 1996), 253–55, 261–64. On Gaza, see Ilana Feldman, “Difficult Distinctions: Refugee Law, Humanitarian Practice, and Political Identification in Gaza,” *Cultural Anthropology* 22, no. 1 (2007): 134; Nancy Gallagher, *Quakers in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: The Dilemmas of NGO Humanitarian Activism* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2007), chaps. 3–4. On the LRCS’s early work with Palestine refugees in Lebanon, see Latif, “Making Refugees.”
82. Abu Sitta, *Mapping My Return*, 96–99; “Refugee Reminiscences III.”
83. Davis, “Matar ‘Abdelrahim,” 163; Abu Sitta, *Mapping My Return*, 96.
84. Jo Kelcey, “‘Incredibly Difficult, Tragically Needed, and Absorbingly Interesting’: Lessons from the AFSC School Program for Palestinian Refugees in Gaza, 1949 to 1950,” *Journal on Education in Emergencies* 5, no. 1 (2019): 12–34.
85. UNGA Resolution 194, A/RES/194(III).
86. On the UNCCP’s history, see Michael Fischbach, *Records of Dispossession: Palestinian Refugee Property and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

87. Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (London: Penguin, 2014), 49–53, 58. See also Simon Waldman, “UNRWA’s First Years, 1949–51: The Anatomy of Failed Expectations,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 25, no. 4 (2014): 630–45; Benjamin Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation: UN Aid to Palestinians* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 18; Buehrig, *The UN and the Palestinian Refugees*, 15; Gendzier, *Dying to Forget*, 201, 215; Kemp, “‘Dangerous Populations,’” 78.
88. ESM, First Interim Report.
89. Feldman, “Difficult Distinctions,” 135.
90. See letter from Arnold Rirholt, Norwegian Red Cross secretary-general, to Trygve Lie, June 17, 1949; and report submitted by the Technical Committee to the Conciliation Commission, July 4, 1949, both in Box 197, Andrew Cordier collection, Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscripts, New York (CURBM).
91. UNGA Resolution 302(IV), A/RES/302(IV).
92. Buehrig, *The UN and the Palestinian Refugees*, 36; Waldman, “UNRWA’s First Years,” 636.
93. Oroub el-Abed, *Unprotected: Palestinians in Egypt Since 1948* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2009), 36; Lance Bartholomeusz, “The Mandate of UNRWA at Sixty,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, nos. 2–3 (2010): 457–60; Vernant, *The Refugee in the Post-war World*, 145–47.
94. Ghada Hashem Talhami, *Palestinian Refugees: Pawns to Political Actors* (New York: Nova Science, 2003), 113; Chatty, *Displacement and Dispossession*, 204.
95. Bartholomeusz, “The Mandate of UNRWA at Sixty,” 460; Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, 183–84. For information on Jewish refugees registered with UNRWA in this time, see incoming code cable, Jamieson to Labouisse, November 19, 1957, S-0169-0011-0001, UNA.
96. Quoted in memo from E/Bank Field Relief Services Officer to Director of Relief Services, “Camps and Buildings,” OP/AD/100, March 3, 1970, File RE400 II, No Box, UCRA.
97. Lex Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 69–70.
98. “UNRWA: A Brief History 1950–82,” File RE100 III, Box RE2, UCRA.
99. Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees*, 71.
100. Riccardo Bocco, “UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees: A History Within History,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, nos. 2–3 (2010): 237; Farah, “The Marginalization of Palestinian Refugees,” in *Problems of Protection: The UNHCR, Refugees, and Human Rights*, ed. Niklaus Steiner, Gil Loescher, and Mark Gibney (New York: Routledge, 2003), 163–64.
101. Norman Corkill, “Nutrition of Palestinian Refugees,” Spring 1951, GB165-0063, File 5, Box 1, MECA.
102. Interview with Zizette Dardakally, UNRWA chief communications officer, Beirut, January 26, 2015.
103. Feldman, “Difficult Distinctions,” 135.
104. Letter from UNRPR director James Keen to American Mission in Beirut, April 6, 1950, GB165-0161, File 3, Box 73, MECA.

105. Julie Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair: Palestinian Refugee Camps* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 98.
106. Quoted in Kotaishová, *Nahr Al-Bared*, 5.
107. Bocco, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees," 234.
108. See, for example, Confidential Memo from UNRWA OPT Directors to Acting DARI, "Refugee Camps," IN/C 104/C, n.d., File RE410(WB) II, Box RE65, UCRA. The term is also used in UNRWA's official newsletter. See UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today* [back catalogue], IPS.
109. UNRWA, "Draft Paper on Administration of Refugee Camps Since 1970," September 12, 1970, File RE400 II, No Box, UCRA. On Lebanon, the host state most actively hostile to the Palestinian camps, see David Hirst, *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), 77–78.
110. It should be noted that while this was unusual, it was not exclusive to UNRWA. The UN Korean Reconstruction Agency (UNKRA), created in 1950 and operating until 1958, was similarly restricted in the nationalities it served.
111. Interview with Filippo Grandi, former UNRWA commissioner-general, Beirut, January 19, 2015.
112. Philipp Misselwitz and Sari Hanafi, "Testing a New Paradigm: UNRWA's Camp Improvement Programme," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, nos. 2–3 (2009): 362, 378.
113. S. A. Morrison, Circular Letter to Members of the Beirut Conference and Others Interested in the Work for the Arab Refugees, December 21, 1951, GB165-0161, File 2, Box 73, MECA.
114. Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, 16–21.
115. Jalal al-Husseini, "UNRWA and the Refugees: A Difficult but Lasting Marriage," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 40, no. 1 (2010): 8. See, for example, Lord Macdonald, speech in the Ad hoc Political Committee, November 29, 1950, FO1018/73, TNA. See also Gendzier, *Dying to Forget*, 254–62.
116. Letter from UK Foreign Office to Ministry of Education, USE 1748/2, August 27, 1952, ED 157/366, TNA.
117. Kelcey, "'Incredibly Difficult,'" 15; Volker Schimmel, "Humanitarianism and Politics: The Dangers of Contrived Separation," *Development in Practice* 16, nos. 3–4 (2006): 303–15.
118. Feldman, "Difficult Distinctions," 137.
119. Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief*, 58–61; Anne Irfan, "Palestine at the UN: The PLO and UNRWA in the 1970s," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 49, no. 2 (2020): 27–28.
120. UNGA Resolution 513, A/RES/513(VI), January 26, 1952, <https://www.palquest.org/en/historictext/9918/unga-resolution-513-vi>. See also Maya Rosenfeld, "From Emergency Relief Assistance to Human Development and Back: UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees, 1950–2009," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, nos. 2–3 (2010): 295.
121. Special Report of the UNRWA Director and Advisory Commission, A/2717/ADD.1, 5 November 1954, GB165-0161, File 3, Box 73, MECA.
122. Soon after UNRWA's creation, Director Howard Kennedy stated, "It must be realised that our Agency has no mandate to deal with the political settlement of the problem." Press statement by Howard Kennedy, June 15, 1950, FO 1018/73, TNA.

123. Interview with Giorgio Giacomelli, *Refugees*, September 1987, DC/OR/UNR/PR/1, File DC/OR/UNR/ICI/IPU/IPR, Box UNR 1, Cooper archive, RSC.
124. Bocco, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees," 231.
125. UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today* 53 (April 1967), IPS.
126. Hisham Jabr, "Housing Conditions in the Refugee Camps of the West Bank," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 2, no. 1 (1989): 76.
127. Elfan Rees, Report to the Department of Inter-Church Aid and Service to Refugees of the World Council of Churches, November 1949, GB0165-0161, File 2, Box 73, MECA.
128. Houseden, 1953 report.
129. Blandford, 1951 report.
130. On the history of international intervention in pre-1948 Palestine, see Allen, *A History of False Hope*, chaps. 1–3.
131. UNGA Resolution 181, A/RES/181(II), November 29, 1947, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/038/88/PDF/NR003888.pdf>.
132. Jawhariyyeh, *The Storyteller of Jerusalem*; Karmi, *In Search of Fatima*, 75–76.
133. Allen, *The Rise and Fall of Human Rights*, 13.
134. Confidential note from Ernest Bevin to Clement Attlee, PM/49/101, July 22, 1949, PREM 8/1050, TNA.
135. Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, 101. See also Turki, *Exile's Return*, 132.
136. Turki, *Soul in Exile*, 38.
137. UNRWA Note DUA/L-1, November 21, 1963, File RE150 II, Box RE3, UCRA.
138. See, for example, Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, 56, 128.
139. Council of the League of Nations, The Palestine Mandate, July 24, 1922, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/palmanda.asp.
140. Abu Sitta, *Mapping My Return*, 66–67.
141. Houseden, 1953 report.
142. Declaration from Palestinian pupils in Lebanon, L/510, n.d., Inactive Files Box 7, UCRA.
143. Phillip Issa, "Abu Maher al Yamani and the Unheralded Palestinian Leadership in 1950s Lebanon," M.A. thesis, University of Texas, 2015, 60–66.
144. Mu'in Basisu, *Descent Into the Water: Palestinian Notes from Arab Exile* (Wilmette, Ill.: Medina Press, 1980), 22–25.
145. Nell Gabiam, "When 'Humanitarianism' Becomes 'Development': The Politics of International Aid in Syria's Palestinian Refugee Camps," *American Anthropologist* 114, no. 1 (2012): 100.
146. See chapter 4 on these dynamics.
147. Interview with Zizette Dardakally.
148. UNGA Resolution 302(IV), paragraph 5.
149. Quoted in Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, 113.
150. For more discussion of such sentiments, see Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority and the Work of Rule, 1917–67* (London: Duke University Press, 2008), 142.
151. Quoted in UNRWA, "Get Out of the Camps Business," draft paper, n.d., file RE400 II [No Box], UCRA.
152. UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today* [back catalog], IPS.

