

Nadia Latif

Palestinian Labour and Burj al-Barajneh Camp

Towards a Critical Political Economy
of Long-Term Refugee Camps in
the Global South



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To Mama and Biba, with love.

Introduction

A significant body of scholarship has asserted that the operation of all camps regardless of their stated purpose—pre-emptive custody, detention, forced re-education, extermination, facilitating shelter, or providing refuge and humanitarian aid—follows a single logic (Agamben, 1995, 1998; Diken & Laustsen, 2005; Pandolfi, 2003; Perera, 2002; White, 2023). How does this universalizing paradigm of “encampment” obscure the experiences of refugees/migrants themselves? How might an analysis of the particular social relationships that emerge in a given long-term refugee camp foreground shifts over time in the local political economy of that camp?

When I first arrived in Burj al-Barajneh camp in 2003 to begin preliminary fieldwork for my dissertation, the construction of the houses, the spatiality of the camp, and the density of social relationships between its Palestinian inhabitants reminded me of informal neighbourhoods I was familiar with from growing up in Karachi during the 1980s–1990s. In the post-World War Two era, many cities in parts of the world today referred to as “the Global South” experienced rapid urbanization led by the establishment of “informal” settlements. These settlements were built by rural–urban migrants as well as by “self-settling” refugees. Consider the following excerpt from field notes recorded in 2004.

Conversation with Najah about housing in her part of the camp. Looking up with her at the ceiling. Cracks and paint peeling off. Looks as if it’s been caused by water collecting in the roof. Ask her what is causing it. She tells me that it’s been like that since the Lebanese army destroyed Manal’s house. Manal’s son was born with asthma and was quite ill as a baby. The doctor advised her to move because her house was small and dark, and didn’t have good ventilation. When she was pregnant with her youngest, they decided to build above Najah’s house. Really happy about it. Made plans about where her room would be etc. The Lebanese army came the moment they finished putting up the roof and told them that they weren’t allowed because the land was outside the camp.

I asked Najah if she thought someone had informed on them. She said probably because you can’t really see their house from the road. Did she think it was one of her Lebanese neighbours? She said, whenever something like this happens that’s what people say. Sounded as if she believed it too without wanting to. Manal was nine months pregnant when it happened. The army came at night, and because of the Pope’s visit (and the fact of it being a weekend), all government offices were closed. Any contacts that other people in the camp

had with government officials, who they could have approached on behalf of Manal and her family, were unavailable. The army official asked who the house belonged to, and both Najah and Manal's husbands said it was theirs, so they were both taken into custody.

The army wasn't able to demolish the house because the concrete hadn't dried. So, they returned the next day even though it was a Sunday and tore it all down. They said that if there is anyone below (in Najah's house), tell them to go out. Not our problem/ responsibility if in the course of demolishing upstairs, downstairs also gets demolished. Manal's uncle tried to offer the army officer a bribe, but guy got so outraged that you would have taken him for a man of strict principles. Except, two weeks later we noticed that our neighbours were building a second storey, and since then ten households have done so. Are they Lebanese? No, they are Palestinian. We learned that before building they had gone to the army officer (He was from Baalbek and known for hating Palestinians. I asked Najah if he was Amal, and she said probably. The neighbours had secretly paid him a bribe. Between \$200-\$500 USD. Najah, laughing—you can buy him with even \$100. Why didn't they tell you this when you were building? I don't know. I think because Manal's house went up in just two weeks, and they probably thought that we had already paid the man.

Manal got the house she currently lives in through her brother-in-law who is unmarried. He has migrated to England where he has a decent job. Apparently, Palestinians aren't the only ones who get their houses demolished in that area. One of the neighbours is a Lebanese working for the government. The boss hates him and had his second floor demolished twice. But he finally succeeded in building and has a big house now. Maybe he went over the man to someone higher. It's only recently that Manal has finished paying off the money that they borrowed from her parents and friends to construct their house that was destroyed.

The conversation recounted in the above excerpt came up during a coffee at Najah's home in Burj al-Barajneh camp. I had become friends with Najah and her sister-in-law, Manal, through the local NGO in which they worked, and in which I volunteered during my first year of fieldwork in the camp. They were both second-generation Palestinian refugees who had grown up in Burj al-Barajneh camp, living there for the duration of the Lebanese civil war (1975–1991) in the course of which they had grown to adulthood, married, and established households of their own.

Manal's parents and their families were expelled in 1948, from the now depopulated villages of Kūrkāt and Fāra, located in the Galilee. Najah's father and his family were also expelled in 1948. However, they were urban dwellers from the port city of 'Akkā who had maintained ties with the village they had recently migrated from in the Galilee. Najah's mother and her family were Lebanese rural–urban migrants to Beirut. Najah's father's Lebanese employer introduced him to her mother's family in part to convince him not to elope with a Lebanese Shi'a woman. Like her mother's family, Najah's father's family are Sunni Muslim, as was Najah's father's employer. Soon after their marriage, Najah's parents moved to Burj al-Barajneh camp which after the Cairo Agreement of 1969 was removed from the authority of the Lebanese military intelligence and placed under the authority of the political parties comprising the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).

This abbreviated account of Manal and Najah's families' histories and the excerpt from my fieldnotes complicate the representation of official/"formal" refugee camps in the Global South as "spaces of exception" where refugees are "warehoused" and "reduced to bare life". Over the decades, despite the Lebanese state's legal restrictions on the presence of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, as well as the internecine violence of the Lebanese civil war (1975–1991), Palestinian inhabitants of refugee

camps in Lebanon have established and maintained ties with citizens of their host-state through their labour and through intermarriage.

These shifting ties of unequal exchange continue to connect the local political economies of official/“formal” refugee camps in Lebanon with the political economy of their environ, as well as with regional and global capitalist economies. At the same time, the social and economic capital accumulation facilitated by these relationships is uneven and has changed over time, contributing to the emergence of new inequalities within camp communities and between Palestinian refugees and Lebanese citizens. Similar dynamics have been observed and analysed by other researchers who have also conducted ethnographic fieldwork in refugee camps located in postcolonial nation-states in Asia and Africa (Alimia, 2022; Betts et al., 2017; Jansen, 2018; Omata, 2017; Monsutti, 2021). However, the valuable insights of this body of scholarship need to be combined with an analytic approach that problematizes understandings of “the Global South”, and “the Global North”, in terms of a fixed political geography (Dirlik, 2007; Mintz, 1976).

The early twenty-first century saw a proliferation of scholarship questioning policymaking assumptions about the temporality of refugee camps and the protection they provide to refugees (Diken & Lautsen, 2005; Fassin, 2012; Feldman, 2018; Hanafi & Long, 2010; Hyndman, 2000; McConnachie, 2016; Pandolfi, 2003; Perera, 2002; White, 2023). Drawing on Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben’s critiques of the modern state, this body of scholarship has analysed refugee camps as techniques of power aimed at governing “populations” deemed surplus by the contemporary global system of states.

In this book, I argue that, while the paradigm of “encampment” may be a rhetorically powerful strategy to build movements of transnational solidarity around the rights of refugees and migrants, it does not facilitate a nuanced understanding of the experiences of particular groups of refugees and migrants themselves. Nor does it permit an understanding of how those experiences may change over time with shifts in the global capitalist economy. Such an understanding requires a sustained focus on the unwaged and waged labour of both women and men refugee/migrants, as well as historic shifts in how that labour has been mobilized in order to ensure the social reproduction of a particular refugee/migrant group over multiple generations.

The binary distinction between “forced” and “voluntary” migration asserted in policy and legislation is increasingly recognized as unreflective of the lived experiences of migrants themselves (Erdal & Oeppen, 2018; Fitzgerald & Arar, 2018). Institutionalized in international law during the post-World War Two era in response to Cold War rivalries (Bernard, 2023; Long, 2013; Venturas, 2015), the distinction between “forced” and “voluntary” migration has been paralleled by a scholarly division of labour between the study of “migrants” and the study of “refugees”.

The multiple generations of Palestinian refugees inhabiting official/“formal” refugee camps in Lebanon are exemplars of “forced migration”. While the *nakbā* (the term Palestinians use to refer to their expulsion in 1948) continues to cast a long shadow, it is one of many migrations experienced by those forcibly displaced in 1948 as well as by subsequent generations. Through long-term field research in Burj

al-Barajneh camp, I have been able to collect oral histories of some of these subsequent migrations, and the ways in which they have shaped the political economy of the camp over the decades of its existence. Immediately after their expulsion in 1948 and before the establishment of UNRWA in 1950, the first generation of Palestinian refugees migrated between camps in Syria and camps in Lebanon in search of better employment opportunities, as the humanitarian aid provided through Red Cross societies was insufficient for meeting basic survival needs.

From the 1960s onwards, waves of rural–urban migration contributed to the spatial expansion of Burj al-Barajneh camp and the “informal” urbanization of Beirut. These rural–urban migrants included Syrian and Lebanese citizens as well as Palestinian refugees inhabiting camps in rural Lebanon. At the same time there was considerable out-migration from Burj al-Barajneh camp to the oil-producing nation-states in the region that were experiencing an economic boom and a concomitant increase in demand for labour. This period overlapped with the PLO’s relocation of its base of operations from Jordan to Lebanon (1969–1982) and the Lebanese civil war (1975–1991). After the first Gulf War (1990–1991), and then the Oslo Accords between the nation-state of Israel and the leaders of the PLO (1993, 1995), many former Palestinian inhabitants of refugee camps in Lebanon were forced to return due to shifts in the relations between the PLO and Arab oil-producing states. Several of my interlocutors described the considerable difficulties they encountered in securing permission to return from the Lebanese state. This abbreviated account of some of the multiple migrations experienced by those Palestinian refugees who still inhabit Burj al-Barajneh camp illustrates ways in which the distinction between “forced” and “voluntary” migration does not reflect the lived experiences of refugee/migrants themselves.

Scholarship on migration deemed “forced” has focused on host states and humanitarian aid organizations’ “governance” of refugee (im)mobility. The ways in which refugees themselves negotiate—but not necessarily contest—this “governance” in order to secure a livelihood and ensure their social reproduction over generations has not been a primary concern. Nor has sufficient attention been paid to shifts over time in intersecting power inequalities within a refugee “population”, since the paradigm of encampment—similar to the law and policy making it critiques—assumes that all those “abandoned” by the state deemed their legitimate sovereign are equally dispossessed. This in turn results in a reductive understanding of the actual power inequalities between refugee/migrants and the various “public” and “private” actors and institutions that comprise the contemporary global migration and refugee regimes. It can also obscure ways in which intersecting inequalities within refugee/migrant groups can change over time with shifts in the global capitalist economy.

A nuanced analysis of historical shifts in the experiences of particular groups of migrants and refugees themselves, that is not hampered by “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002), may contribute to the apprehension of the “Global South”, not in terms of a fixed political geography, but as spaces socially produced by the particular history of their integration into what became the global capitalist economy on unequal terms (Dirlik, 2007; Mintz, 1976). This then allows

for the possibility of seeing “the Global South” in the “Global North” in ways that do not reproduce hierarchal recognitions of exploitation, and concomitant competitions of suffering (Trefzer et al., 2014). Such an approach also helps to problematize the assumption that in comparison with “the Global North” the integration of refugee/migrants in the Global South—whether deemed “forced” or “voluntary”—is facilitated by presumed similarities in race, religion, and culture.

Scholars who have conducted ethnographic research on refugee camp livelihoods in postcolonial states in Asia and Africa have highlighted the importance of what has been termed “the informal economy” (Alimia, 2022; Betts et al., 2017; Jansen, 2018; Omata, 2017; Monsutti, 2021). In contrast to scholars who view formality as the norms sanctioned by modern bureaucracies and informality as their lack or absence, I approach the relationship between formality/informality in terms of the shifting interplay between the stated norms of a given group of people and the ways in which these norms are implemented, negotiated, and circumvented. In this understanding, formality is not limited to the state, humanitarian aid organizations, and other agents of “governance”. Rather, formality refers to all forms of social action that are recognized and considered legitimate by a particular group of people. Hence, the informal is a possibility inherent in all social relationships. This, then, makes it possible to consider whether what is currently “formal”, historically emerged as an “informality” that acquired durability, permanence, and legitimacy over the course of historic political economic shifts. Such an approach to formality may also facilitate a multi-scalar analysis of the ways in which refugee/migrants are “informally” integrated into the political economies of host nation-states on unequal terms while being “formally” excluded.