153. Letter from G. Furlonge, UK Foreign Office, to A. H. Clough, Treasury, April 11, 1950, FCO 371/82236, TNA.
154. Letter from Ernest Bevin to Foreign Ministers of Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, May 26, 1950, FCO 371/82236, TNA. See also UK Brief for Colombo, "Palestine Refugees," n.d., FCO 371/82243, TNA.
155. Turki, *The Disinherited*, 36, 58.
156. Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, 86.
157. Letter from the Committee of Action for the Congress of the Palestinian Refugees to the Soviet government, November 29, 1950, FO1018/73, TNA.
158. Extract from a report submitted to the director general by Dr. Matta Akrawi, UNESCO Rep, May 12, 1952, ED 157/366, TNA.
159. John Davis, *The Evasive Peace: A Study of the Zionist/Arab Problem* (London: Cox & Wyman, 1970), 68.
160. S. A. Morrison, circular letter, December 21, 1951, GB165-0161, File 2, Box 73, MECA.
161. Houseden, 1953 report.
162. Blandford, 1951 report.
163. Report by Bishop Weston, December 27, 1950, GB165-0161, File 2, Box 73, MECA.
164. Turki, *The Disinherited*, 36.
165. Henry Labouisse, Report of the UNRWA Director, A/3212, June 30, 1956, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/9a798adbf322aff38525617b006d88d7/3e55412b18aacd5f0525659100536f27?OpenDocument>, accessed April 11, 2022.
166. Turki, *Soul in Exile*, 38.
167. Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, 150.
168. Benjamin Schiff, "Between Occupier and Occupied: UNRWA in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18, no. 3 (1989): 62; see also UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today* 123 (May 1989), RSC.
169. Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, 64; interview with Giorgio Giacomelli, *Refugees*, September 1987, File DC/OR/UNR/PR5, Box UNR 1; "UNRWA 1950–90: Serving Palestine Refugees," April 1990, Box GP59.3 UNRWA, both RSC.
170. Lex Takkenberg, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees After Sixty Years: Some Reflections," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, nos. 2–3 (2009): 255.
171. Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, 21.
172. David P. Forsythe, "The Palestine Question: Dealing with a Long-Term Refugee Situation," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 467 (1983): 92.
173. Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, 81.
174. Memo from J. Robbins, chief of UNRWA Education Division, to Director Blandford, 12.10/c/103, March 24, 1952; UNESCO letter, "Schools for Arab Refugees," May 19, 1952, both ED 157/366, TNA.
175. Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, 28; al-Husseini, "UNRWA and the Refugees," 13.
176. Rosenfeld, "From Emergency Relief Assistance to Human Development and Back," 289–300.
177. On the early history of UNRWA's education system, see Anne Irfan, "Educating Palestinian Refugees: The Origins of UNRWA's Unique Schooling System," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34, no. 1 (2021): 1036–59.

178. Bocco, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees," 232.
179. Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies*, 53.
180. Charlotte Johnson, Red Cross chief social welfare advisor, Report on Schools Directed by the League of Red Cross Societies in Lebanon, Syria & Jordan, May 12, 1950, ED 157/366, TNA.
181. Kelcey, "Incredibly Difficult," 22.
182. Turki, *The Disinherited*, 39–41.
183. Atwan, *A Country of Words*, 53; interview with Abdel Bari Atwan.
184. Quoted in Kotaishová, *Nahr Al-Bared*, 25.
185. Rosenfeld, "From Emergency Relief Assistance to Human Development," 312; Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 47; Abu Iyad, *My Home My Land*, 14–15.
186. Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies*, 54, 55.
187. Basisu, *Descent Into the Water*, 22. Basisu lists refugee camps in Gaza.
188. Milton Viorst, *UNRWA and Peace in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: Middle East Institute, 1984), 34.
189. See, for example, strictly confidential memos from R. Skinner and S. F. Hussein, February 20, 1971, File RE400 III, No Box; note for the record of Meeting of DUO/WB with General Shelev and Major Naboth, March 1, 1976, File RE410(WB) II, Box RE65, both UHA.
190. Riccardo Bocco and Lex Takkenberg place the shift in the late 1980s, meaning that the resettlement policy still shaped refugee attitudes for decades after it ended. Most other scholars, such as Nell Gabiam, Sari Hanafi, and Phillip Misselwitz, argue that the refugees continued resisting camp improvement until the early twenty-first century and in some cases still do. Bocco, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees," 247; Takkenberg, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees," 256–57; Gabiam, "When 'Humanitarianism' Becomes 'Development,'" 97; Misselwitz and Hanafi, "Testing a New Paradigm," 361.
191. Olof Rydbeck, quoted in summary record of the sixth meeting of the UN General Assembly (34th Session) in New York, October 17, 1979, FCO 93/2243, TNA.
192. Michael Dumper, ed., *Palestinian Refugee Repatriation: Global Perspectives* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2006), 4.
193. Forsythe, "The Palestine Question," 93; Gabiam "When 'Humanitarianism' Becomes 'Development,'" 100; Lamis Alami, "Educating Palestinian Refugees: The Role of UNRWA," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture* 3, no. 2 (1996): 70; Ghassan Shabaneh, "Education and Identity: The Role of UNRWA's Education Programmes in the Reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 4 (2012): 491–513; Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, 140–43.
194. Report of the Working Party convened by UNESCO to make recommendations on the possible development of the UNRWA-UNESCO Education Programme for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, April 28–30, 1952, ED 157/366, TNA.
195. Gabiam, "When 'Humanitarianism' Becomes 'Development,'" 96.
196. Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, 142.
197. Houseden, 1953 report.
198. Blandford, 1951 report.
199. Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, 138.

200. Memo from Mr. T. Jamieson, UNRWA AD/OPS, to Acting UNRWA Director, January 2, 1959, File RE120 I, Box RE3, UCRA.
201. Najeh Jarrar, "Citizenship and Palestinian Refugees," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture* 3, nos. 3–4 (1996): 66.
202. Viorst, *UNRWA and Peace in the Middle East*, 12.
203. Nabil Marshood, *Voices from the Camps: A People's History of Palestinian Refugees in Jordan* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2010), 20. Gabiam, "When 'Humanitarianism' Becomes 'Development,'" 101.
204. Farah, "The Marginalization of Palestinian Refugees," 167.
205. Turki, *The Disinherited*, 45.
206. Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, 28; Kotaishová, *Nahr Al-Bared*, 9.
207. Vernant, *The Refugee in the Post-war World*, 277, 338.
208. Houseden, 1953 report.
209. Interview with Zizette Dardakally.
210. Adel H. Yahya, *The Palestinian Refugees 1948–88: An Oral History* (Ramallah: PACE, 1999), 73–77. Many refugees continued to feel this way decades later. See, for example, petition from Balata Camp Mukhtar to UNRWA Commissioner-General, August 8, 1981, File RE500 VII, Box RE67, UCRA.
211. Turki, *Soul in Exile*, 55.
212. Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, 129. The Council for the Relief of Palestine Arab Refugees also highlighted the refugees' feelings of humiliation in *Sands of Sorrow*.
213. Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, 28–36; Turki, *Exile's Return*, 56–57; Davis, "Matar 'Abdelrahim," 162.
214. Davis, "Matar 'Abdelrahim," 163.
215. Atwan, *A Country of Words*, 27.

2. FROM REFUGE TO REVOLUTION

Epigraph source: Ahmed Kotaish, quoted in Jana Kotaishová, *Nahr Al-Bared*.

1. Several political commentators and a smaller number of scholars have argued that a distinctive Palestinian national identity did not exist prior to 1967, speaking instead of "the Arabs of Palestine." See, for example, Jon and David Kimche, *Both Sides of the Hill: Britain and the Palestine War* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1960); Shabtai Teveth, "Review: The Palestine Arab Refugee Problem and Its Origins," *Middle Eastern Studies* 26, no. 2 (1990): 214–49; Asaf Romirowsky, "The Real Palestinian Refugee Problem," May 2014, <http://www.thetower.org/article/the-real-palestinian-refugee-crisis>; Bruce Thornton, "The Middle East and Orwellian Historical Arguments," October 16, 2015, http://www.horowitzfreedomcenter.org/bruce_thornton_the_middle_east_and_orwellian_historical_arguments. See also "Empty Book on Palestinian History Becomes Instant Bestseller on Amazon," *Haaretz*, June 22, 2017, <http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/1.797333>. This argument has been effectively discredited. For evidence of Palestinian nationalism and national identity before 1948, see Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007); Gudrun Krämer, *A History of Palestine: From the*

- Ottoman Conquest to the Founding of the State of Israel* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008); Louis A. Fishman, *Jews and Palestinians in the Late Ottoman era, 1908–1914* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019). On the impact of the Naksa on Palestinian nationalism, see Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, chap. 8; Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 236; Helena Lindholm Schulz, *The Reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism: Between Revolution and Statehood* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1999), 36–39.
2. Shafiq al-Hout, *My Life in the PLO: The Inside Story of the Palestinian Struggle*, trans. Hader al-Hout and Leila Othman (New York: Pluto Press, 2011), 78. Reflecting on the early years of exile in Aqbat Jabr camp in Jericho, Abu Nabil speculates that as many as 70 percent of infants died very young. “Refugee Reminiscences I: Dheisheh’s Abu Nabil,” in UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today* 126 (May 1990), RSC.
 3. Rochelle Davis, “Matar ‘Abdelrahim: From a Palestinian Village to a Syrian Refugee Camp,” in *Struggle and Survival in Palestine/Israel*, ed. Mark LeVine and Gershon Shafir (London: University of California Press, 2012), 163.
 4. Abdel Bari Atwan, *A Country of Words: A Palestinian Journey from the Refugee Camp to the Front Page* (London: Saqi, 2008), 15, 27, 33.
 5. Fawaz Turki, *Exile’s Return: The Making of a Palestinian American* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 179.
 6. Jana Kotaishová, *Nahr Al-Bared* (self-published: printed by Amazon, 2014), 102–6.
 7. Sari Hanafi, “Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon: Laboratory of Indocile Identity Formation,” in *Manifestations of Identity: The Lived Reality of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon*, ed. Muhammad Ali Khalidi (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2010), 48, 58.
 8. Turki, *Exile’s Return*, 167; Turki, *Soul in Exile: Lives of a Palestinian Revolutionary* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988), 36.
 9. Rosemary Sayigh, *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Books, 2007), 112.
 10. Rosemary Sayigh, “The Palestinian Identity Among Camp Residents,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 6, no. 3 (1977): 7. This phenomenon is not unique to the Palestinian refugees. When observing Hutu refugees in Tanzania, anthropologist Liisa Malkki found that the camps served as sites of separateness and functioned to preserve a “pure” national identity in much the same way. Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 3–4.
 11. Al-Hout, *My Life in the PLO*, 18.
 12. Interview with Abdel Bari Atwan.
 13. Kotaishová, *Nahr Al-Bared*, 26–27.
 14. Davis, “Matar ‘Abdelrahim,” 163.
 15. Turki, *Exile’s Return*, 10, 63–66, 167–69.
 16. These remembrance practices are recalled and discussed in Salman Abu Sitta, “The Invisible Face of the Occupier,” in *Being Palestinian: Personal Reflections on Palestinian Identity in the Diaspora*, ed. Yasir Suleiman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 40–43; Muhammad Ali Khalidi and Diane Riskedahl, “The Lived Reality of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon,” in *Manifestations of Identity: The Lived Reality of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon*, ed. Muhammad Ali Khalidi (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2010), 6; Julie Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair:*

- Palestinian Refugee Camps* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 111–12; Rochelle Davis, *Palestinian Village Histories: Geographies of the Displaced* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011), 214.
17. Nadia Latif, “Making Refugees,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 8, no. 2 (2008): 62.
 18. Davis, *Palestinian Village Histories*, 214.
 19. Khalidi and Riskedahl, “The Lived Reality of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon,” 6; Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, 111–12.
 20. Interview with Abdel Bari Atwan; Kotaishová, *Nahr Al-Bared*, 27.
 21. Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, 119.
 22. UNRWA Department of Operations, Technical Instruction No. 1, n.d., File RE230 Part II, Box 65, UCRA. See also Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Gaza: A History* (London: Hurst, 2015), 79.
 23. Riccardo Bocco, “UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees: A History Within History,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28, nos. 2–3 (2010): 234.
 24. Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule, 1917–1967* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008), 128.
 25. This is observed in Dr. Leslie Houseden, 1953 report, MECA. See also Jihane Sfeir, “Palestinians in Lebanon: The Birth of the ‘Enemy Within,’” in *Manifestations of Identity: The Lived Reality of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon*, ed. Muhammad Ali Khalidi (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2010), 13–31; Turki, *Exile’s Return*, 132, 185. See also Rosemary Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies: The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon* (London: Zed Books, 1993); Maysoun Sukarieh, “Speaking Palestinian: An Interview with Rosemary Sayigh,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 38, no. 4 (2009): 28; Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, 106, 132.
 26. Helena Lindholm Schulz, *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of identities and Politics of Homeland* (London: Routledge, 2003), 60.
 27. Kotaishová, *Nahr Al-Bared*, 8–13; Fawaz Turki, *The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 72; Turki, *Soul in Exile*, 50–52.
 28. Leila Khaled with George Hajjar, *My People Shall Live: The Autobiography of a Revolutionary* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973), 34.
 29. Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Gaza: A History* (London: Hurst, 2015), 69–71, 74; Ramzy Baroud, *My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza’s Untold Story* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), 41.
 30. Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, 128–35, 148–49. See also Ilana Feldman, “Home as a Refrain: Remembering and Living Displacement in Gaza,” *History and Memory* 18, no. 2 (2006): 27.
 31. Jacques Vernant, *The Refugee in the Post-war World: Preliminary Report of a Survey of the Refugee Problem* (Geneva: United Nations, 1951), 145.
 32. Interview with Abdel Bari Atwan.
 33. Turki, *Exile’s Return*, 167.
 34. Filiu, *Gaza*, 55.
 35. Atwan, *A Country of Words*, 24.
 36. Rashid Khalidi, “The Palestinians and 1948: The Underlying Causes of Failure,” in *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948*, ed. Eugene Rogan and Avi Shlaim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12–36.
 37. Interview with Abdel Bari Atwan.

38. Turki, *Soul in Exile*, 41–44.
39. For discussion of the near reverence with which the right of return is treated in the camps, see Turki, *Exile's Return*, 63; al-Hout, *My Life in the PLO*, 18; Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, 26.
40. Elise G. Young, *Gender and Nation Building in the Middle East: The Political Economy of Health from Mandate Palestine to Refugee Camps in Jordan* (London: Tauris, 2012), 134.
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42. See, for example, report of the Bishop's Relief Committee, December 27, 1950, File 2, Box 73, GB165-0161, MECA.
43. See, for example, UNRWA translation of article in *Journal de Genève*, March 6, 1956; "The Palestinians in Lebanon" statement "We are returning," November 29, 1962, both File RE150 1, Box RE3, UCRA [UNRWA translation].
44. For more on Palestinian "infiltrations" at this time, see Filiu, *Gaza*, 79–81; Avner Yaniv and Robert J. Lieber, "Personal Whim or Strategic Imperative? The Israeli Invasion of Lebanon," *International Security* 8, no. 2 (1983): 121; Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, 22–23; Shoufani, "The Fall of a Village," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 1, no. 4 (1972): 116–18.
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48. Mu'in Basisu, *Descent Into the Water: Palestinian Notes from Arab Exile* (Wilmette, Ill.: Medina Press, 1990), 25.
49. Isabelle Humphries and Laleh Khalili, "Gender of Nakba Memory," in *Nakba: Palestine, 1948 and the Claims of Memory*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod and Ahmad H. Sa'di (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 219–20.
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53. Interview with Abdel Bari Atwan.
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58. Dawn Chatty, *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 206–7.
59. Constantine Zureik, *Ma'na al-Nakba* (Beirut: Dar al-'ilm lil-malayin, 1948).
60. Helga Baumgarten, "The Three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism, 1948–2005," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34, no. 4 (2005): 26–31.