The Palestinian inhabitants of refugee camps in Lebanon today are descendants of the first generation, who were expelled during the establishment of the nation-state of Israel in 1948. As the conversation excerpted from my fieldnotes indicates, notwithstanding the Lebanese state’s prohibitions on Palestinian employment and property ownership, social relationships of unequal exchange emerged between Palestinian camp refugees and Lebanese citizens. These relationships have facilitated the informal circumvention of legal restrictions aimed at “containing” the presence of non-citizens. However, this circumvention has not provided multiple generations of Palestinian camp refugees in Lebanon with the power to consistently secure recognition of their (human) rights.

This book seeks to contribute to the growing body of scholarship problematizing the distinction between forced and voluntary migration. It does so through an examination of how the political economy of an urban refugee camp located in the southern suburbs of Beirut has been historically shaped by protracted conflict and the provision of humanitarian aid, as well as by Palestinian refugees’ precarious labour, and remittances from circular migration in the region. Similar to a number of other long-term refugee camps in postcolonial states of Asia and Africa, Burj al-Barajneh camp was established by “self-settling” Palestinian refugees from villages and towns in the Galilee fleeing the violence that accompanied the establishment of the nation-state of Israel. Over the decades, Burj al-Barajneh camp’s political economy has been shaped by the intertwining of sectarianism and capitalism in Lebanon, the

international and local provision of humanitarian aid, as well as by Palestinian camp refugees' labour migration to other nation-states in the region.

The considerable body of scholarship on Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon has focused primarily on their "governance" by the political parties comprising the PLO, the Lebanese state, and the humanitarian aid organizations that provide services to Palestinian camp refugees. The ways in which multiple generations of Palestinian refugees have sustained themselves through precarious labour within the camps themselves, their host nation-state environs, and regionally have not been systematically considered in connection with their experiences of dispossession and statelessness. In order to reach a better understanding of the uneven ways in which Palestinian camp refugees have been integrated into the Lebanese political economy on terms unfavourable to them, in this book, I propose the continuum of formality and informality as a framework for analysing the flows of labour and capital that connect Burj al-Barajneh camp's political economy to that of Beirut, as well as to the global capitalist economy.

An analysis that foregrounds the unequal exchanges that comprise labour and capital flows can highlight ways in which spaces deemed "exceptional" and "sites of biopolitical governmentality" are connected to their environs and integrated into the political economy of host nation-states despite formal constraints on refugee mobility. Foregrounding labour and capital flows enables a better understanding of how such "marginal" spaces are connected to the global capitalist economy and shaped by it, rather than forming "pockets of resistance" or providing models of alternative social organization, whether lauded in terms of "moral economy", or vilified in terms of "terrorism". Such an approach also highlights the impact of shifts in humanitarian aid provision on the political economies of refugee camps as well as their host-state environs at a more granular scale than that permitted by the concept of "governance". Lastly, a focus on unequal exchange may facilitate a better understanding of uneven capital accumulation within "refugee populations" and the emergence of new hierarchies over several generations of dispossession.

The focus on a single camp—in this case, Burj al-Barajneh refugee camp located in the southern suburbs of Beirut—aims to underscore the necessity of studying the particular history of a particular refugee camp located within a particular host nation-state locale. Extrapolating a universal experience of "encampment" for a refugee "population", or a given host-nation state may be effective as a strategy for building transnational solidarities around the rights of refugees/migrants. It does, however, have the consequence of precluding a nuanced understanding of the particular relationships of unequal exchange that emerge over the long-term within camps and between camps and their host nation-state environ. These relationships do not remain unchanged over time. Attempts to narrate "the refugee experience" rest on the assumption that the dispossession that ensues from the loss of state protection is uniform. This fails to consider ways in which the dispossessed may have been differentially positioned within particular intersections of class, gender, race, sect, and ethnicity in their regions of origin.

Research Methods and Ethics

The analysis presented in this book is based on material collected through long-term fieldwork conducted while living and volunteering in Burj al-Barajneh camp with a local NGO established by a second-generation Palestinian woman who grew up in Burj al-Barajneh camp. Two nine-month stays in 2003–2004 and 2005–2006 have been followed by shorter stays ranging from a week to two months. The most recent of these stays was in 2024, prior to the recommencement of the Israeli war on Lebanon. The interlocutors I was initially introduced to were women neighbours and co-workers in the Palestinian NGO with which I volunteered. All of my interlocutors had had some level of involvement with the PLO-led struggle for national liberation during the 1970s–1980s. None of them, however, had held political office or considered themselves to be part of the cadre of any Palestinian political party. Through them, I was later able to interview a number of their close male relatives, some of whom had been part of the military wings of the various political parties comprising the PLO during the 1980s, but had not held positions of authority in either the PLO or the “popular committees” that emerged after the Lebanese state placed the Palestinian camps under the authority of the PLO in 1969.

My research methodology has included participant observation, unstructured interviews, and the collection of life histories of women and men refugees of different generations. Informed consent was sought and obtained for participant observation, as well as for all interviews. This material has been supplemented by research in the archives of the Institute for Palestine Studies in Beirut, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in Geneva. In addition, I have been able to remain in contact over the decades through telephone, email, and social media with a small number of families who have become dear friends.

The problematic of my research, as it has evolved over the course of my fieldwork, is twofold: How do different generations of Palestinian inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh relate to this place—the refugee camp—that they have been inhabiting for the past seven decades? Do they consider it their home? The material, gathered during participation-observation and formal interviews primarily focused on accounts of relationships to and within the camp in answer to these questions. This approach rendered questions of orality, memory, and language important, given that oral accounts of remembered events are often associated with unreliability, and thus deemed untrustworthy as bases of knowledge.

Questions of orality and memory led directly to the second problematic: power relations in the production of knowledge concerning any group deemed “vulnerable” or “subaltern”. This problem, not limited to scholars from former colonial powers, has been a preoccupation within anthropological debates since the 1970s. Terms such as “multiple, intersecting identities” have been used to acknowledge the fact that ethnographers and their interlocutors occupy many different subject positions at the same time, and that these positions may shift if fieldwork is continued over the life-course of the ethnographer. Researchers may be keenly aware of this while

conducting fieldwork. However, the attempt to represent this awareness textually, without limiting it to biographical notes at the beginning of one's ethnography, compounds the problem. Strategies that are sustainable—and thus sustained in the body of the text—and which allow for a representation of the complicated interplay of subject positions, also capture the overarching awareness that, at the end of the day, as scholars, we are accorded the power to produce and disseminate knowledge about our interlocutors in forums from which they are debarred.

In the specific context of my own work, this twofold problematic intersected with the political sensitivity of the questions considered. Palestinian camp refugees have been studied, written about, photographed, and filmed throughout their ongoing displacement in Lebanon. Given their class position, the fact of their origin in territory ceded to the Israeli nation-state in all versions of the two-state solution, and their marginalization within international and Palestinian nationalist concerns, "home" is not and cannot be a depoliticized issue. My interlocutors often speak of feeling fed up with being documented, while at the same time feeling compelled by their situation to continue to speak, of constantly having to ascertain who they are speaking to, and who they are being asked to define themselves as. Conversations about "home", whether or not in a formal interview setting, always take place within the broader context of Palestinian self-determination and the right of refugees, under international law, to return "home".

Who I have been perceived to be, in turn, has shaped the answers I have received. My age, marital status, citizenship, and occupational status have changed considerably since I began fieldwork in Burj al-Barajneh camp. Along with my gender identity, they have meant different things to different interlocutors at different times. In the early years of my fieldwork, at times I was dismissed as an "American", even though I emphasized the fact that as a Pakistani citizen, my presence in the USA was permitted solely by my status as a scholarship receiving student. At other times, I was asked why I did not wear a hijab and pray and fast as a proper Muslim woman, since I was from Pakistan. I found it difficult to explain that the particular sect of Islam followed by my paternal family is considered heretical under the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The various subject positions I could neither embrace nor discard shaped not only the material I collected but the project itself.

Ruth Behar defined anthropology as "A mode of knowing that depends on the particular relationship formed by a particular anthropologist with a particular set of people in a particular time and place" (Behar, 1996). The relationships that I was able to establish with my interlocutors and have maintained over the decades with those who have become close friends have been shaped not only by their perceptions of me, but also by the particular gender and class norms I was raised with in the middle-class neighbourhood of Karachi I grew up in. Soon after I first arrived in 2003, I accompanied a neighbour on a visit to a sick relative at the camp hospital, run by the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS). Two Bangladeshi men were trying to make themselves understood to the receptionist in a mixture of broken Arabic and English. The receptionist, a camp resident, overhearing me talking to my neighbour in heavily accented Arabic, brusquely turned to me and asked me to explain, "What do these [men] want?" The men and my own embarrassment at her

arbitrary assumption of our commonality, given our linguistic, national, gender, and class differences, seemed palpable only to ourselves. I explained to her that we did not speak the same language, and later wondered if I would have been able to conduct the research I was doing here, within an “informal” neighbourhood in the city I and multiple generations of my family are from.

Given my experiences of growing up under a military dictatorship, I early on made the decision not to ask questions that would be construed as “political”. This included the collection of family genealogies. Given the detention and torture of a large part of the camp’s Palestinian adult male population by Syrian military intelligence at the end of the 1980s, and camp refugees’ experience of agents of various intelligence-gathering agencies posing as researchers, journalists, and humanitarian aid workers, my interlocutors had little reason to trust me with such information. Moreover, I was cautious about asking questions that could be considered intrusive or cause pain. Ethical scholarship respects the interlocutor’s right to choose what—if anything—to share.

Overview of Chapters

This book does not claim to provide an account of current conditions in Burj al-Barajneh camp. Since my last visit in 2024, the Israeli military has reoccupied South Lebanon and laid waste to the southern suburbs of Beirut in which Burj al-Barajneh camp is located. My goal, rather, is to propose a theoretical framework that can assist other researchers in approaching the experiences of particular groups of refugees/migrants in ways that do not banalize them into “bare life”. To that aim, I present an analysis of historic shifts in the ways in which Burj al-Barajneh camp’s Palestinian inhabitants have been informally integrated on unfavourable terms into the political economy of Beirut, as well as into the global capitalist economy.

The first chapter provides a historical overview of Palestinian refugees’ social production of the space of Burj al-Barajneh camp. Palestinian refugee camps have primarily been analysed as spaces of containment or zones of exception, where refugees are reduced to bare life. The social relationships that have emerged within them over time are either viewed as the repositories of tradition that enable multiple generations to cope with the upheavals of continued dispossession, or as severely limited by the liminality and transience characteristic of spaces deemed temporary. The terms of these analyses mirror earlier discourses of “marginality” developed in the context of rural–urban migration in Latin America (Munck, 2017; Perlman, 1975). In both cases, spaces created through dispossession are viewed as enclaves of tradition, isolated from their environs, and inhabited by an unstratified and homogeneously disempowered community.

The first chapter examines how and why Burj al-Barajneh refugee camp came to be established near Burj al-Barajneh village on the outskirts of Beirut, as well as how it was “urbanized” by the subsequent settlement of Lebanese rural migrants, Palestinian migrants from camps located in more rural parts of Lebanon, and Syrian

rural migrants seeking work in Beirut. The chapter also examines the emergence of a property market within the camp despite the Lebanese state's formal prohibitions on Palestinian refugees' ownership of property and construction of housing more durable than metal and wood shacks. Unequal relationships of exchange between individual refugees and Lebanese citizens possessing greater economic and social capital are shown to have played an important role in the settlement of the camp and the emergence of an informal housing market. Highlighting the changing interconnections between the local political economy of the camp and its environs, this chapter problematizes the characterization of nation-states as omnipotent and monolithic entities, as well as the characterization of refugee camps as homogenous and isolated spaces of containment.

The second chapter looks at Palestinian women and men's multi-generational accounts of unwaged and waged labour in order to reach a better understanding of how the political economy that emerged within Burj al-Barajneh camp has been historically shaped by the intertwining of sectarianism and capitalism in Lebanon, as well as by shifts in the global capitalist economy. The use of labour as a conceptual lens foregrounds the centrality of Palestinian camp refugee women's "productive" and "reproductive" labour in sustaining their households over the decades of statelessness. At the same time, an analysis of shifting intersections of gender, religious sect, and citizenship in generating a segmented labour market highlights some of the ways in which the implementation and circumvention of legal prohibitions on Palestinian employment in Lebanon have been shaped not only by the exigencies of the Lebanese economy, but also by shifting relationships of unequal exchange between Palestinian refugees and Lebanese citizens.