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63. Said Aburish, *Arafat: From Defender to Dictator* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 37. On Hussein, see also Ilan Pappé, *The Rise and Fall of a Palestinian Dynasty: The Husaynis, 1700–1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), chaps. 10–11.
64. Filiu, *Gaza*, 93. See also Ghada Karmi, *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* (London: Verso, 2002), 365–66.
65. Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 344.
66. Davis, "Matar 'Abdelrahim," 165.
67. Abu Iyad, *My Home, My Land*, 23.
68. Bassam Abu Sharif and Uzi Mahnaimi, *Tried by Fire* (London: Warner, 1996), 30.
69. Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, 97; Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, 126; Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 183; Said Aburish, *Arafat*, 34.
70. Turki, *Soul in Exile*, 34–36.
71. Quoted in Kotaishová, *Nahr Al-Bared*, 36.
72. Interview with Abdel Bari Atwan.
73. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, 111; Kotaishová, *Nahr Al-Bared*, 28.
74. Basisu, *Descent Into the Water*, 6.
75. Baumgarten, "The Three Faces/Phases," 26–31.
76. Forsythe, "The Palestine Question," 4. See also Derek Cooper, "Refugee Report," May 1969, File DC/OR/UNR/IR, Box UNR 1; "UNRWA 1950–90: Serving Palestine Refugees," April 1990, Box GP59.3 UNRWA, both RSC.
77. UNRWA Director in Jordan, "Numbers of Refugees and Displaced Persons, Jordan (East Bank), as of 1 August 1968," File DC/OR/UNR/IR, Box UNR 1, RSC.
78. Abu Sharif and Mahnaimi, *Tried by Fire*, 42.
79. Abu Sharif and Mahnaimi, 47.
80. John Rennie, June 30, 1974, "Report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA," FCO 93/570 B, TNA.
81. Haim Bresheeth-žabner, *An Army Like No Other: How the Israel Defense Forces Made a Nation* (London: Verso, 2020), 170; Ilan Pappé, *The Biggest Prison on Earth: A History of the Occupied Territories* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2017), chap. 8. On the military regime for Palestinian citizens of Israel from 1948–66, see Adriana Kemp, "'Dangerous Populations': State Territoriality and the Constitution of National Minorities," in *Boundaries and Belonging: State and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Local Practices*, ed. Joel Midgal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 77–79.
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83. Such feelings are recalled in Bassam Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine: An Insider's Account* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 9–11, 19; Karmi, *In Search of Fatima*, 371. See also Reja-e Busailah, "The Tree," 117; and Randa Farah, "Darker Shades of Exile," 153, both in Suleiman, *Being Palestinian*.
84. See, for example, Abu Iyad, *My Home, My Land*, 51; Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine*, 1–3; Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, 90–91, 97; Atwan, *A Country of Words*, 49–53; Baroud, *My Father Was a Freedom Fighter*, chap. 7; and Najwa al-Qattan, "An Ornithologist from Iceland," in Suleiman, *Being Palestinian*, 55.
85. Sami al-Arian, "No Land's Man Determined to Return to Palestine," in Suleiman, *Being Palestinian*, 49; Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine*, 9.
86. Interview with Abdel Bari Atwan.
87. Karmi, *In Search of Fatima*, 371–72.
88. Turki, *Soul in Exile*, 85.
89. Eric Hazan, "Palestinian Defiance: An Interview with Mustafa Barghouti," *New Left Review* 32 (2005): 117–31.
90. Interview with Abdel Bari Atwan.
91. Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, 90, 98.
92. Cassels, letter to Acting Commissioner-General, 25 September 1970, "Situation in Schools," File RE230(WB-3) I, Box RE22; Gaza Director, Memo to Acting C-G, 6 October 1971, File RE230(G-3)II, Box RE19, both UCRA. Khaled recalls the disillusionment with Nasser in her memoir, *My People Shall Live*, 97.
93. Filiiu, *Gaza*, 128.
94. Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine*, 17.
95. Abu Sharif, *Tried by Fire*, 51.
96. PFLP, "First Political Statement," December 1, 1967, trans. *The Palestinian Revolution*, <http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/uploads/sources/588c773adfc29.pdf>.
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98. Turki, *Exile's Return*, 189; Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, 90, 98; Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine*, 1.
99. Jeroen Gunning, *Hamas in Politics: Democracy, Religion, Violence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 29.
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101. Rennie, 1974 report; "The Question of Palestine," pamphlet prepared for and under the guidance of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, 1979, OP.309.55.25, Cambridge University Official Publications Archive (CUOPA), UK.
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104. Al-Hout, *My Life in the PLO*, 43, 52–53.

105. Derek Cooper, "Refugee Report," May 1969, File DC/OR/UNR/IR, Box UNR 1, RSC.
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107. Rex Brynen, "PLO Policy in Lebanon: Legacies and Lessons," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18, no. 2 (1989): 58.
108. Davis, "Matar 'Abdelrahim," 166.
109. Ramzy Baroud, "The Trees Die Standing: A Story of a Palestinian Refugee," in *Struggle and Survival in Palestine/Israel*, ed. Mark LeVine and Gershon Shafir (London: University of California Press, 2012), 225.
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111. Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine*, 1–3.
112. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, 148.
113. Abu Iyad, *My Home, My Land*, 57.
114. Filiu, *Gaza*, 128.
115. Palestinian National Charter, Resolution of the Palestinian National Council, July 1–17, 1968, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/o/B508C2071B4377DB85256CED00716FA3>.
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118. Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 195–96.
119. Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 76.
120. For Khaled's account of the hijacking, see Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, chap. 5.
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131. Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, 107.
132. Anastasia Valassopoulos, “The International Palestine Resistance: Documentary and Revolt,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 50, no. 2 (2014): 150.
133. Helena Lindholm Schulz, *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 37.
134. Turki, *Exile’s Return*, 110; Kotaishová, *Nahr Al-Bared*, 52.
135. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 217.
136. Atwan, *A Country of Words*, 73; Abu Iyad, *My Home, My Land*, 60.
137. *Time*, December 13, 1968, <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19681213,00.html>.
138. Department of State, Memorandum for the Record, October 29, 1969, File POL-23-8, Box 20, Entry A1-5632, RG59, USNA.
139. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 197.
140. Aburish, *Arafat*, 84.
141. King Hussein’s infamous statement is recalled in Abu Iyad, *My Home, My Land*, 73; Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, 107. See also Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation: People, Power and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 48; Aburish, *Arafat*, 84; Nigel Ashton, *King Hussein of Jordan: A Political Life* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008), 140.
142. Stamps of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, <http://www.jordanstamps.com/index.php?sr=2026,2027,2028>, accessed August 14, 2021.
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148. Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, 80–81, 152.
149. See, for example, Fatah Poster 36, Palestine Poster Project Archive (PPPA), <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/al-karameh-1968>; Fatah Poster 42, PPPA, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/al-karameh-exhibition>; PLO Poster 142, PPPA, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/steadfastness-and-victory-al-karameh>; Fatah Poster 1278, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/al-karameh-the-symbol>, all accessed August 14, 2021.
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156. Interview with Abdelfattah Abu Srou, Palestinian refugee, Aida camp, West Bank, August 4, 2011.
157. Baumgarten, "The Three Faces/Phases," 26, 44; Filiu, *Gaza*, 141; Agha and Khalidi, "Yasser Arafat."
158. On the concept of the "Palestinian Revolution," see Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, chap. 4; Sayigh, "The Palestinian Identity Among Camp Residents," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 6, no. 3 (1977): 3–22; Fuad Jabber, "The Arab Regimes and the Palestinian Revolution, 1967–71," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 2, no. 2 (1973): 79–101; Samir Franjeh, "How Revolutionary Is the Palestinian Resistance? A Marxist Interpretation," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 1, no. 2 (1972): 52–60; Anne Irfan, "An Unusual Revolution: The Palestinian *Thawra* in Lebanon," Durham Middle East Papers, 103, 2020, <https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/imeis/DMEP103-AnUnusualRevolution.pdf>.
159. Quoted in Kotaishová, *Nahr Al-Bared*, 56–57. The name of this camp can be correctly transliterated as either "Nahr el-Bared" or "Nahr al-Bared."
160. Hirst, *Beware of Small States*, 96.
161. For the text of the Cairo Agreement, see *Al Nahar*, April 20, 1970, Orient-Institut Beirut (OIB) [Arabic], Lebanon.
162. Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2012), 155.
163. "We'll Talk with the Phalangists, but . . .," *Monday Morning*, June 23, 1975, S-0359-0002-02, UNA.
164. Miriyam Aouragh, *Palestine Online: Transnationalism, the Internet and the Construction of Identity* (London: Tauris, 2011), 17.
165. Filiu, *Gaza*, 136–37. See also press extracts from *Al Quds*, October 24, 1969, File RE230(G-3)I, Box RE19, UCRA [UNRWA translation]; UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today* 124 (September 1989), RSC.
166. Cable from West Bank director to Commissioner-General, February 8, 1969, File RE230(WB-3)I, Box RE22, UCRA.
167. Gaza Director, Memo to Commissioner-General, March 22, 1972, File RE230(G-3)II, Box RE19, UCRA.
168. Davis, "Matar 'Abdelrahim," 166.
169. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, 174–86.
170. See chapter 5 on these programs' ramifications for UNRWA's education program in the camps.
171. Keith Feldman, *A Shadow Over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 100; Michael Fischbach, *Black Power and Palestine: Transnational Countries of Colour* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2018), 126–27, 140–41, 196, 203–4, 208, 217. Such visits are recalled in Kotaishová, *Nahr Al-Bared*, 119–20.
172. Anastasia Valassopoulos, "The International Palestine Resistance: Documentary and Revolt," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 50, no. 2 (2014): 149.
173. Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, 100. See also Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, 124.

174. Mohammad Bamyeh, "Palestine. Listening to the Inaudible," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 4 (2003): 831.
175. Turki, *Exile's Return*, 7.
176. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 196.
177. Rashed Hamid, ed., *Muqarrarat al-majlis al-watani al-filastini, 1964–74*, 46, quoted in Rashid Khalidi, "Observations on the Right of Return," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21, no. 2 (1992): 30.
178. Yasir Arafat, in *The Fifty Years War*, documentary, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSAD9pS8NIw>, accessed August 14, 2021.
179. Aburish, *Arafat*, 42.
180. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 23, 195, 667–70.
181. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, chap. 4.
182. U.S. Embassy in Lebanon to Department of State, confidential letter NEA/IAI, July 28, 1972, File REF3, Box 20, Entry A1-5632, RG:59, USNA.
183. Alfred Atherton Jr. to Joseph Sisco, memorandum, November 14, 1969, File POL 17, Box 20, Entry A1-5632, RG 59, USNA.
184. This is discussed in depth in chapter 3.
185. Edwrd Buehrig, *The UN and the Palestinian Refugees: A Study in Non-territorial Administration* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), 31.
186. Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, 35.
187. Karmi, *In Search of Fatima*, 20–21.
188. Karmi, 18.
189. For more on this, see Jihane Sfeir, "L'historiographie Palestinienne entre histoire et mémoire," in *Ecritures Historiennes du Maghreb et du Machrek*, ed. N. Amara, C. Raymond, and J. Sfeir (Hors-Série: NAQD, 2015), 9.
190. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 195–96.
191. See, for example, PLO Poster 19, AUB; PLO Poster "Palestine Our Holy Land, PPPA, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/our-blessed-land>; Fatah Poster 211, PPPA, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/30-march-1976-land-day-in-palestine>, both accessed August 15, 2021.
192. PFLP Poster "Land of Oranges," PPPA, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/land-of-oranges-land-of-revolutionaries>. See also Fatah Poster 254, PPPA, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/the-land-is-for-those-who-liberate-it>, both accessed August 15, 2021.
193. See, for example, PFLP Poster 100, AUB; Fatah Poster 486, PPPA, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/the-call-of-the-land>; PFLP Poster 1630, 1970, <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/support-the-steadfastness-of-gaza>, both accessed August 15, 2021.
194. This UNRWA claim was part of a wider set of tensions in the agency's relationship with the Israeli government at this time. Laurence Michelmore, "Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General," A/6713, June 30, 1967, <https://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/181c4bf00c44e5fd85256cefo073c426/2a43e4d980f2c20685256a48004do424?OpenDocument>.
195. Bresheeth-žabner, *An Army Like No Other*, 163.
196. Atwan, *A Country of Words*, 49–50.
197. Baroud, *My Father Was a Freedom Fighter*, 77; Bresheeth-žabner, *An Army Like No Other*, 166.