Scholarship on refugee camp economies in postcolonial states of Asia and Africa has problematized the characterization of refugees as constituting an economic burden on host nation-states (Betts et al., 2017; Werker, 2007). Highlighting the wide range of camp refugees' formal and informal economic activities, these studies have presented camp refugees as entrepreneurs who suffer from market distortions created by the host nation-state's restrictive policies, that are exacerbated by host citizens' discriminatory practices towards refugees. These studies facilitate a consideration of citizenship and statelessness in the generation of segmented labour markets. However, their celebration of refugee entrepreneurship may obscure camp refugees' uneven accumulation of social and economic capital, as well as the conflicts this may give rise to.

Debates regarding the provision of humanitarian aid in long-term refugee camps have been conceptualized in terms of "governance" and its (il)legitimacy (Fassin, 2012; Feldman, 2018; Hanafi & Long, 2010). Aid agencies and host nation-states are viewed as governing refugee populations while holding questions of political representation and legitimate authority in temporary/permanent abeyance. By problematizing humanitarian aid organizations' self-representation as being "apolitical", this body of scholarship highlights the political disavowals implicit in humanitarian claims of "neutrality". However, the ethnographic material analysed by this body of scholarship complicates its theoretical framework by highlighting contingencies and shifts in the social relationships and power differentials between

providers of humanitarian aid and their refugee recipients. Moreover, this body of scholarship does not consider ways in which the global capitalist economy has shaped and continues to shape the provision of humanitarian aid, or how the provision of humanitarian aid shapes and is shaped by the political economies of refugee camps as well as their host nation-state environs.

The third chapter addresses this lacuna by examining the life histories of Palestinian women from Burj al-Barajneh who worked at an NGO established by a second-generation Palestinian woman refugee from the camp. The chapter examines ways in which these women have negotiated and reflected on the contradictions of being recipients of humanitarian aid, while at the same time being employed as humanitarian workers. These negotiations and reflections are analysed in light of the sectarian provision of welfare services in Lebanon, the effects of the retrenchment of PLO-provided social services since its military withdrawal from Lebanon in 1982, and the use of flexible labour policies by humanitarian aid agencies and local NGOs. Palestinian refugee women's self-reflections on their experiences of both receiving and disbursing aid highlight the extent to which humanitarian work has come to provide some camp refugee women with the opportunity for "respectable" salaried labour and limited accumulation of economic and social capital. These self-reflections also bring to the fore the tensions generated within families and households by the gendering of this uneven accumulation of capital.

Dispossession and the containment of refugees within camps have been viewed as maintaining traditionalism and facilitating diasporic nationalism (Allan, 2013; Malkki, 1995; Sayigh, 1979). Scholarly interest in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon emerged in tandem with the PLO's establishment of its base of operations in Lebanon in the late 1960s. In line with the view held by many leftists during this period which equated Third World nationalism with international revolution, the primary preoccupation of this body of scholarship was to establish the "revolutionary consciousness" of the camp refugees in light of their national dispossession.

For many scholars, the preservation of *fellah* (peasant) culture they perceived in the refugee camps attested to the authenticity and strength of Palestinian nationalism which they viewed as cutting across class, sectarian, and regional divides. For others, this was the legacy of a premodern past that had survived because camp refugees had not been integrated into the "modern" economic processes of a capitalist economy. It is significant that regardless of whether they viewed social relationships and political organization in the camps in a positive or negative light, both positions concurred in viewing them as premodern survivals. This view of camp refugees as repositories of (national) tradition mirrored the discourse of marginality that predominated analyses of rural-urban migration in Latin American cities. In both cases, migrant/refugees were seen as isolated from the political economies of their environs and, hence, the true protagonists of Third World Revolution, or conversely lacking a "modern" political consciousness and, thus, incapable of political mobilization on their own.

The fourth chapter analyses multi-generational accounts of Palestinian women and men camp refugees' involvement in political activity during the period the PLO's base of military and civilian operations was in Lebanon (1969–1982). The

view of first-generation camp refugees as naïve, ignorant, and premodern appears to have been shared by the Palestinian nationalist leadership as well as camp refugees themselves (Latif, 2011). At the same time, Palestinian camp refugees' own accounts complicate the narrative that credits the PLO's middle- and upper-class leadership, who did not live in refugee camps, with inculcating a modern national consciousness among their "depeasantized" compatriots.

A growing body of scholarship has sought to problematize the distinction between "forced" and "voluntary" migration instituted through policy and legislation, as unreflective of the lived experiences of "people on the move" themselves. The fifth chapter contributes to these debates through an analysis of the accounts of Palestinian camp refugee women and men's transnational migration during the Lebanese civil war (1975–1991). During this period, large numbers of Palestinian refugee men from camps in Lebanon migrated to the oil-producing nation-states Libya and the UAE. Most travelled on their own as the jobs they were able to secure were precarious and they were legally prohibited from bringing family members. Others, especially those migrating to Libya, were deemed "skilled" labour and allowed to bring their families. During the same period, many young Palestinian women and men travelled to Eastern Bloc states on scholarships for higher education disbursed through the political parties comprising the PLO.

This chapter examines women and men's gendered experiences of living, working, and studying in nation-states that formally asserted solidarity with the Palestinian cause. However, as the refugees' accounts highlight, this solidarity was tempered by each nation-state's views regarding the labour and capital needs of its national economy. With the end of the Cold War, the Eastern Bloc's provision of scholarships in aid of developing "human capital" in the Global South came to an end. Similarly, shifts in the relationship between the leadership of the PLO and the UAE and Libyan states resulted in the mass expulsion of Palestinian migrant workers from those nation-states in the early 1990s. The chapter concludes by examining the difficulties experienced by returnees in re-building their lives in Burj al-Barajneh camp upon their forced return to Lebanon.

The final chapter of the book analyses the complicated ways in which Burj al-Barajneh camp refugees' production and consumption of social media have been bound up with thwarted political and economic aspirations, couched in the discourse of progress and its moral consequences. The scholarship on Palestinian camp refugees' use of social media has made an important contribution to analyses of the ways in which these media forms are deployed in the articulation of national identity and claims to nationhood under conditions of military occupation, surveillance, and protracted displacement. However, since this body of work primarily focuses on the imagining of a Palestinian national community and identity form, the role of social media in local and global processes of commodity production and consumption is left unexamined. Also not interrogated are the ways in which Palestinian camp refugees' conceptions of national liberation have been shaped by the workings of the global capitalist economy. This chapter examines these questions in light of multi-generational interviews conducted with Palestinian women and men in Burj al-Barajneh camp regarding ongoing debates about the effects of social media

on the moral and social fabric of their community. This debate is couched in terms of the societal and moral impact of *taṭawwur* (evolution/development). The chapter examines the complicated ways in which Palestinian camp refugees' production and consumption of social media have been bound up with thwarted political and economic aspirations, couched in the discourse of *taṭawwur* and its moral consequences.

Conclusion

Most of Burj al-Barajneh camp's Palestinian inhabitants originate from villages and towns in the Galilee that were annexed by the nation-state of Israel in 1948 and depopulated. Located in Beirut's southern suburbs, the camp presents the appearance of a low-income, urban neighbourhood, in many respects typical of other such "informal" settlements in other large cities of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Houses are multi-storied cinderblocks. When I first arrived in 2003, much of the construction on the perimeter of the camp was still pockmarked by shell holes from the Lebanese civil war. Houses were separated by narrow alleys, some of which were only wide enough for a single person to walk through. Over the decades, the alleys have become narrower. In the past, when the weather was pleasant and during the summer, people—particularly the elderly—liked to sit on the small, concrete benches built next to their doorways. These no longer exist, as all possible space that could be built on has been used up.

Over the course of fieldwork, I have heard numerous accounts of the kindness that various Lebanese individuals showed the first generation of refugees in the course of the painful journey they were forced to make in 1948. I also learned that the establishment of Burj el-Barajneh camp in 1949 by villagers from Tarshiha was made possible by the social relationships between a notable family of Tarshiha and their Lebanese counterpart from the Burj el-Barajneh, at that time a village on the outskirts of Beirut. Fieldwork revealed that such ties were quite common, with frequent border crossing and resettlement between south Lebanon and the Galilee, facilitated by the permeability of the borders—the Mandate demarcation of Palestine and Lebanon having taken place merely three decades earlier in 1920.

Furthermore, with the establishment of Palestinian refugee camps, new social relationships emerged between the inhabitants of the camps and their Lebanese neighbours, cemented by intermarriage. In the case of Burj el-Barajneh camp, close ties developed with Lebanese Shi'a rural migrants from the south and the Bek'ā who had settled in the areas around the camp to seek employment in the rapidly expanding construction and industrial sectors of Beirut. The political mobilization of the camp refugees and their Lebanese class counterparts—particularly among the Shi'a—during this period, and the PLO's establishment of its base of operations in Beirut further cemented these ties. In addition to relations of labour and intermarriage, the inhabitants of Burj el-Barajneh camp and their Lebanese neighbours now became political allies in a joint struggle—their *shebāb* (young men) training

together for military combat to bring about a revolution in Lebanon and secure Palestinian national liberation.

I do not mean to suggest that these relationships were uniformly harmonious and free of conflict. But by dint of working and living together a solidarity had come into being, despite the deuxième bureau's control of the camps in the 1950s and 1960s and Lebanese labour regulations that restricted Palestinian refugees from being employed in salaried and professional fields. This solidarity—cemented by ties of intermarriage—was articulated through various discourses. At times it was expressed in the language of class, at other times as revolutionary pan-Arabism, and at other times in the language of kinship.

However, at the same time as these ties between the inhabitants of Burj el-Barajneh camp and its Lebanese neighbours appeared to be gaining strength, decisions made by the PLO's leadership and the actions of its cadre were alienating their Lebanese allies—particularly the Shi'a in the south, who bore the brunt of Israeli retaliatory strikes—as has been documented by Augustus Norton in his work on the political mobilization of the Lebanese Shi'a (Norton, 1987). This growing estrangement culminated in the War of the Camps when Amal militia fighters from the areas around Burj al-Barajneh camp joined those from the Bek'ā and the south to besiege the camp at the behest of the Syrian government in order to flush out supporters of Yasir Arafat. The experience of being denied food, water, and medical supplies for periods as long as several months, in addition to being shot at and shelled by co-workers, friends, and neighbours was experienced and remembered as a betrayal.

Placed in this context, perhaps it is not surprising that even those who had remained politically active after the official withdrawal of the PLO from Lebanon in 1982 were very ambivalent of their assessment of that period, and of their political engagement. If, as with Maurice Halbwachs, memory is viewed as the socially produced glue that binds generations to a sense of identity and self (Halbwachs, 1992), then it is to accounts of everyday social relationships that we must turn in order to understand how individual and collective memories shape generational experiences of dispossession.

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Chapter 1

Urbanization



Over the last three decades, studies of the spaces housing people seeking refuge from conflict, persecution, economic collapse, and climate change have proliferated. Led by twentieth century theorizations of the exercise of power in modern states (Agamben, 1998; Foucault, 1995, 1991), these analyses of official refugee camps, informal settlements, and detention and processing centers have primarily concentrated on the unequal power relationships between the inhabitants of those spaces and the host nation-states and humanitarian aid organizations administering them (Agier, 2011; Diken & Laustsen, 2005; Fassin, 2012; Feldman, 2018; Hanafi & Long, 2020; Hyndman, 2000; Malkki, 1995; Mortland, 1987; Pandolfi, 2003; Perera, 2002; Perdigon, 2018; Peteet, 2005). Conceptualized in terms of “discipline,” “surveillance,” “containment,” “warehousing,” and “reduction to bare life,” critiques of the unequal power relationships structuring “spaces of dispossession” have focused, on the one hand, on ways in which host nation-states and humanitarian aid organizations exercise power within these spaces, and on the other hand, have raised questions regarding the legitimacy of their exercise of power, given the lack of representation of those subject to it.

Dating the emergence of the refugee camp as a “generalizable technology of power” at the end of the Second World War, anthropologist Liisa Malkki argued that the logic of an “orderly segregation of nationalities” instituted by the Allied forces administering those camps continues to operate in most refugee camps today (Malkki, 2002, p. 352). Similarly, with regards to the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, Sari Hanafi and Taylor Long have claimed: “There is no more telling marker of the refugee’s status as *homo sacer* than the unregulated, urban, and prison-like conditions of his or her life in a camp” (Hanafi & Long, 2010, p. 135).

These studies have made important contributions to highlighting the oppressive and exploitative conditions that prevail in “humanitarian spaces.” However, in representing refugee camps as completely contained and isolated spaces inhabited by a homogenous social group—“refugees”—these studies fail to examine the ways in which the unequal social relationships that emerge within such spaces connect them

to their environs, despite the containment and dispossession of their inhabitants. Shifting over time in response to local and global political-economic changes, these social relationships facilitate the movement of people as well as the material and immaterial products of their labour in and out of spaces formally deemed closed.

1.1 Marginalization Theory and Studies of Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon

The refugee camps that emerged in Lebanon to accommodate Palestinians expelled from the Galilee during the establishment of the nation-state of Israel in 1948—referred to as the *nakba* (the Catastrophe) in Arabic—are among the oldest refugee camps in the world today. Scholarly interest in these camps accompanied the Palestinian Liberation Organization's (PLO) formal establishment of its base of operations in Lebanon in 1969 (Franjeh, 1972; Peteet, 1991; Sayigh, 1978, 1979; Sirhan, 1975; Turki, 1974). Reflecting the preoccupations of marginalization theory, developed in the 1960s in response to rural-urban migration in Latin America (Munck, 2017; Perlman, 1975), early scholarship on Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon was primarily concerned with the question of whether Palestinian camp refugees possessed a modern, proletarian consciousness and whether anti-colonial national liberation required such a consciousness.

Social relationships within the refugee camps were characterized as repositories of *fellah* culture, deemed premodern. For a number of scholars, this perceived retention of tradition attested to the strength of the refugees' sense of national identity and attachment to the lands from which they had been dispossessed (Sayigh, 1978, 1979; Sirhan, 1975; Turki, 1974). Posited as originating from a shared experience of dispossession, this national solidarity was claimed to traverse class, sectarian, and regional divisions. For other scholars, these social relationships were a "legacy of a semi-tribal past" that had survived because the refugees had not been "integrated into any economic productive process and so know nothing of the economic exploitation to which a normal proletariat is subjected, and against which it ultimately rebels with the aim of establishing a new system of social relationships" (Franjeh, 1972, p. 53).

Whether they viewed the social relationships in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon in a positive or negative light, both positions concurred in viewing them as premodern survivals. This paralleled marginalization theory's assumptions regarding the retention of "traditional" social relationships in the informal urban settlements established by rural migrants to Latin American cities. Marginalization theory also assumed that these social relationships hindered rural migrants' integration into the capitalist political economies of Latin American cities (Perlman, 1975). In a similar vein, early studies of Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon claimed that the retention of a premodern *fellah* culture, perceived among the camp refugees, signified these refugees' resistance to their dispossession by the Israeli state, as well

as to host Arab states' restrictions on their political mobilization (Sayigh, 1978, 1979; Sirhan, 1975). A consequence of this assertion of the retention of tradition was a tendency to view Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon as isolated from the political economies of their environs and disconnected from the global capitalist economy, despite evidence to the contrary.

Scholarly and activist preoccupation with the legitimization of Palestinian national solidarity asserted the perceived retention of kinship ties and traditional practices as evidence, not only of the camp refugees' continued resistance (*ṣumūd*) to the *Nakba*, but also as proof of the authenticity and depth of their nationalism (Sayigh, 1979; Sirhan, 1975). However, a consequence of this assertion of the retention of tradition was to obscure the relationships of unequal exchange that emerged within Palestinian inhabitants of the camps and between camps and their Lebanese environs. These social relationships enabled the circumvention of the Lebanese state's legal prohibitions on Palestinian employment and property ownership, and facilitated the refugees' integration into local and global capitalist political economies, albeit highly unevenly and on disadvantageous terms.

Assertions such as, "Just as the loss of landed property in 1948 reduced all peasant Palestinians to an equality of non-ownership, so it reduced them all collectively to an equality of non-respect" (Sayigh, 1978, p. 104) facilitated representations of camp refugees as comprising a homogenous and uniformly disempowered "autochthonous" community. This representation has become hegemonic among scholars, political activists, and camp refugees (Latif, 2011). The assumption that Palestinian camp refugee communities drew their strength from the retention of "traditional" kinship ties has been maintained in more recent scholarship, which has argued that camp refugees' increased impoverishment since the PLO's formal withdrawal from Lebanon in 1982 has strained these ties to the breaking point (Allan, 2013).

1.2 Pre-Nakba Local and Regional Political Economies

This assumption of the retention of "traditional" social relationships and practices is rendered problematic by the history of the region from which Palestinian camp refugees were displaced, as well as by the history of the regions to which they were displaced. The villages of the Galilee, from which the first generation of Palestinian refugees were expelled, as well as the villages on the outskirts of Beirut, where the refugee camp of Burj al-Barajneh came to be, had already been part of the world economy since Ottoman times. Misrepresented as isolated, backward, and unchanging in developmentalist imaginaries—whether nationalist, imperialist, or leftist—these regions had long been transformed by their integration into the world economy through commodity production, landlessness, share cropping, and regional, as well as rural-urban migration (Amel, 2020; Gilsenan, 1984; Kabha & Karlinsky, 2021; Khalaf, 1997; Khuri, 1969; Nadan, 2006; Owen, 1981, 1988; Traboulsi, 2007). Several first-generation refugees I interviewed in Burj al-Barajneh camp during 2005–2006, emphasized the extent to which their villages in Palestine were

integrated into regional and global political economies through production for export and the consumption of imports.

Imm Mohammad: ...All our villages are nice, but my village is beautiful because it has a lot of water. It has four springs...All the villages had developed, but not as much as nowadays. There wasn't electricity, TV, computers. Only radio, and he who had a radio was happy. There were four springs in our village, and it was surrounded by orchards. It was a productive area, because we would export produce to the cities like 'Akkā and Haifa by car. This car was for the whole village. They used to export tomatoes and cucumbers. There was everything. There were olive trees. We didn't have citrus fruit trees, but we were very happy. If someone in the village died, the whole village would mourn. At Eid, we would all celebrate together. If there was a wedding, everyone would participate. Everyone would cook... They used to make sweets from dough and fry them...We only used olive oil. We didn't know sunflower oil.

Nadia: Did you make your own olive oil?

Imm Mohammad: Yes. Each one had olive trees. They would gather the olives and press them. Also, carob for treacle. We would prepare our supplies for the winter. We hadn't shops like nowadays. There were shops, but not for these things.

Imm Mohammad's recollections portray a rural community that was "modern" in being part of a larger, capitalist economy. The villagers produced for monetary exchange in urban markets and possessed enough surplus to warrant the existence of village shops where certain imported commodities could be purchased. Moreover, some households had accumulated enough capital to be able to purchase radios, as well as a car which was shared in the marketing of the village's produce. The use to which these commodities were put—rural-urban transportation and access to regional news and cultural forms—contributed to the social and cultural capital of their owners by being of benefit to members of the village community.

The reference to citrus trees must be understood in terms of the importance of citrus exports to the political economy of the British Mandate (1920–1948), as well as their association with Zionist immigration and land purchases which began during Ottoman rule in the late nineteenth century (Kabha & Karlinsky, 2021; Nadan, 2006). By Imm Mohammad's account, even though her village did not have citrus fruit plantations, it had modernized. At the same time, Imm Mohammad's account also emphasizes the persistence of cooperative social relationships, along with the taste for consuming the products of the community's own social labour associated with "traditional" communities.

The following account by another first-generation refugee also emphasizes markers of "modernization" and "rural development," such as the cultivation of new cash crops and the provision of formal education to boys and girls.

Ustadh Yusuf: I don't know exactly when, but I think it was the British who started tobacco cultivation. The soil was very fertile for this kind of crop. The farmers in our village who were growing tobacco started to go to other villages to teach them how to grow tobacco... They were even going to Lebanon and the West Bank to train people how to grow tobacco, or they were taking some land and cultivating tobacco on it...Tarshiha is a developed village. More than other villages. It had agriculture and industry. Agriculture needs industry, and industry needs education. Also, agriculture needs transportation to the city. We needed to bring the harvest to the city, because the traders weren't coming to the rural villages. We had to bring our goods to them. This is development. Also, with regards to education, in

1901, we had the first school in our village. It was for boys. Then they established a school for girls in 1937. The school for the girls was only for the primary years. For the boys it went up to secondary school...Also there were vocational lessons in craftsmanship and agriculture. The school owned agricultural lands, so we had theoretical and practical lessons.

Ustadh Yusuf's account highlights the cash-crop cultivation of tobacco, regional labour migration, the integration of local agricultural production with processing and manufacturing, and the provision of formal education as indicative of Tarshiha's incorporation into a larger, "modern" political economy. The existence of a school that provided elementary and vocational education, as well as the provision of formal education to boys and girls, is all the more significant given its paucity during the Ottoman and the Mandate periods, particularly outside major urban centres (Regan, 2022).

However 'historians' analyses of conditions in rural Palestine during the Mandate era contradict these accounts of rural harmony and prosperity (Bernstein, 1996; Kabha & Karlinsky, 2021; Khalaf, 1997; Nadan, 2006; Owen, 1988). The uneven consequences of the integration of the Galilee into the world capitalist economy during Ottoman rule were further exacerbated during the Mandate, as Zionist efforts to create a Jewish homeland in the territory of Mandate Palestine gave rise to a political economy bifurcated between Jews and Arabs under British tutelage. Committing itself simultaneously to the establishment of a Jewish national homeland, as well as to "safeguarding the civil and religious rights of all the inhabitants of Palestine, irrespective of race and religion,"¹ British administrators implemented policies aimed at rationalizing the *fellahin* and their institutions. British and Zionist discourses concurred in viewing the *fellahin* as conservative, irrational, and unable to make economic judgements (Nadan, 2006). To support their views, they pointed to improvements made in the Jewish agricultural sector that were not being made in the Arab sector—due to a lack of capital. The historical record indicates that the overall impact of British land reforms was not the improvement of Arab lands, but increased land transfer from Arabs to Jews (Nadan, 2006). In addition, Zionist policies of replacing Arab labour with Jewish labour that was paid higher wages, as well as the political pressure brought on Mandate authorities to promote Jewish economic development, resulted in a segmented labour market that further exacerbated the impoverishment of the *fellahin* (Bernstein, 1996; Khalaf, 1997).

How then should the above accounts of first-generation camp refugees be interpreted? Imm Mohammad spoke of her village, whereas Ustadh Yusuf spoke of his town itself located near Imm Mohammad's village. Treating their accounts as nostalgic misremembrance precludes consideration of the extent to which the impact of incorporation into a wider political economy may be very uneven, not only within the same village or town, but also within a family. Furthermore, it precludes consideration of the extent to which access to even a small plot of land cultivated through household labour may have mitigated the precarity of seasonal and

¹Article 2 of the Palestine Mandate. Accessed from the United Nations Archives at Geneva on March 25, 2022. <https://archives.ungeneva.org/mandat-pour-la-palestine>.

part-time wage labour in a segmented labour market. This is evident from the following account of another first-generation camp refugee of her experiences immediately after she and her family were forced to flee their village in 1948.

Imm Khalil: I was older than this girl, but taller than her. Our life was difficult. They would spread the wheat, and we would clean it. We could keep some of the wheat. Flour was expensive. My mother, brother and sister were paid 2 liras for their work. 1 kilo of wheat cost 1 lira, and we were nine people when we fled Palestine. Life was very difficult...Some people's financial status was better. Before we fled, my father had bought a rifle for my brother for 150 liras. He had also bought a plot of land for 200 or 250 liras. So, he didn't have much cash. Only 20 or 30 liras. That wasn't enough for anything, and we were nine people. We had goats. About 40 or 50 goats. He started to sell them one by one. We had three donkeys. He sold two of them. The cows were still in Palestine. If a woman had a gold bracelet, she would sell it to buy food. Life was difficult. Some people had a little money. They spent it all. Then, my father started to work. In Qana, he started to work in the orchards again, and he became well known. He started to earn money, and things got better. We stayed in Qana from 1948 till the end of 1954. In December we came to the camp.

Imm Khalil's account highlights the loss not only of work, but also of capital that occurs when rural communities are forcibly displaced, losses that are not easily recoupable for those who do not possess the transferable economic and social capital that would enable them to gain access to cultivatable land or employment in the place to which they have been displaced. These losses bring about changes in social relationships, which in turn have consequences for social organization and the articulation of identity. Imm Khalil's account also draws attention to the crucial role played by women and children's labour in sustaining low-income refugee households through precarious work. Lastly, the account is significant for highlighting the trajectory taken by many refugees, via South Lebanon, to what became Burj al-Barajneh refugee camp in the rural outskirts of Beirut.