198. Rennie, 1974 report.
199. Filiu, *Gaza*, 95–106.
200. See, for example, A. Brown, memo to S. Sinha, “Status of Camps in the Occupied Territories,” February 5, 1982, File RE410(WB) III, Box RE65, UCRA.
201. Omri Shafer Raviv, “Israeli Emigration Policies in the Gaza Strip: Crafting Demography and Forming Control in the Aftermath of the 1967 War,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 57, no. 2 (2021): 345. Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani also portrayed such returnee visits in his famous play *Return to Haifa*.
202. Jabber, “The Arab Regimes and the Palestinian Revolution,” 81.
203. Seth Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018), 18.
204. DUO/WB, memo to A/COM, October 4, 1969, File RE230(WB-3) I, Box RE22, UCRA.
205. UN Summary Record of 947th Meeting of Special Political Committee, A/SPC/SR. 947, December 12, 1974, FCO 93/571B, TNA.
206. Olof Rydbeck, “Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General,” A/34/13, June 30, 1979, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/o/E8149C637F38D5398525684200539E62>.
207. Bresheeth-žabner, *An Army Like No Other*, 154.
208. Avi Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry: Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians in the Aftermath of the June 1967 War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2012), 3.
209. Bresheeth-žabner, *An Army Like No Other*, 173.
210. Israeli policy in the occupied Sinai also engendered displacement, as the army’s destruction of canal cities led 1.5 million residents to lose their homes. Bresheeth-žabner, 165–69, 181.
211. Atwan, *A Country of Words*, 52.
212. Bresheeth-žabner, *An Army Like No Other*, 168–73; Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, 272–74.
213. Pappe, *The Biggest Prison on Earth*, 75.
214. Pappe, 81; Filiu, *Gaza*, 94.
215. Quoted in Tom Segev, “The June 1967 War and the Palestinian Refugee Problem,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 36, no. 3 (2007): 12.
216. Tareq Baconi, *Hamas Contained: The Rise and Pacification of Palestinian Resistance* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press: 2018), 11, 65.
217. Letter from R. E. Skinner, director of UNRWA Operations, West Bank, to Chief Relief Operations Division HQ, February 1, 1971, OP/RE/223, File RE210/03(WB) II, Box RE7, UCRA; UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today* 125 (February 1990), Box GP3 PALESTINE, RSC. See also Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, 227–28; Roy, *The Gaza Strip*, 105; Segev, “The June 1967 War and the Palestinian Refugee Problem,” 6–22.
218. Pappe, *The Biggest Prison on Earth*, 81.
219. Shafer Raviv, “Israeli Emigration Policies,” 347.
220. Segev, “The June 1967 War,” 17.
221. Shafer Raviv, “Israeli Emigration Policies,” 344.
222. Segev, “The June 1967 War,” 11.

223. Director of UNRWA Liaison New York, memo to Urquhart, March 16, 1970, S-1066-0065-0006, UNA.
224. Shafer Raviv, "Israeli Emigration Policies," 347.
225. Segev, "The June 1967 War," 11.
226. Shafer Raviv, "Israeli Emigration Policies," 344, 348.
227. Segev, "The June 1967 War," 7.
228. Segev, 12–17; Shafer Raviv, "Israeli Emigration Policies," 345–47.
229. Shafer Raviv, "Israeli Emigration Policies," 342, 350.
230. Letter from DUO/Gaza to Commissioner-General, UR 810, April 20, 1971, File OR215(IS) II, Box OR59, UCRA.
231. Filiu, *Gaza*, 141–43, 389.
232. Segev, "The June 1967 War," 15.
233. Atwan, *A Country of Words*, 52.
234. Segev, "The June 1967 War," 17–18.
235. DUO/WB, memo to A/COM, October 4, 1969, File RE230(WB-3)I, Box RE22, UCRA; Rydbeck, 1979 report.
236. "Peres: We Will Aid the Refugees, but Cannot Solve Entire Problem," *Jerusalem Post*, February 19, 1970; Acting DUO/Gaza, Note for the Record, October 19, 1971; both File OR215(IS)I, Box OR59, UCRA. See also Feldman, *Governing Gaza*, 171, 228.
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242. Segev, "The June 1967 War," 15.
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3. AN INTERNATIONAL REGIME

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2. See, for example, press statement by Kennedy, June 15, 1950; memo from UNRWA General Counsel to DUA/Syria, January 30, 1965, S-0169-0002-0010, UNA; statement of the UNRWA Commissioner-General at the UNGA Ad Hoc Committee for the Announcement of Voluntary Contributions to UNRWA, November 30, 1971, in *Palestine Refugees Today* 70 (1971), IPS; UNRWA, "General Information on UNRWA, Its Programmes and Financial Needs," n.d., FCO 93/1304 B, TNA; incoming code cable, Rennie to Vanwijk, February 29, 1972, S-0169-0009-0009, UNA; Philippe Lazarini, "Aiding Palestine Refugees Is Not Political," *Al Jazeera*, April 6, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/4/6/aiding-palestine-refugees-is-not-political>.
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4. UNRWA annual reports, <https://www.un.org/unispal/documents/>, accessed August 17, 2021; Maya Rosenfeld, *Confronting the Occupation: Work, Education, and Political Activism of Palestinian Families in a Refugee Camp* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 112.
5. Lex Takkenberg, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees After Sixty Years: Some Reflections," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, nos. 2–3 (2010): 255. See also review of UNRWA by the twentieth session of the General Assembly, n.d., S-1066-0065-0007, UNA.
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Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2019), 104–6.

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13. See Foreign Office, letter to Treasury, EE 1822/14, April 11, 1950; Ernest Bevin, letters to Foreign Ministers of Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, May 26, 1950, both File EE 1822, FO 371/82236; Brief for Colombo: Palestine Refugees, n.d., File EE 1825, FO 371/82243, all TNA.
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87. Abu Sharif and Mahnaimi, *Tried by Fire*, 37–38.
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89. Lebanese Interior Ministry, highly confidential letter to Commissioner-General, December 20, 1974, File LEG/480/4(L)II, Box LEG23, UCRA.
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91. The eight other member states at that time were Turkey, France, Ghana, Japan, Norway, Trinidad & Tobago, the United States, and the UK. See UNGA Resolution 2656, A/RES/2656(XXV), December 7, 1970, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/o/2D3AFB77D53D2A87852560DE006E5636>.
92. Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, 98–99.
93. According to UNRWA annual reports, around 51 percent of the registered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon lived in the camps at this time. See also Sfeir, “Palestinians in Lebanon,” 16.
94. See, for example, UNRWA memo, “Siblin Appointments,” January 21, 1969, File LEG/480/4(L)I; UNRWA, letter to Lebanon Foreign Ministry, March 3, 1970, File LEG/480/4(L) II, both Box LEG23, UCRA.
95. UNRWA Note for the Record, March 13, 1970, File LEG/480/4(L)II, Box LEG23, UCRA.
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97. Extract from Deputy Commissioner-General’s letter to the Commissioner-General, December 10, 1968, File LEG/480/4(L)I, Box LEG23, UCRA.
98. Laurence Michelmores, “Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General,” A/8013, June 30, 1970, para. 15 6, 39, 164, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/o/519871909FA2913885256A5700565639>.
99. Michelmores, para. 16; John Rennie, “Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General,” A/8413, June 30, 1971, para. 170, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/o/A81D27231BA0BF4985256AA8006C6BFD>.
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101. UNRWA General Staff circular no. 1/79, January 9, 1979, File OR131 II, Box OR17, UCRA.
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103. Michelmores, 1970 report, para. 17; Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, 88.