1.3 Refugee Agency and Sectarian Capitalism

An exclusive focus on state institutions and humanitarian aid organizations' warehousing of refugees through techniques of "encampment" and "humanitarian government" may forestall a consideration of refugee agency in bringing refugee camps into being, as well as a consideration of the political economic factors that shape—but do not fully determine—that agency. This is brought out in the following account of a second-generation refugee of how Burj al-Barajneh camp came into existence.

Sameera: They didn't come straight to Lebanon. They moved from village to village until they reached Lebanon. First, they stayed in Qana, as it has olive trees, and because they used to trade. Qana is close to Palestine, and they thought that when the war ended, they would return. My grandmother said that they weren't expecting the war to last more than a month. My grandfather brought them to the border and then returned. On the way back, he was killed, because they permitted people to leave, but they killed the people who tried to return. The rest of them stayed in Qana. Then the authorities came and brought buses. They told them, "We will distribute you in different areas." All of them decided to go to Majdal Anjar. They gave them tents in Majdal Anjar, and they stayed there. My mother's family

said, “We don’t want to go to Lebanon. We want to go to Syria” ... They divided into two groups. My grandmother, her brother, and her sister stayed in Lebanon. The rest of her family went to Aleppo. It seems they went to different places in order to see which would be the best place for them to stay in. Then the authorities stopped letting them go wherever they wanted to go, and each person had to stay where they were. The authorities told them to register their names according to where they were. My father knew people from the X family who were from Burj al-Barajneh...They told him to come to Beirut because it was warmer. So, because they knew that Lebanese family, they came to Beirut. But at that time, there was no camp in Burj al-Barajneh. When one person takes a decision, others follow him. That is what the people of Tarshiha do. So, they rented buses to bring them to the Burj al-Barajneh area. In those days, it was like a small forest. There were trees, and it was deserted. People hadn’t money because most of them had spent the money that they had. Then the authorities decided to establish camps in Beirut. They rented this land, and gave people tents. Each family took a tent and lived in it, to prove that they didn’t want to stay...

Sameera’s account highlights the many different considerations that played a role in impoverished Palestinian refugees coming to Burj al-Barajneh camp, not least of which was securing a livelihood that could sustain the extended family. In this case, it necessitated a splitting up of the family, as well as multiple migrations, none of which fit the forced/voluntary dichotomy that came to be institutionalized in the post WWII era. Sameera’s account also makes clear that the refugees’ actions were constrained by Jewish paramilitary forces’ killing of those who tried to return, as well as by Lebanese authorities’ attempts to regulate refugee flows. Research I conducted in 2007 in the archives of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), who were working with the Lebanese Red Cross in providing humanitarian aid to Palestinian refugees during this period, suggested that efforts to regulate refugee mobility may, in part, have been motivated by logistical considerations regarding the provision of food, tents, and other humanitarian supplies.

At the same time, Sameera’s account makes clear that, while the authorities’ regulatory attempts structured refugee mobility, they did not solely determine it. The refugees’ possession—and dispossession—of different amounts and forms of capital also played an important role in shaping mobility by structuring access to means of livelihood. Lastly, Sameera’s account highlights the central role played by pre-existing, cross-border ties of trade, work, friendship, and intermarriage between the villages and towns of the Galilee, South Lebanon, and Beirut in shaping many of the political economic processes that resulted in the social production of Burj al-Barajneh refugee camp.

These processes were also shaped by the newly independent Lebanese state’s domestic and foreign policy considerations, as well as by the political economy of Beirut and its environs. Scholarship on the regions that were administratively brought together under the French Mandate for Lebanon (1920–1945) indicates that the integration of these regions into the world economy during the Ottoman period led to the emergence of local political economies in which sectarian membership came to play an important role in accessing opportunities for wage labour, as well as capital flows (Amel, 2020; Makdisi, 1996; Owen, 1981; Traboulsi, 2007). During the Mandate period, sectarian membership was formalized as the official basis for

political participation (Amel, 2020; Traboulsi, 2007). In 1942, when Bishara al-Khoury and Riad al-Sulh met in Cairo under the patronage of the Egyptian prime minister Mustafa Nahhas Pasha to discuss the form Lebanon's government would take after independence from Mandate rule, they met as representatives of the elites of their respective sects.

Referred to as the National Pact, the power sharing agreement they reached was never written down, but known from a ministerial declaration made by Riad al-Sulh on October 7, 1943 (Traboulsi, 2007, p. 110). By the terms of this pact, the Christian elite gave up French protection for the Christian inhabitants of the region in exchange for a constitutionally guaranteed political primacy. In return, the Muslim elite gave up amalgamation of the regions into Syria in exchange for a (Maronite) Christian-(Sunni) Muslim partnership in running the country. The independent Lebanese republic would be run on the basis of *laissez-faire*, understood as minimal state regulation of the economy. "Public" services such as education and healthcare would continue to be provided primarily by each sect's charitable institutions to its own members. In other words, sectarian belonging came to be institutionalized, not only as the basis of political participation, but also as the means by which social services could be accessed within the context of a capitalist political economy that was well incorporated into the global economy.

The influx in 1948 of Palestinian refugees was deemed a threat to the new nation-state's sectarian balance of power and a burden on its economy (Sayigh, 1997; Vernant, 1953). This was in contrast to the settlement and naturalization of Armenian refugees during the French Mandate, a decision supported by many Christian political leaders and opposed by many of their Muslim counterparts (Traboulsi, 2007). At the same time, the regional boycott of the newly established state of Israel greatly benefited Lebanon's service sector. Beirut took over Haifa's role as a major port for the Arab hinterland and as an important hub of intercontinental communications. Beirut also received a huge inflow of Palestinian capital, along with numbers of wealthy and middle-class Palestinian refugees, who were either naturalized in Lebanon or migrated to other nation-states (Nasr, 1978; Smith, 1986a; Traboulsi, 2007). However, it is the impoverished first generation and their stateless descendants who have come to be the representation of Palestinians in Lebanon.

In being forcibly displaced to Lebanon, Palestinians were dispossessed to yet another segmented labour market, although one whose faultlines were articulated in terms of gender, citizenship, and sect rather than in terms of gender and race. That, in turn, had consequences for the forms taken by Palestinian political mobilization in Lebanon. The following extract from a life history interview conducted with a second-generation couple in 2006 highlights the melding of statelessness and class in articulations of Palestinian national identity in Lebanon.

Nadia: Do you think that there is a difference between the Palestinians who live in the camp, and the Palestinians who live outside the camp? In Haret Hreik, or Hamra?

Hala: Maybe, because they didn't live in war as the Palestinians in the camp did. In the past, when economic conditions were better, many people didn't live in the camps. When they fled Palestine, they had money. They bought houses outside the camp and lived there.

They didn't suffer like the people in the camp. Those who came to live in the camp, hadn't money to live outside the camp. So, they stayed in the camp, and lived in it.

Nadia: You don't think they treat you the way the Lebanese treat you?

Mahmood: No, because they always feel that they are Palestinians. They don't deny who they are.

Hala: We feel more pity for them, because they didn't become strong like the Palestinians in the camp. Those who lived in the camps have been through many things. Those who lived outside the camp were not accepted by the Lebanese. They became lost, and live in between. They can't be like the Palestinians in the camp. Also, they can't be Lebanese. So, they were lost in between.

Hala and Mahmood's answers to my questions highlight a conflicted view of class differences with regards to Palestinian nationalist mobilization and identity. As the chauffeur of a wealthy Palestinian family, Mahmood interacted on a daily basis with his well-to-do compatriots as well as with their Lebanese counterparts. These unequal exchanges included acts of charity aimed at benefiting—and potentially obligating—his family. Over the decades, life in the refugee camps in Lebanon has come to signify not only poverty, violence, and suffering, but also autochthony in terms of Palestinian national identity in Lebanon. The phrasing of Hala's response—"We feel more pity for them"—highlights the tensions inherent in the status of the "autochthon." As the authentic locus of identity and belonging, autochthony empowers; while at the same time its associations with poverty and tradition disempower (Latif, 2011). At the same time, those whose economic and social capital enabled them to avoid the privations of the camp are not only perceived as unassimilated; they are also perceived as having lost a sense of belonging and solidarity with their poorer compatriots. Hence, in Hala's words, they are more pitiable than those they seek to pity, patronize, mobilize, as well as simultaneously distance themselves from.

In the milieu of Lebanon's sectarian political economy, living in the refugee camps as a marker of class and autochthony also came to be associated with sect. In 2003, when I first began fieldwork in Burj al-Barajneh camp, many second and third generation refugees responded to my questions about Dbayeh camp, located in the eastern suburbs of Beirut, with surprise that any Palestinian Christians still lived in a camp and had not been naturalized. The heightening overtime of these intersecting faultlines is highlighted by the following first-generational account of the early years of Burj al-Barajneh camp.

Haj Yusuf: When the Palestinians fled Palestine, and came to Lebanon, there were existing ties with people from the Burj al-Barajneh area, because those people used to come to Palestine to trade. So, some Palestinians came to the village of Burj al-Barajneh and lived in some buildings. Now, when the Red Cross came, and then UNRWA, some families were living in the mosques. So, they brought tents, and those people moved from the mosques to the tents. Then people sheltering at other villages heard that there are tents in the Burj al-Barajneh area, so they started to come here. There was a man from Tarshiha named X. UNRWA hired him to run the camp's affairs. They started to give the new people tents. That is how the camp started, and it became a big camp and expanded. But this land doesn't belong to the state, or to the Palestinians. It belongs to many different people. UNRWA rented it from its owners on a 99-year lease. Then the people here started to work, because this area is close to the city of Beirut. There are factories, construction. Construction work is the most important.

Nadia: And the airport?

Haj Yusuf: They didn't work at the airport, because it was forbidden. Also, it wasn't allowed for Palestinians to work at charitable foundations, or at any public organizations. After a while, the Christians began to give the Palestinian Christians nationality, while not allowing Muslims to take it. Here at Burj al-Barajneh, we had good relations with our neighbors. It was good with the Christians and the Shi'a Muslims. We were living in peace with all our neighbors. They were working in Burj al-Barajneh and Haret Hreik, and no one looked aggressively at us...

Haj Yusuf's account highlights the role played by social capital in the emergence of Burj al-Barajneh camp. This social capital, based on pre-existing socioeconomic ties between a notable family of Tarshiha and a notable family of Burj al-Barajneh, initially brought refugees from Tarshiha to seek refuge and work in Burj al-Barajneh. When the Red Cross began to provide humanitarian assistance in the form of tents and food rations, more refugee families from villages neighbouring Tarshiha began to arrive from the villages and towns in South Lebanon and the Biqā^c, where they had previously been sheltering. More importantly, the orchards in Burj al-Barajneh and its neighbouring villages, as well as the area's proximity to Beirut provided access to much needed work. The accounts of first-generation refugees collected during interviews in 2005–2006, as well as my research in the archives of the IFRC in 2007, and the library of the American University of Beirut (AUB) in 2003–2004, confirmed that neither the basic humanitarian aid provided by the Lebanese Red Cross, nor the more comprehensive services provided by UNRWA were ever on their own sufficient in meeting the needs of the refugees. In a first-generation refugee's words: "Everyone worked, man, woman, boy, girl, to be able to live."

However, as Haj Yusuf's account makes evident, the refugees were constrained in the work they could do, both by the Lebanese state's legal prohibitions on Palestinian employment, and by their not possessing the requisite economic and/or social capital to circumvent those prohibitions. Lastly, Haj Yusuf's account highlights an important role that humanitarian aid can play in securing refugee livelihoods. Given the constraints on camp refugee employment in those early years, UNRWA was one of the few avenues of salaried employment, capital accumulation, and social mobility open to some camp refugees.

1.4 The Urbanization of Burj Al-Barajneh Camp

Over the course of the 1950s–1960s, a ring of informal settlements formed on the outskirts of Beirut (Fawaz & Peillen, 2002). Concentrated around industrial sites and punctuated by official Palestinian refugee camps, it was termed the "misery belt" in official and political discourse (Traboulsi, 2007). Lebanese and Syrian rural migrants, as well as Palestinian refugees from more rural camps in Lebanon such as Nahr al-Bared in the north and Rashidieh in the south, migrated to the rapidly sub-urbanizing villages on the outskirts of Beirut in search of work. The *nakba* had had a deleterious impact on the economy of south Lebanon, as Palestine had been an

important market for its exports (Traboulsi, 2007). At the same time, the increasing capitalization of agriculture, monopolized by a small number of notable families, exacerbated landlessness and indebtedness in the rural regions of Lebanon, contributing to mass rural-urban migration in Lebanon (Gilsenan, 1977; Nasr, 1978; Nasr & James, 1985).