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105. Karma Nabulsi, ed., *Palestinians Register: Laying Foundations and Setting Directions* (Oxford University: Report of the Civitas Project, August 2006), 74–115; Adnan Abu Odeh, *Jordanians, Palestinians and the Hashemite Kingdom in the Peace Process* (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Peace Press, 1999); Laurie Brand, “Palestinians and Jordanians. A Crisis of Identity,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34, no. 4 (1995): 46–61; Shaul Mishal, *West Bank/East Bank: The Palestinians in Jordan, 1949–1965* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1978); UNRWA, “Where We Work: Jordan,” <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/jordan>, accessed July 29, 2021; Åge A. Tiltne and Huafeng Zhang, *Progress, Challenges, Diversity: Insights Into the Socio-economic Conditions of Palestinian Refugees in Jordan* (Norway: Allkopi AS and Fafo, 2013).
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114. Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, 61, 83.
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116. King Hussein recalls his response to the hijackings in the documentary *The Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSAD9pS8NIw>, accessed August 18, 2021. For a Palestinian nationalist account of Black September, see Abu Sharif and Mahnaimi, *Tried by Fire*, 88–89. See also Ashton, *King Hussein of Jordan*, 145–57.
117. Abu Sharif and Mahnaimi, *Tried by Fire*, 89.
118. Fawaz Turki, *Soul in Exile: Lives of a Palestinian Revolutionary* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988), 52, 99, 109, 120.
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121. Avi Plascow, *The Palestinian Refugees in Jordan, 1948–57* (London: Routledge, 1981), 71.
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128. Frances Susan Hasso, *Resistance, Repression, and Gender Politics in Occupied Palestine and Jordan* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 18.
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130. Under Secretary-General of the Legal Counsel, letter to Jordanian Ambassador to the UN, December 8, 1981, File LEG480(IS) I, Box LEG22, UCRA. See, for example, Olof Rydbeck, "Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General," A/38/13, June 30, 1983, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/61551?ln=en>.
131. UNRWA Legal Advisor, memo to Director of Education, October 29, 1980, File RE230(J-3) II, Box RE21, UCRA.
132. Takkenberg, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees," 255.
133. Lance Bartholomeusz, "The Mandate of UNRWA at Sixty," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, nos. 2–3 (2010): 460; Viorst, *UNRWA and Peace in the Middle East*, 35; Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, 183.
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144. Agreement reached between UNRWA and Israel on Aid to Palestine Refugees, June 14, 1967, File OR210(IS), Box OR59, UCRA.
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92. Ghassan Shabaneh, "Refugees, International Organizations, and National Identity: The Case of Palestine," *New Political Science* 32, no. 2 (2010): 219.
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97. Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, 46; Farah, "Uneasy but Necessary," 5.
98. Viorst, *Reaching for the Olive Branch*, 10.
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102. Viorst, *Reaching for the Olive Branch*, 108.
103. Interview with Matthias Schmale.
104. Olver, letter to Seward, September 4, 1957, S-1713-0000-0046, UNA.
105. Memo, Ardill to Michelmores, July 27, 1967, File RE230(WB)I, Box RE22, UCRA.
106. Interview with Matthias Schmale.
107. Interview with Maria Kekeliou; interview with Yazid Zahda; Farah, "UNRWA," 405.
108. Interview with Zizette Darkazally.
109. UNRWA Jordan (East Bank) Press Review No. 238/73, September 25, 1973, File RE230(J)IV, Box RE20, UCRA.
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111. Gabiam, *The Politics of Suffering*, 71.
112. Farah, "UNRWA," 401.
113. Code cable NY 339, n.d., S-0069-0010-01, UNA.
114. Farah, "UNRWA," 402; interview with Matthias Schmale.
115. Atwan, *A Country of Words*, 34.
116. Al-Hout, *My Life in the PLO*, 291.
117. Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, 66.
118. Interview with Hasna Rida.
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128. UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today* 65 (December 1970), IPS.
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139. Rennie, "Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General," A/10013, para. 158.
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150. Anne Irfan, "Activism and the Agency: The Palestinian Refugees' UNRWA Campaigns," *Rethinking Refuge*, 2019, <https://www.rethinkingrefuge.org/articles/activism-and-the-agency-the-palestinian-refugees-unrwa-campaigns>.

5. AGENTS OF THE NATION

1. On the negative image, see, for example, "Can the Hijackers Be Halted?," *Time Magazine*, September 12, 1969, 11, 32. See also Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance* (London: Profile Books, 2020), 113–14.
2. Noura Erakat, *Justice for Some: Law and the Question of Palestine* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2019), chap. 3.
3. Petition from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to UN Secretary-General Thant, 20 May 1968, 1968, S-0667-0006-03, UNA. On the use of petitions as a tactic, see Anne Irfan, "Petitioning for Palestine: Refugee Appeals to International Authorities," *Contemporary Levant* 5, no. 2 (2020): 79–96.
4. In recent years historians and political theorists have paid increasing attention to the intersection between nationalism, transnationalism, and internationalism, diverging from earlier tendencies to see these forces as inherently opposed. See, for example, Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2019); Craig Calhoun, "Nationalism and the Contradictions of Modernity," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 42 (1997–1998): 1–30; Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origin of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). For transnational studies of Palestinian nationalism, see Miriyam Aouragh, *Palestine Online: Transnationalism, the Internet and the Construction of Identity* (London: Tauris, 2011); Steven Salaita, *Inter/Nationalism: Decolonizing Native America and Palestine* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016); Michael Fischbach, *Black Power and Palestine: Transnational Countries of Color* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2018); Keith Feldman, *A Shadow Over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Paul Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
5. See, for example, Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation: People, Power and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Kemal Kirisci, *The PLO and World Politics: A Study of the Mobilization of Support for the Palestinian Cause* (London: Frances Pinter, 1986). More recently, Laleh Khalili has written that the "quasi-state structure of the Palestinian Authority" later became a crucial such institution. Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 220.
6. Recent studies of the internationalization of the Palestinian cause have focused on the PLO's role. See Erakat, *Justice for Some*, chap. 3; Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive*.
7. On earlier notions of Palestinian national identity, see Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, chap. 7; Lauren Banko, *The Invention of Palestinian Citizenship, 1917–47* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), chaps. 3, 6.

8. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 194. On the functioning of this phenomenon beyond the Palestinian case, see Martin van Bruinessen, "Transnational Aspects of the Kurdish Question," Working Paper, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, Florence, 2000.
9. Helena Lindholm Schulz, *The Reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism: Between Revolution and Statehood* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1999), 37.
10. Francesca P. Albanese and Lex Takkenberg, *Palestinian Refugees in International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 89–93.
11. Randa Farah, "The Marginalization of Palestinian Refugees," in *Problems of Protection: The UNHCR, Refugees, and Human Rights*, ed. Niklaus Steiner, Gil Loescher, and Mark Gibney (New York: Routledge, 2003), 163–64.
12. Howard Kennedy, "Interim Report of the Director of UNRWA," A/1451/Rev/1, October 6, 1950, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/o/EC8DE7912121FCE5052565B1006B5152>. On the same grounds, John H. Davis, UNRWA commissioner-general from 1959 to 1963, explicitly argued that the right of return should not be limited to registered refugees. Davis, *The Evasive Peace: A Study of the Zionist/Arab Problem* (London: Cox & Wyman, 1970), 110.
13. Ilana Feldman, "The Challenges of Categories: UNRWA and the Definition of a 'Palestine Refugee,'" *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 3 (2012): 388.
14. Julie Peteet writes that the agency's registration practices were "identity affirming" for the Palestinian refugees. Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair: Palestinian Refugee Camps* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 64–65.
15. Feldman, "The Challenges of Categories," 387–406.
16. See chapter 4.
17. Feldman, "The Challenges of Categories," 388–92.
18. Extract from *Palestine Refugees Today*, n.d., Box GP3 PALESTINE UNRWA PUBLICATIONS, RSC. See also Ilana Feldman, "Home as a Refrain: Remembering and Living Displacement in Gaza," *History and Memory* 18, no. 2 (2006): 39.
19. Interview with Matthew Reynolds, director of UNRWA Representative Office in Washington, and Chris McGrath, UNRWA liaison officer, Washington, D.C., April 7, 2016.
20. Nadia Latif, "Making Refugees," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 8, no. 2 (2008): 260.
21. Wasif Jawhariyyeh, *The Storyteller of Jerusalem: The Life and Times of Wasif Jawhariyyeh, 1904–48*, ed. Salim Tamari and Issam Nassar, trans. Nada Elzeer (Northampton, Mass.: Olive Branch Press, 2014).
22. Feldman, "The Challenges of Categories," 394.
23. Later stratifications are detailed in note from DUA/Jordan to Jordanian Minister of Development, July 11, 1968, File RE210/03(J); Resume of Criteria for Services provided to Refugees in the West Bank, November 16, 1978, File RE210(WB) III; both Box RE7, UCRA.
24. On Palestinian passports during the Mandate, see Banko, *The Invention of Palestinian Citizenship*, chap. 5.
25. Jawhariyyeh, *The Storyteller of Jerusalem*.
26. The vast majority of Palestinians in Jordan hold citizenship of that country, but there are significant exceptions, including those who arrived from Gaza in 1967. See

- Rochelle Davis et al., "Hosting Guests, Creating Citizens: Models of Refugee Administration in Jordan and Egypt," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (2017): 13.
27. Abdel Bari Atwan, *A Country of Words: A Palestinian Journey from the Refugee Camp to the Front Page* (London: Saqi, 2008), 34.
 28. Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 41–49.
 29. Najeh Jarrar, "Citizenship and Palestinian Refugees," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture* 3, nos. 3–4 (1996): 65–66; Jalal al-Husseini, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 2 (2000): 52.
 30. Interview with Filippo Grandi; interview with Matthew Reynolds and Chris McGrath.
 31. See, for example, T. Jamieson, "After June 1960," memo to Acting Director, January 2, 1959, File RE120 I, Box RE3, UCRA.
 32. D. F. Mant, acting DUA/Jordan, memo to Director of Relief Programmes, July 20, 1961, File RE210/03(WB) I, Box RE7, UCRA.
 33. Usama Khalidi, "The Diet of Palestine Arab Refugees Receiving UNRWA Rations, Up to 31st May 1967," 1968, IPS.
 34. Feldman, "The Challenges of Categories," 394.
 35. "UNRWA's Mandate," memo prepared by Office of UNRWA Commissioner-General, May 16, 1979, File OR110 II, Box OR1, UCRA.
 36. See, for example, Louis Gendron, confidential memo to Chief of Eligibility & Distribution Division, May 28, 1960, File RE120 I, Box RE3, UCRA.
 37. UNGA Resolution 37/120, A/RES/37/120, December 16, 1982.
 38. The practical difficulties were highlighted in Report of the Secretary-General, "Special Identification Cards for All Palestine Refugees," A/38/382, September 12, 1983. On the question of UNRWA's mandate, see Feldman, "The Challenges of Categories," 400–401.
 39. Lance Bartholomeusz, "The Mandate of UNRWA at Sixty," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, nos. 2–3 (2010): 459–60.
 40. Oroub el-Abed, *Unprotected: Palestinians in Egypt Since 1948* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2009), 9.
 41. Ghassan Shabaneh, "Refugees, International Organizations, and National Identity: The Case of Palestine," *New Political Science* 32, no. 2 (2010): 215, 218. On concepts of transnationalism, see M. Kearney, "The Local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalization and Transnationalism," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 547–48; Craig Calhoun et al., "Discourse of Nationalism and Transnationalism in Political Mobilization," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 47 (2003): 170–85; Nicholas van Hear, "Refugees, Diasporas, and Transnationalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, ed. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 176–87; Eva Østergaard-Nielsen, "The Politics of Migrants' Transnational Political Practices," *International Migration Review* 37, no. 3 (2003): 760–86. On transnationalism in the Palestinian context, see Daniel Meier, "The Palestinian *Fiday'i* as an Icon of Transnational Struggle: The Lebanese Experience," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 3 (2014): 22–334; Aouragh, *Palestine Online*.

42. Shafiq al-Hout, *My Life in the PLO: The Inside Story of the Palestinian Struggle*, trans. Hader al-Hout and Leila Othman (New York: Pluto Press, 2011), 44.
43. Interview with Filippo Grandi.
44. Acting DUA/Jordan, letter to Comptroller, February 4, 1973, File RE210/03(J), Box RE7, UCRA.
45. Interview with Lex Takkenberg, head of UNRWA Ethics Office, August 9, 2015, Amman. See also "Palestine Refugees: Review of UNRWA by the Twentieth Session of the General Assembly," S-1066-0065-07, UNA.
46. In article 4 of its National Charter of 1968, the PLO similarly characterized Palestinian identity as an inherent characteristic transmitted from parents to children. See PLO National Charter, OP32072.956.7, CUOPA.
47. The policy preventing female refugees from registering their children was confirmed in P. M. Holdaway, director of UNRWA Relief Services, to Denis Prescott, August 24, 1984, File A/RE/210(S), Box RE7, UCRA. The pre-UNRWA LRCS regime had been even more exclusionary, issuing women with ration cards only if they were widowed, and otherwise including them as dependents on the card of their father, brother, or husband. See Latif, "Making Refugees," 262.
48. See, for example, Rennie, 1971 Report; "UNRWA: A Brief History 1950–82," File RE100 III, Box RE2, UCRA.
49. Extract from *Palestine Refugees Today*, n.d., Box GP3 PALESTINE UNRWA PUBLICATIONS, RSC.
50. Interview with Filippo Grandi; interview with Ardi Imseis, former UNRWA Field Legal Officer, by Skype, May 23, 2017.
51. Interview with Ardi Imseis.
52. Asaf Romirowsky, "The Real Palestinian Refugee Crisis," *Tower*, 2014, <http://www.thetower.org/article/the-real-palestinian-refugee-crisis>; Simon Waldman, "UNRWA's Future Reconsidered," Henry Jackson Society, 2020, <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/HJS-UNRWA-Report-web.pdf>; Einat Wilf, "UNRWA: An Obstacle to Peace?," *Fathom*, 2013, <http://fathomjournal.org/unrwa-an-obstacle-to-peace>; Shimon Peres, *David's Sling: The Arming of Israel* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), 272–74. See also "Israeli PM Calls for UN to Dismantle Palestinian Aid Agency," *Telegraph*, June 11, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/06/11/israeli-pm-calls-un-dismantle-palestinian-aid-agency/>.
53. On Palestinian education in exile, see Anne Irfan, "Educating Palestinian Refugees: The Origins of UNRWA's Unique Schooling System," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34, no. 1 (2021): 1036–59; Mezna Qato, "A Primer for a New Terrain: Palestinian Schooling in Jordan, 1950," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 48, no. 1 (2018): 16–32.
54. Davis, *The Evasive Peace*, 65.
55. Quoted in Jana Kotaishová, *Nahr Al-Bared* (self-published: printed by Amazon, 2014), 25.
56. Fawaz Turki, *The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 53.
57. Ibrahim Abu Lughod, "Educating a Community in Exile: The Palestinian Experience," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 2, no. 3 (1973): 103; Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 193–94; Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, 87; Maya Rosenfeld, "From

- Emergency Relief Assistance to Human Development and Back: UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees, 1950–2009,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, nos. 2–3 (2010): 317. See also Edward Buehrig, *The UN and the Palestinian Refugees: A Study in Non-territorial Administration* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), 8–9; Kirisci, *The PLO and World Politics*, 42–43; Milton Viorst, *Reaching for the Olive Branch: UNRWA and Peace in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: Middle East Institute, 1984), 17.
58. Ghassan Shabaneh, “Education and Identity: The Role of UNRWA’s Education Programmes in the Reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 4 (2012): 491–513. See also Shabaneh, “Refugees, International Organizations, and National Identity”; Rosemary Sayigh, “What History Books for Children in Palestinian Camps?,” *Jadaliyya*, July 7, 2014, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/18421/what-history-books-for-children-in-palestinian-cam>.
 59. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 101, 115, 167; Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 91–92. For other leading modernist theories of nationalism, see Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); T. O. Ranger and Eric J. Hobsbawm, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). On the Palestinian context, see Qato, “A Primer for a New Terrain.”
 60. Extract from *Al Ayyam*, September 6, 1960, File RE230(S)I, Box RE21, UCRA.
 61. Article 7, PLO National Charter 1968, OP32072.956.7, CUOPA.
 62. On notions of education as a national duty, see Irfan, “Educating Palestinian Refugees,” 4–5; Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, 64, 88, 125, 129; Bocco, “UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees,” 245; Rosemary Sayigh, *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Books, 2007), 121, 186; Ibrahim Abu Lughod, “Educating a Community in Exile: The Palestinian Experience,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 2, no. 3 (1973): 103; Qato, “A Primer for a New Terrain,” 18.
 63. Tract from Palestinian Organisation for Solidarity and Moral Guidance, February 1971, File RE230(G-3) II, Box RE19, UCRA.
 64. Zeev Schiff and Ehud Yaari, *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising—Israel’s Third Front* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 85.
 65. Ghada Karmi, *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story* (London: Verso, 2002), 403.
 66. Shabaneh, “Education and Identity.” See also Shabaneh, “Refugees, International Organizations, and National Identity,” 216.
 67. See, for example, Gaza Director, memo to Field Education Officer, September 7, 1971, File RE230(G-3)II, Box RE19, UCRA. See also: Karmi, *In Search of Fatima*, 407.
 68. Rosenfeld, “From Emergency Relief Assistance to Human Development and Back,” 300.
 69. Bocco, “UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees,” 239.
 70. Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, 88, 128.
 71. Anaheed al-Hardan, *Palestinians in Syria: Nakba Memories of Shattered Communities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 59.
 72. George Dickerson, “Education for the Palestine Refugees: The UNRWA/UNESCO Programme,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 3, no. 3 (1973): 128.