Labour migration from what is today the nation-state of Syria to the regions that comprise the contemporary nation-state of Lebanon, predated the League of Nations' establishment of the French Mandate in the region (1923–1946). During the 1960s, this migration was propelled by the perception of growth in Lebanon's economy, as well as by post-independence land reform in Syria (Chalcraft, 2009). Ba'thist redistribution of land had the consequence of spurring labour migration with the goal of securing capital for tools, machinery, seed stock, and more land. By bringing about the shared inhabitation of informal urban settlements, these migrations facilitated the formation of social, political, and economic ties between impoverished Palestinian refugees and their Lebanese and Syrian class counterparts—ties that unraveled in the violence of the Lebanese civil war (1975–1991) (Latif, 2012).

Over time, the urbanization of Palestinian refugee camps on the outskirts of Beirut resulted in the emergence of urban-rural distinctions between the inhabitants of the camps near Beirut, and the inhabitants of camps located in other parts of Lebanon considered “rural.” This is brought out in the following extract from a second-generation woman refugee conducted in 2006.

Nadia: Do you think there is a difference between the camps?

Soha: Certainly, there is a difference, a big difference. For example, the camps in Beirut are influenced by the city of Beirut. They are different in their way of thinking, dressing, living. Also, it's different in Shatila. In Nahr al-Bared they think we are different from them. We don't behave like them. They still have their old way of thinking. Here, we deal as the city people. So, there is a difference between Ein al-Hilweh and Rashidieh. Each camp differs from the other camps. They aren't similar. The similarity is only in the language, but in thinking we are different. Also, the environment has an effect on us...where we are living, the area we are living in, and the position of the camp in this area...When we used to go to Rashidieh, they used to say, “The civilized people of Beirut have come.” We would be wearing trousers and tee shirts. In the past it was *'ayb* (shameful) to wear trousers. They didn't have these things. They used to wear trousers, and above it a skirt and blouse. So, it was different...

Soha's answer suggests an association of urbanity not only with modernity, but also with distinctions of taste delineated through patterns of consumption (Bourdieu, 2010). *Ta'āmal*, the word translated above as “deal,” also connotes trade and business dealings, indicating political economic practices considered antithetical to the cooperative social relations of production presumed as predominating in areas considered rural/traditional. Soha's answer is also significant in highlighting the ways in which long-term refugee camps and the communities that inhabit them are differently shaped by the local geographies and political economies of the various regions deemed as constituting a single host nation-state. Hence, scholarship that extrapolates a homogenous refugee experience based on research in a particular camp may be undermined by methodological nationalism in its very attempts to advocate on behalf of those researched.

In addition to local and regional political economic shifts accompanied by waves of rural-urban migration, the urbanization of Burj al-Barajneh camp during this period was shaped, on the one hand, by the Lebanese state's prohibition on Palestinian camp refugees' construction of durable structures and, on the other hand, by the refugees themselves rejecting what they perceived as international attempts to resettle them (Peteet, 2005; Sayigh, 1979; Turki, 1974). This is highlighted by the following quote from an interview with a first-generation camp refugee in 2006:

Abu Mustafa: Yes, it was forbidden to build. If a woman spilt water outside her house, they would fine us. The paths were sandy. If anyone tried to pave them, they would be fined too. They were very strict with us. It was forbidden to have cement ceilings. Only zinco was allowed.

Nadia: But why didn't UNRWA help? I know that in Jordan, they built cement houses and good roads. Why didn't they do the same here?

Abu Mustafa: It was up to the people if they wanted to have good houses or not. Here, they were working, so they started to build. But we must not accept new homes because nothing is like our homeland... My father used to say, it's nice to have a house and a garden in front of it, because you need a place to live. But, one day we will return to our land. But we didn't return, and we didn't build nice houses. All the houses were built by people with their own money, not by UNRWA.

During the presidency of Fu'ad Shihab (1958–1964), the Palestinian camps in Lebanon were placed under the authority of the Lebanese military intelligence services—the Deuxième Bureau—in order to thwart refugee and labour-based political mobilization, articulated in the discourse of Arab nationalism (Denoeux, 1993; Johnson, 1986; Traboulsi, 2007). The Bureau also recruited informants in the camp. First and second-generation camp refugees recounted this as a period of harassment and violent repression at the hands of the Deuxième Bureau.

Abu Mustafa's response to my question about UNRWA assistance to refugee construction of housing is significant for a number of reasons. It emphasizes the centrality of the refugees' own endeavours in constructing durable structures, hence problematizing assumptions not only regarding refugee dependency, but also regarding the power that such dependency is believed to generate for humanitarian aid organizations. Abu Mustafa's response also indicates the extent to which these endeavours to improve the material conditions of their lives, were qualified by the camp refugees' rejection of *tawfīn* (naturalization) and desire to return.

1.5 Emergence of an Informal Property Market

The Lebanese state's prohibitions on Palestinian property ownership and construction within the refugee camps notwithstanding, an informal property market emerged in response to Beirut's growth after the *Nakba* and the migration of Palestinian refugees from rural camps in Lebanon, as well as Lebanese and Syrian rural-urban migration to Beirut. This is indicated in the following excerpt from an interview with a second-generation male refugee in 2006.

Nadia: Why did your family decide to come to this camp?

Ayad: When people are displaced from their homes, they start to search for each other. You search for those who are closest to you. You search for your family, your neighbours, your friends. You search for the people you know. The camp itself became villages because there (in Palestine) they were living in villages. Now they were living in a camp. There are quarters in the camp. Each quarter belongs to a village. The people in the quarter are from the same family and the same village sometimes. Our family wasn't big so that's why they didn't have a quarter carrying their name. The inhabitants of our village stayed in Rashidieh, in the south. They are distributed in different quarters...

Nadia: If the majority of your village are in Rashidieh, why did some people come here (to Burj al-Barajneh)? Because of work?

Ayad: I don't know for certain, but definitely for work. My father moved to many places. He didn't settle in one place. First, they went to Syria. Then they moved to Maslakh in Beirut. But it was destroyed during the wars. Then they lived in Ein al-Hilweh. Then they came here (Burj al-Barajneh camp). My father settled here only in the sixties. He moved from one house to another and from one area to another. Also, he used to travel.

Nadia: What was his work?

Ayad: He worked in construction.

Nadia: Was that also his work in Palestine?

Ayad: No, he was young when he left Palestine, and they had land there.

Ayad's answers to my questions problematize the assumption that all refugee camps operate as carceral spaces where refugees are contained and isolated. This, in turn, underscores the importance of researching the micro-histories of specific refugee camps in order to reach a better understanding of the shifting power dynamics that constitute them, rather than presenting the snapshot of a particular moment in time as an unchanging universal.

Ayad's account also problematize claims that the emergence of the village *ḥayy* (quarter within a city) within Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon attests to the centrality of kinship to a people deemed "traditional" (Allan, 2013; Sayigh, 1978, 1979), as well as analyses which read this emergence solely in terms of assertions of nationalism (Khalili, 2007). His account suggests that village *āḥyāʾ* (plural of *ḥayy*/quarters) emerged within the camp in response to the exigencies of forced displacement, rather than as a deliberate attempt to retain tradition in order to assert resistance to the *nakba*.

Over the decades, changes in the social space of the *āḥyāʾ*, and the names by which they are referred to by camp inhabitants have accompanied the out and in migration of Palestinian, Lebanese, and Syrian refugees and migrant workers. These multiple migrations do not neatly fit into the dichotomy of forced (political)/voluntary (economic) institutionalized in the post-World War Two era. Lastly, Ayad's account highlights the significance of the construction sector in providing a source of employment for refugee and migrant workers deemed "low skill" in terms of the economic and social capital they possess. This designation, in turn, is used to justify the precarity of work conditions and of worker remuneration.

The accumulation of sufficient economic and social capital that would enable camp refugees to improve the material conditions of their lives required the labour of all members of the household. At the same time, capital accumulation was uneven not only within the same village *ḥayy*, but also within the same family. This

accumulation, as well as its unevenness, was facilitated by the emergence of new social relationships between the camp refugees and the inhabitants of their environs—Lebanese, as well as those middle-class and wealthy Palestinians who were not in need of humanitarian aid. Characterized by unequal exchange, these new social relationships enabled camp refugees' circumvention of the Lebanese state's legal restrictions on their employment and their attempts to improve their living conditions. This is brought out in the following excerpt from the life history of a first-generation woman refugee.

Hajje Karima: Here, in the beginning, there were tents. Then they brought zinco boards to make walls. The walls and the ceiling were from zinco, because the tents would fly away during storms... Sometimes, they would leak. There was flooding. Also, snow. So UNRWA gave people zinco boards to build houses. Like the houses in Bir Hasan and the houses of the *nawar* (Dom people). But it wasn't allowed to build with stone.

Nadia: I heard this from other people too. That everything was forbidden, and that the gendarmerie was very harsh.

Hajje Karima: It was forbidden to push a nail into the wall. They would fine you.... The gendarmerie would patrol the camp to stop people from building. Some people bribed them to be able to build...

Nadia: What about bathrooms?

Hajje Karima: There were communal latrines.

Nadia: Really?

Hajje Karima: Yes. My father made a toilet for us in our home, but they fined him. They fined him 52 LL. It was a very large amount. When he built the toilet, he brought a barrel and put it in the ground. Many people used to visit us, and he was embarrassed to tell them to use the communal latrine. There were informants in the camp. They reported him. The gendarmerie came to check. They told him that he had to destroy it. Because he had *wāṣṭa* (social capital accrued from personal ties) and a good reputation, they wrote down that he had put his goods on the pavement. They did not write down that he had built a toilet. But they kept changing the amount of the fine, till they decided that he had to pay 52 LL. My father gave my brother the money and told him to go to the police station to pay it and bring back a receipt. That was a month before my father died...

Hajje Karima's account highlights the precarious living conditions within Burj al-Barajneh camp at the time. Camp refugee households had been able to construct one to two room shelters from corrugated iron and scrap wood. However, the construction of more durable structures was strictly prohibited, as were private toilets. Unequal relations of exchange (bribes and *wāṣṭa*) facilitated the circumvention of state prohibitions. However, as Hajje Karima's account indicates, they also served as a perpetual reminder to the camp refugees of their lack of belonging and, hence, lack of rights. Since collectively, even if not individually, they lacked *da'im*—literally support with architectural connotations—they were fair game. It is important to note that the term *nawar* is used in Arabic as a pejorative term to refer to the Dom, a nomadic and semi-nomadic people, much in the same way as the term "gypsy" is used in English to refer to the Roma and the Sinti.

The removal of Deuxième Bureau control over the refugee camps after the signing of the Cairo Agreement in 1969, was recounted by many first and second-generation refugees as a liberation. Conducted between Yasser Arafat, the head of Fateh, and General Emile Bustani, the commander-in-chief of Lebanon's armed

forces, the agreement was mediated by the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser and served as the official basis for Palestinian-Lebanese relations until its annulment by the Lebanese Parliament in 1987. The agreement placed the camps under the authority of the Fateh led Palestinian Armed Struggle Command (PASC). In addition to guaranteeing Palestinian refugees the rights of residence and employment, it also recognized their right to participate in armed struggle for the liberation of Palestine. Though the agreement did not grant them the right to own property in Lebanon, implementation of this formal prohibition was informally loosened. Given the terms of the agreement, the PLO decided to make Lebanon their primary base of operations after their expulsion from Jordan in 1971.

Referred to by camp refugees as *al-āyām al-thawrā* (The Days of the Revolution), this period in the history of Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon has been extensively presented and analyzed as a period of revolutionary mobilization (Khalili, 2007; Peteet, 1991, 2005; Sayigh, 1979, 1993). However, two decades after the PLO's official withdrawal from Lebanon in 1982, the accounts I was given of this period during fieldwork, across generation and gender, were markedly ambivalent.

Hajje Karima: When the camp took its independence, the Lebanese state couldn't do anything. They couldn't control the camp anymore. The people took their freedom, and they started to build in any way they wanted... In the past it wasn't allowed to have cement ceilings. Only zinco. It was forbidden. So, when the people took their freedom, they built their roofs. It was up to each one's financial capabilities. That is the construction, you see today. Some construction was good, or very good. Other construction wasn't that good.

Nadia: How did it happen that some people have big houses, but others have small ones?

Hajje Karima: It depends on the area they took for their houses in the beginning. Whether the elders were thinking of the future of their sons. Most of them built for their children. They used the space that was between the tents.

Nadia: Was the land registered with UNRWA? For example, this piece of land belongs to this person.

Hajje Karima: No, until now nothing is registered. If UNRWA decided not to pay the rent, each one would have to look after himself. If the Lebanese state wants the land, we cannot do anything. We heard from people that UNRWA has rented this land for 100 years.

Nadia: But how did people decide where they could build? What were the limits of one person's house, and the other person could not build there?

Hajje Karima: I can't speak for this neighbourhood. But in the past, when there was space between houses, people would use this space, or come to an agreement about it. For example, I talk to my neighbour and tell him my house is small. I need to make it bigger. We would give to each other. We don't care for this land, because we left our lands. In those days, people were forgiving. Till we reached the present. Now the houses are very close to each other. If we had known that we would still be here, we would have left some space. You know the area where X lives? In that area you can see big spaces between the houses. They built houses in that area after the (Israeli) invasion (of 1982). We heard that Abu Ammar has bought that area. Also, the Samed area, and the area next to Haifa hospital. They said that Abu Ammar bought it too.

Nadia: But that is only hearsay. It may not be true.

Hajje Karima: I can't say if it's true or not. But now because there is no one to stop us, we can do whatever we want. If we were still controlled by the Lebanese state, we wouldn't be able to hammer a nail. They would fine us....

Nadia: Do you remember the time the gendarmerie withdrew from the camp?

Hajje Karima: At that time, I think it was Franjeh who was the president. The gendarmerie conducted an air raid. We had to leave our houses and the camp. Our home was

shelled. Our kitchen was of zinco. A bullet hit the oil jar, but the oil didn't spill. It was an 80 mm bullet.

Nadia: I didn't know that they shelled the camp before they withdrew.

Hajje Karima: They shelled the camp. At that time there were no weapons in the camp. They wanted to displace us. So, the army shelled us. There were protests. Then Abu Ammar came, and Abdel Nasser demanded that conditions in the camps be improved....

Nadia: Did life get better?

Hajje Karima: No. It became worse. It's true that we took our freedom, but there weren't any rules. Each one ruled himself. If everything is prohibited, the evil person becomes more evil, and the good person remains good. Do you understand what I mean?

Nadia: Yes, I do. But I thought that during *al-āyām al-thaūrā* it was better for people?

Hajje Karima: In some ways it was good. In other ways, it was not. Before the *thaūrā*, the youth cared about their education, and men cared about their work....

As a politically active first-generation refugee with clear memories of the period of Deuxième Bureau control, Hajje Karima's ambivalence was significant. On the one hand, her account underscored the sense of liberation that camp refugees experienced with the removal of Deuxième Bureau control. The phrasing of her answers associated camp refugee agency with being able to enlarge housing to accommodate growing families, as well as with being able to build more durable structures. If this manner of exercising agency appears contradictory in conjunction with mobilizing to return, the perceived contradiction must be evaluated in light of the official and informal measures taken to render Palestinian refugee presence in Lebanon precarious. These measures ranged from official prohibitions on the practice of most skilled professions and the ownership of property, to being paid lower wages and having less job security than their Lebanese counterparts. Similarly, despite recourse to *wāsta* and/or the payment of bribes, camp refugees were often required to demolish the little they had been able to build only after considerable effort. Such instances served as a constant reminder that not being recognized as from there, the Palestinian refugees were not recognized as having any claims on reciprocity, and hence, rights.

In this regard, experiences of discrimination cut across class lines and, over time, helped foster a sense of national solidarity that extended throughout the Palestinian diaspora. At the same time, the consequences of not belonging fell much more heavily on the impoverished and stateless camp refugees than on their middle- and upper-class compatriots, many of whom had acquired naturalization by the 1960s. The latter were constrained in transforming the economic and social capital they had accumulated into political power (Franjeh, 1972; Rouleau & Paul, 1985; Smith, 1986a, 1986b). However, unlike the treatment of camp refugees, these constraints did not take the form of arbitrary arrest, torture, and extrajudicial killings.

Hajje Khadijje's remarks about autonomy—"It's true that we took our freedom, but there weren't any rules."—raises a number of questions about the consequences of the PLO establishing its base of operation in Lebanon for the inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh camp. Her account suggests that one consequence was changes in the social relationships that had emerged since the establishment of the camp and facilitated informal agreement on shared inhabitation of space. Similarly, her remarks about work and education—"Before the *thaūrā*, the youth cared about their education, and men cared about their work"—suggest that participation in the armed

struggle for national liberation may have become a means of accessing salaried employment and accumulating economic and social capital. This is consistent with the accounts I was given by a number of first- and second-generation male refugees who had also been politically active. “It became a job,” was a frequently iterated phrase.

These accounts complicate claims regarding *al-āyām al-thaūrā* made in recent scholarship.

In a work analyzing the emergence of property rights in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, Nadya Hajj has claimed: “Following the signing of the Cairo Accords in 1969, Fatah established sovereignty in the refugee camps and set out to co-opt and control political economic life. In particular, they set up camp committee (CC) offices to negotiate property right claims” (Hajj, 2016, p. 84). This representation of Fatah—the Palestinian political party that received the most financial support from Arab states as well as the Palestinian diaspora in the Gulf—as a predatory state, on the one hand, simplifies the relationship between Palestinian political parties and camp refugees and, on the other hand, contributes to the narrative that characterizes camp refugees as a “traditional” community lacking in modern political consciousness.

The accounts of first and second-generation camp refugees suggest that, similar to the emergence and urbanization of Burj al-Barajneh camp, the interplay of a range of political economic factors shaped camp refugees’ political mobilization during the 1960s–1970s. These included: camp refugees’ past experiences of political organization and struggle against the British Mandate authorities and against Zionism; provision and access to social welfare services and employment opportunities in Lebanon along sectarian lines; attempts on the part of the various Palestinian political parties comprising the PLO to provide a range of social services and employment opportunities to Palestinian camp refugees as well as to their Lebanese class counterparts; along with Palestinian camp refugees’ own attempts to improve the material conditions of their lives. Reducing this complicated and shifting interplay to an encounter between a “traditional community” and a “predatory state” exercising sovereign rule fails to consider hegemony and the political economic circumstances of its emergence in this particular instance.

1.6 The Lebanese Civil War (1975–1991) and Sectarianization of Social Space

Similar to other neighbourhoods and suburbs of Beirut, the space of Burj al-Barajneh camp was transformed by the violence of the Lebanese civil war (1975–1991). In 2003, when I first arrived in Burj al-Barajneh camp to begin fieldwork, there were a number of Syrian *mukhabarāt* (military intelligence) checkpoints at key entrances to the camp. The facades of camp houses were pock-marked by shells, and in a number of areas collapsed structures had still not been removed or rebuilt. I was told

by Palestinian camp inhabitants that this was due in part to a lack of capital and in part to prohibitions on construction. It was unclear whether these prohibitions were issued by the Lebanese state or by the Syrian *mukhabarat*. It was, however, clear that construction beyond the perimeter established over the course of a decade and a half of internecine violence would not be permitted.

After the signing of the Cairo Agreement in 1969, the political parties comprising the PLO established political and military alliances with Lebanese political parties deemed leftist (Sayigh, 1997). A shared commitment to the national liberation of Palestine and Lebanon was fostered through political activism, shared military training, provision of social services, and employment at enterprises established by the PLO. At the same time, the large influx of capital mustered by the various political parties composing the PLO transformed existing unequal relationships of exchange within Lebanon's sectarian political economy, exacerbating pre-existing tensions and conflicts which subsequently exploded into the Lebanese civil war (Denoeux, 1993; Johnson, 1986). The social relationships that had emerged between Palestinian camp refugees and their Lebanese class counterparts through shared inhabitation of Burj al-Barajneh camp and its environs, intermarriage, and political mobilization rapidly unraveled. This is brought out in the following excerpt from the life history of a second-generation, male camp refugee who had been a fighter for the militant wing of one of the Palestinian political parties during this period.

Nadia: How were relations between the inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh and the inhabitants of the camp?

Moeen: Before the war?

Nadia: Yes, before the war.

Moeen: The Lebanese were more than brothers to the Palestinians. They liked them a lot. I don't know what happened. Maybe it's politics. They still like us, but not as much as before. Before they had more interests in common with us. They joined our political parties. When the *thawrā* withdrew from Lebanon, most companies were bankrupted. If you spoke to the Lebanese who were ruined by the war, they would tell you that their lives were better in the past.

Nadia: Were there Lebanese working at Samed?

Moeen: Yes. There were many institutions. The Samed stone factory. Lebanese and Palestinians were working at these institutions. There was no difference.

Nadia: Even now many Lebanese come to Haifa hospital for treatment.

Moeen: Yes, many Lebanese come. We were very close to the Lebanese. But the war with the Shi'a affected our relations with them. They didn't fight us because they hate the Palestinians. They fought us for political reasons.

Nadia: How?

Moeen: The Syrians couldn't control the country anymore. It was the Palestinians who were controlling this country. But the Syrians' interests were here. They created a split between the Lebanese and the Palestinians, so that they could come as a deterrent force. They came and they did whatever they wanted. Till now they are still doing what they want.

Nadia: But, some of the Amal fighters had friends from the camp?

Moeen: They had friends. My best friend was shooting at the camp...I saw him on television.

Nadia: How? How could your friend or neighbour do this to you?

Moeen: I saw my friend shooting at the camp and cursing the Palestinians, so I recorded it on video tape. When the war ended, my friend sent word to me that he wanted to see me.

Nadia: Why did he want to see you?

Moeen: Because he was worried about me.

Nadia: After he shot at you, he was worried about you?

Moeen: The one who shot at us was my friend's brother. But because he was the eldest, he should have stopped them. He should have said to his brother, "This is my friend. We grew up together." So, I said to him, "Do you love me?" He said yes. I said to him, "You were worried about me, and you waited until the war was over to see me?" He said yes. So, I said to him, "Watch this tape." His two brothers were shooting and swearing at us. I said to him, "These are your brothers. You pushed them to do this."

Nadia: What did he say?

Moeen: He started to cry. His brother died during the war. He was killed by someone from the camp. The one who was shooting at us was killed. There were some people who liked us. Others did not. Till now it is the same. He who was hurt by the war, if he lost a member of his family, many of them till now hate the Palestinians. A while ago when I was in a shared taxi, a man said, "Today the Syrians are leaving. Tomorrow the Palestinians will leave..."

Moeen's answers to my importune questions refer to the period of fighting termed the War of the Camps (1985–1987) by Palestinian camp refugees in Lebanon. It consisted of a series of sieges varying in duration from one to 6 months, carried out by members of the Shi'a Amal militia at the behest of the Syrian government. During this period food and medical supplies were formally prohibited from entering the camps. These prohibitions were implemented through checkpoints and snipers. However, on an individual basis it was occasionally possible to circumvent them in exchange for monetary payment. Most camp refugees' memories of the Lebanese civil war, regardless of gender and combatant status, were predominated by this period. "They didn't hate us. It was all politics," was what I was invariably told by those who were willing to speak to me about their experiences.

It was even more difficult to learn about what had happened in Burj al-Barajneh camp during what is referred to as the war between Abu Musa and Fateh (Sayigh, 1997; Wighton, 1990). In 1988 after an official ceasefire had been reached between Amal and the PLO, Burj al-Barajneh and Shatila camps were attacked by Palestinian dissident groups that had broken away from Fatah and aligned themselves with the Syrian government. Camp refugees refer to this war as the Abu-Musa War, for the nom de guerre of Colonel Said Maragha, leader of Fateh-Intifada, one of the dissident groups. For several years after the end of the Abu Musa wars, male camp refugees over the age of eighteen were unable to leave the camp for fear of being arrested at the checkpoints erected by the Syrian *mukhabarat*. Those who were arrested were sent to Syria and tortured. Many did not return. Of all the periods of Burj al-Barajneh camp's history, the Abu-Musa wars are the least spoken about. This is highlighted in the following quote from the life-history of a second-generation woman refugee.

Nadia: Where did the Abu Musa fighters come from?

Hayat: It is difficult to know. Maybe from Syria. Actually, they are Palestinian Syrian.

Nadia: They came after Amal and fought the people who were left?

Hayat: Yes. They wanted to finish the people who were left. It was politics. It was nothing against Palestinians. They wanted to put more pressure on Arafat. They didn't want Arafat in Lebanon. That's why.