73. Senior UNRWA officials used this phrase in "The Needs of UNRWA in the Fields of Education and Training," February 10, 1968, File RE230 V, Box RE19, UCRA; Dickerson, "Education for the Palestine Refugees," 124.
74. Education Director, memo to Commissioner-General, June 26, 1967, File RE230(L-1) IV, Box RE21, UCRA.
75. In 1961 UNRWA had formally accepted the principle of free preparatory education "for all refugee children capable of benefiting from it," although it had been running schools across the fields long before this. "UNRWA 1950–90: Serving Palestine Refugees," April 1990, Box GP59.3, UNRWA, RSC.
76. UNESCO, "The Education of Palestine Arab Refugees," UNESCO/ED/31, August 31, 1953, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001261/126137EB.pdf>. See also Isabelle Humphries and Laleh Khalili, "Gender of Nakba Memory," in *Nakba: Palestine, 1948 and the Claims of Memory*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod and Ahmad H. Sa'di (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 217.
77. Quoted in Kotaishová, *Nahr Al-Bared*, 82.
78. Abu Lughod, "Educating a Community in Exile," 111.
79. Jo Kelcey, "Incredibly Difficult, Tragically Needed, and Absorbingly Interesting: Lessons from the AFSC School Program for Palestinian Refugees in Gaza, 1949 to 1950," *Journal on Education in Emergencies* 5, no. 1 (2019): 17.
80. Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, 88, 128; Rosemary Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies: The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon* (London: Zed Books, 1993), 55; Qato, "A Primer for a New Terrain," 29.
81. On female participation in the thawra, see Abu Iyad with Eric Rouleau, *My Home, My Land: A Narrative of the Palestinian Struggle* (New York: Times Books, 1981), 60; *PLO Information Bulletin* 1, no. 4 (July 1975), IPS. For examples of women's petitions, see petitions from citizens of the Jordan West Bank and Gaza Strip, submitted to UN and UNRWA, February 6, 1968, S-0667-0006-03; letter from "The Palestinian Women in the Occupied Lands" to the UN Secretary-General, March 25, 1979, S-1808-0094-0008, both UNA.
82. See memo from Jordan Field Education Officer to Director of Education, July 17, 1975; memo from Lloyd Callow to DUA/Jordan, August 11, 1975; memo from Acting Director of Education, August 11, 1975, all in File RE230(J) IV, Box RE20, UCRA.
83. Yamila Husein, "The Stone and the Pen: Palestinian Education During the 1987 Intifada," *Radical Teacher* 74 (2005): 20.
84. Mezna Qato, "Palestinian Education and the Politics of Regeneration, 1948–67," lecture, Oxford RSC, February 24, 2021. For more on the impact of UNRWA's gender segregation in schools, see Maya Rosenfeld, *Confronting the Occupation: Work, Education, and Political Activism of Palestinian Families in a Refugee Camp* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), chap. 4.
85. UNRWA, "The Needs of UNRWA in the Fields of Education and Training," February 1967, File RE230 V, Box RE19, UCRA.
86. UNRWA West Bank Director, memo to Comptroller and Director of Education, RE/C410/A, October 21, 1971, File RE230(L-4), Box RE21, UCRA.
87. Davis, *The Evasive Peace*, 71–72.
88. Address by R. H. Ardill, director of UNRWA/UNESCO Department of Education, at the Third Regional Conference of Ministers of Education and Ministers

- Responsible for Economic Planning in the Arab States, Marrakesh, January 12–20, 1970, File OR 230(1–3) PART III, Box OR71, UCRA.
89. Assistant to UNRWA Director of Education, memo to Chief of Secretariat, ED/199, June 19, 1981, File OR150/2-EDU, Box OR29, UCRA; UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees Today* 93 (July 1980), RSC.
 90. Abu Lughod, “Educating a Community in Exile,” 106–9.
 91. Dickerson, “Education for the Palestine Refugees,” 123.
 92. Benjamin Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation: UN Aid to Palestinians* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 28.
 93. Red Cross Report on Palestine Refugees, May 12, 1950, ED 157/366, TNA; Director of UNRWA Education, memo to Acting Commissioner-General, December 9, 1964, CON/ED/165, File RE230(G)I, Box RE19; UNESCO booklet, “The In-service Training Programme for UNRWA/UNESCO Teaching,” 1967, File RE230(L-1) Box RE21; Deputy Commissioner-General, memo to Special Consultant to Commissioner-General, March 27, 1968, File RE230(1)G I, Box RE27, all UCRA. See also Dickerson, “Education for the Palestine Refugees,” 128.
 94. Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, 90.
 95. Turki, *The Disinherited*, 58.
 96. Quoted in Kotaishová, *Nahr Al-Bared*, 27.
 97. The earliest camp schools are depicted in the documentary *Sands of Sorrow* (1950), https://archive.org/details/sands_of_sorrow.
 98. The high proportion of Palestinian teachers in UNRWA schools has been consistent over the decades. In 1971 UNRWA estimated that 99 percent of its staff were Palestinian and half its employees were teachers. Press briefing by UNRWA commissioner-general, June 8, 1971, S-1066-0065-0006, UNA. Two years later UNRWA reported that all its school head teachers were Palestinian refugees themselves. Gaza Director, letter to Colonel Liran, April 9, 1973, File RE230(G-3) II, Box RE19, UCRA.
 99. Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, 90; Qato, “A Primer for a New Terrain,” 19–20.
 100. Phillip Issa, “Abu Maher al Yamani and the Unheralded Palestinian Leadership in 1950s Lebanon,” M.A. thesis, University of Texas, 2015, 12.
 101. Abu Iyad, *My Home My Land*, 25–28; Issa, “Abu Maher al Yamani,” 38–41; Mu’in Basisu, *Descent Into the Water: Palestinian Notes from Arab Exile* (Wilmette, Ill.: Medina Press, 1990), 21–22; Esmat Elhalaby, “Paradoxes of UNRWA,” *Dissent* 2 (March 2018), https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/paradoxes-unrwa-palestine-refugees-israel-usa-trump-cuts.
 102. Interview with Abdel Bari Atwan.
 103. Qato, “A Primer for a New Terrain,” 18.
 104. Issa, “Abu Maher al Yamani,” 6.
 105. Issa, 60; Basisu, *Descent Into the Water*, 23. Basisu’s political activism had been a source of concern to UNRWA management for some time. See Labouisse to Lalive, cable 429, November 16, 1957, S-0169-0010-0007, UNA.
 106. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, 140.
 107. Issa, “Abu Maher al Yamani,” 59.
 108. Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, 128.

109. Issa, "Abu Maher al Yamani," 6, 48.
110. Interview with Abdel Bari Atwan; Kotaish quoted in Kotaishová, *Nahr Al-Bared*, 27.
111. Sayigh, "What History Books for Children in Palestinian Camps?"; Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, 143.
112. On the role of Palestinian refugee teachers, see Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule, 1917–1967* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008), 216–17; al-Husseini, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process," 54; Bocco, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees," 239, 245; El Abed, *Unprotected*, 178; Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, 71–72; Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, 90, 125, 128.
113. Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, 71; Schiff, *Refugees Unto the Third Generation*, 63–64; Alami, "Educating Palestinian Refugees," 71.
114. Director of Education, memo to Commissioner-General, August 17, 1967, File RE230 V, Box RE19, UCRA.
115. Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, 71–72.
116. Director of Education, letter to Supervisor, November 20, 1969, File RE230(WB-3)I, Box RE22; Acting Commissioner-General, letters to UNESCO Director-General, October 22, 1969, December 18, 1969, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, all UCRA.
117. Director of Education, memo to Acting Commissioner-General, November 12, 1969, File RE230 VI, Box RE19, UHA.
118. Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, 184.
119. Head of UNRWA Press and Publications, letter to editor of *Al Ahad*, April 3, 1969, File RE230(3)II, Box RE28, UCRA.
120. "New Training Activities Proposed to Be Taken by the UNRWA/UNESCO Institute of Education," memo 35/69, November 26, 1969, File RE230(L-1)IV, Box RE21, UCRA.
121. Acting Commissioner-General, letter to UNESCO Director-General, October 22, 1969, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, UCRA.
122. UNESCO Director-General, letter to Acting Commissioner-General, December 9, 1969, December 30, 1969, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, UCRA.
123. Acting Commissioner-General, letter to UNESCO Director-General, October 22, 1969, Box RE27; Director of Education, letter to Lebanon Director, October 22, 1969, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27; memo from Lebanon Director, June 17, 1970, File RE230(L-1)II, Box RE20; all UCRA.
124. UNRWA established this institute in 1964 to develop an in-service teacher-training program. Dickerson, "Education for the Palestine Refugees," 127; "UNRWA 1950–90: Serving Palestine Refugees," Box GP59.3, UNRWA, RSC.
125. Acting Commissioner-General, letter to UNESCO Director-General, October 22, 1969, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, UCRA.
126. Interview with Hasna Rida, former UNRWA education research assistant, December 7, 2016, Beirut. In early 1970 UNRWA's deputy commissioner-general also wrote to academic historians in Oxford seeking recommendations for teachers' background reading on the history of Palestine. See Deputy Commissioner-General, letter to Peter Lienhardt, January 8, 1970; Lienhardt, letter

- to Deputy Commissioner-General, January 22, 1970; Albert Hourani, letter to Deputy Commissioner-General, February 5, 1970, all File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, UCRA.
127. UNESCO booklet, "The In-service Training Programme for UNRWA/ UNESCO Teaching," 1967, File RE230(L-1) Box RE21, UCRA.
 128. Deputy Commissioner-General, letter to Lienhardt, January 8, 1970, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, UCRA; Acting Commissioner-General, letter to UNESCO Director-General, December 18, 1969, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, UCRA.
 129. Extract from UNRWA's comments on memo of August 29, 1973, submitted to the Secretary-General on the occasion of his visit to Lebanon by the Higher Political Committee for Palestinians in Lebanon, File RE230(L-1)II, Box RE20; Lebanon Field Education Officer, cable to Chief Education Officer, April 24, 1973, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, both UCRA.
 130. Michelmores, 1970 Report, para. 109.
 131. Acting Commissioner-General, letter to UNESCO Director-General, December 18, 1969, File RE230(1)L, Box RE27, UCRA.
 132. Abu Lughod, "Educating a Community in Exile," 96–97.
 133. Sayigh, "What History Books for Children in Palestinian Camps?"
 134. Sayigh; see also Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, 72.
 135. Deputy Commissioner-General, letter to Leinhardt, January 8, 1970, File RE230(1) L, Box RE27, UCRA. See also: Rennie, 1971 Report.
 136. Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, 71–72.
 137. "Comments on Appeal from Secretary-General of the Federation of Arab Teachers," June 5, 1970, File RE230(1)S, Box RE27, UCRA; Michelmores, 1970 Report, para. 109.

6. PALESTINE AT THE UN

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