Nadia: But there were many people in the camp who were not with Arafat. What was their fault?

Hayat: Usually, when there is a war, they don't think. When the shell falls or explodes, it doesn't recognize who is with Arafat and who isn't. They kill everybody. It's politics more than war. Its politics to get rid of the people who love Arafat...

Moeen and Hayat's accounts are significant for what they indicate about the ways in which not being able to relocate from the place of violence may shape collective memory of internecine violence. Particular to the inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh camp, yet cutting across generation, gender, and combatant status, composed as much by silence and omission as by recollection of what was done and to whom, "It was/is politics" made it possible—though with great difficulty—to continue to inhabit Burj al-Barajneh camp in the wake of violence done by and to former comrades, neighbours, friends, and kin. Palestinian camp refugees' well documented criticism of the PLO attributed to the frustration of the project for national liberation (Hanafi & Long, 2010; Khalili, 2007) and the camp refugees' political economic marginalization subsequent to the PLO's official withdrawal in 1982 (Allan, 2013) must also be considered in light of this unspeakable violence.

1.7 In and out Migration

Since its inception, the social space of Burj al-Barajneh refugee camp has been shaped by the in and out migration of Palestinian refugees, Lebanese and Syrian citizens, as well as migrants from other countries in the region, and from South Asia. Drawn by the growth of Beirut's economy in the wake of the *nakba*, rural migrants from Lebanon and Syria, as well as Palestinian refugees from "rural" camps migrated to the Palestinian refugee camps and informal settlements on the outskirts of Beirut. During the same time period, some Palestinian camp refugees who were able to accumulate sufficient economic and social capital moved out of Burj al-Barajneh camp to "better" neighbourhoods in Beirut.

In the 1970s, male Palestinian refugees from Gaza, Syria, and Jordan, as well as non-Palestinians came as fighters when the PLO established a base of military operations in Burj al-Barajneh camp. Some of them married women from the camp and remained with their affines even after the PLO's official withdrawal from Lebanon in 1982. During the 1970s–1980s, some Palestinian camp refugees were able to find employment in the Gulf countries which were experiencing an economic boom. Others received scholarships, distributed through the PLO, to pursue higher education in the USSR and Cuba. Yet others migrated to Libya where they were welcomed by Qaddafi's government.

The Lebanese civil war (1975–1991) was a period of considerable turmoil. Survivors of the massacres carried out by Christian militias in Karantina and Tal al-Zatar camp in 1976 were resettled in Burj al-Barajneh camp, as well as in the village of Damour, south of Beirut, where PLO fighters carried out a massacre in retaliation. After the War of the Camps (1985–1987), many refugees from Burj al-Barajneh camp sought and obtained asylum in Canada and the Scandinavian

countries. However, with the securitization of migration policy in Europe and North America since the 1990s, seeking asylum has become increasingly dangerous at the same time that opportunities for Palestinian camp refugees' labour migration within the region have dwindled.

In the face of dwindling opportunities for employment, diaspora remittances and the market in rental housing are important sources of income for those Palestinian refugees who have remained in Burj al-Barajneh camp. However, since these are not distributed evenly, they have exacerbated existing tensions and inequalities between and within families.

With the influx of Palestinian and Syrian refugees since the onset of the civil war in Syria (2011), the density of construction in the camp and its demographic composition have changed significantly. This is highlighted in the following excerpt from an interview conducted with a second-generation refugee in 2014.

Abid: The camp of Burj al-Barajneh, and all the Palestinian camps in Lebanon, have been suffering from low job opportunities, unemployment, and high costs of living for years. All these issues cause conflicts and depression. What began 3 years ago in Syria, those who came to Lebanon, headed to the Lebanese camps because the rents are cheap, and the cost of living is lower than in the city... Talking about Burj al-Barajneh camp, according to UNRWA statistics, its population is around 20,000. Those (Palestinians registered with UNRWA) who have remained in this camp till now. In addition, inhabitants from other countries like the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and other nationalities, Arab or foreign, have increased the number to around 35,000 or 40,000 persons. That means the population has doubled...So, the population increased and people started building. Anyone who had money and a one storey house would demolish it and build a building in its place of seven to eight stories. He rents or sells them. This has caused an increase in rents. It used to be \$100 or \$150 USD. Now it has reached \$300, \$400 and sometimes \$500 USD...This overcrowdedness has negatively affected life and work in Burj al-Barajneh camp. These people who came, some of them are Palestinians. They are our brothers in religion. They are our brothers in nationality and in country...But as I told you, the camp was already suffering from a crisis in jobs and from unemployment caused by the fact that the Palestinians in Lebanon are deprived of their rights—civil and social rights...The refugees who came (from Syria) are looking for work. So, they accept lower wages. As a result, the Palestinian, who has been living here originally, has stopped working, because others are working for lower wages. This has increased unemployment in the camp. We are also affected because the garbage collectors can't work efficiently anymore. There aren't enough employees... Also, regarding water and electricity, the two fundamental infrastructures of the camp. Regarding electricity, we have five stations in the camp...All these buildings that have been built, have increased the need for electricity. So, each station is overloaded...The water issue as well. The new houses need more water. How can they be provided? All of this, but people manage to coexist, and there weren't any problems with the refugees. They are our families. They didn't come here to visit, or to have fun. They were forced to leave their countries. Originally, they were refugees in Syria. Now they've become refugees in Lebanon...So we are obliged, first as Muslims, and then as people of the same country to accept these people and help them in any way we can. Not to forget, that they too were hospitable in 2006 when Israel attacked Lebanon, and people left the camps in Lebanon to take refuge in Syria...So, now that they have war and destruction, we must receive them in our houses and our camps, at least to return the favour. No matter whether they are Syrians, Lebanese, or Palestinian, no matter what their nationality is...

Abid's account highlights some of the transformations that have occurred in the social space of Burj al-Barajneh camp since the onset of the civil war in Syria in 2011. While the density of construction and population are indisputable, the precise number of the camp's inhabitants remains disputed. According to Abid, the camp's population doubled over the course of a few years from 20,000 to 40,000 inhabitants. On the other hand, a 2017 census conducted through the collaboration of the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee (an inter-ministerial body established by the Lebanese state in 2005) and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, placed this figure at 18,351. The number of Palestinian refugees from Lebanon was determined to be 8219, whereas the number of Syrian nationals was determined to be 8790. This significant change in the composition of the camp's inhabitants has transformed social relationships within the camp with important consequences for reaching a consensus regarding the provision and utilization of basic infrastructure such as sanitation, water, and electricity. Since this infrastructure emerged in an ad hoc manner over the seven decades of the camp's existence, often at the initiative and expense of the Palestinian camp refugees themselves, its provision and utilization have been negotiated over time through the shifting social relationships between the camp's inhabitants. The influx of a large number of new inhabitants to whom some of the older inhabitants supply rental housing and infrastructure services, while at the same time compete with in terms of employment and humanitarian aid, has created a potentially combustible situation in Burj al-Barajneh camp.

This abbreviated history of the establishment and urbanization of Burj al-Barajneh refugee camp highlights the limitations of analyses led primarily by conceptualizations of "bare life." Foregrounding the shifting social relationships that emerge over time between the inhabitants of long-term refugee camps and their environs demonstrates that those relationships that cannot be reduced to the billiard ball encounter between a monolithic host-state and a homogenous and unchanging refugee population. Examining shifts in the unequal exchanges facilitated by these changing social relationships enables a better understanding of the ways in which formal prohibitions on refugee livelihoods and political organization may be circumvented in actual practice. However, as refugee accounts make clear, the practical circumvention of formal prohibitions does not necessarily provide a solid foundation for the assertion and recognition of refugee rights.

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Chapter 2

Precarious Labour



Imm Kamel: Everyone worked—man, woman, boy, girl—to be able to live.

Nadia: All of you worked in the orchards?

Imm Kamel: Yes. We needed to eat. During the day, only the elderly were in the camp. All the other inhabitants were at work; some at factories, or at workshops, or at the orchards. God alone knows how much we suffered.

(Interview with a first-generation woman refugee in 2006)

Hala works in a sweet factory. During Ramadan they worked seven days a week, often with no break. The owner has promised to give them a half hour break to cover lunch, prayers, bathroom, and cigarettes. Hala is thinking of quitting the job. She can't stand working under such conditions, but knows that jobs are hard to come by.

(Fieldnotes dated December 2003)

Hussam tells me that he used to work in an oil refinery in the UAE. Then he lost his job (before the Gulf War), and still cannot practice the profession he is trained in. He works on contract for UNRWA, maintaining their medical equipment. He also works as an electrician in the camp, fixing washing machines, air conditioners etc. I ask if he studied at a vocational institute. "Of course!" he replies. We get out of the car, thanking him for the lift. As we walk, I remark that it is a shame that he has so many skills, but can't get a job. Leila replies, "There are many like him in the camp. They have education, but there are no jobs. They have certificates, but there are no jobs."

(Fieldnotes dated September 2005)

These multi-generational accounts highlight some of the ways in which, the Lebanese state's legal restriction of Palestinian labour notwithstanding, the political economy that emerged in Burj al-Barajneh camp was and remains connected to the political economy of its host nation-state, as well as to the global capitalist economy, by the labour of women *and* men refugees. Imm Kamel's account is of the early years of the camp in the 1950s when the previously agrarian refugees who had not received a "formal" education in Mandate Palestine were deemed "unskilled" labour. Hala and Hussam's accounts are of the early 2000s, by which time at least three generations had been educated at UNRWA schools. Many had also been able to acquire vocational training and higher education through UNRWA, PLO scholarships, and most importantly through the pooling together of the labour of multiple household members to aid the education of a promising son or brother. It is significant that regardless of its characterization as "skilled" or "unskilled,"

“self-employed,” or answerable to an employer, all three accounts speak of irregularly available, poorly remunerated labour performed in the absence of formal regulations regarding wages and work conditions—labour conceptualized as “informal” (Breman, 1976a, 1976b, 1976c, 2013, 2020; Hart, 1973, 1975, 2009; Munck, 2017) and “precarious” (Betti, 2018; Han, 2018; Narotzky, 2018; Standing, 2011).

What is meant by precarious labour? How might this concept explicate the predicament of the descendants of the Palestinian refugees, displaced to Lebanon at the founding of the nation-state of Israel in 1948, who still inhabit Burj al-Barajneh camp? Analyses of encampment focus on the power inequalities generated by host nation-states’ and humanitarian aid organizations’ administration of refugee camps. However, these analyses do not examine the unequal relationships of exchange that emerge between refugees and host state citizens in the long-term. Relationships which, on the one hand, facilitate circumvention of formal prohibitions on refugee employment can, on the other hand, play a role in maintaining precarious conditions for refugee and local labour.

Scholars of migration have highlighted the ways in which the governance of migration has historically contributed to unequal conditions for different segments of workers in the Global South and the Global North (Castles, 2015; van der Linden, 2012; Wolf, 1982). How has migration historically shaped the labour market in Beirut? How has labour market segmentation in Lebanon contributed to the precarity of Palestinian camp refugee labour? Lastly, despite the centrality of women’s wage labour in securing the household’s survival, why do many Palestinian women and men camp refugees view a gendered division of labour as the desired ideal? Increasing women’s participation in wage labour has long been promoted as key to addressing gender inequalities in the Global South. However, as some feminist economists have pointed out, treating an increase in women’s workforce participation as an inherently positive outcome may obscure the precarious conditions of their labour. Moreover, women’s increased participation in wage labour may exacerbate the burden placed on them, if there are no changes in gendered expectations around responsibility for reproductive labour (Olmsted, 2005).

2.1 Why Focus on Labour?

In their focus on host nation-states and humanitarian aid organizations’ administration of refugee camps, analyses led by conceptualizations of “encampment” have not given serious consideration to the question of how camp refugees provide for themselves and their families (Agier, 2011; Feldman, 2018; Hanafi & Long, 2010; Hyndman, 2000; Malkki, 1995). This omission suggests unexamined assumptions regarding camp refugee dependence on host nation-states and humanitarian aid—assumptions that scholars who may view themselves as advocates of refugee rights share with those who advocate for the restriction of asylum.

The omission also indicates a consideration of what is deemed “political”—belonging, rights, and political mobilization—in isolation from what is considered

“economic”—production, redistribution, and consumption. In addition to highlighting the inextricable entanglement of the economic and the political, a focus on refugee labour problematizes the dichotomy between forced—or “political”—and voluntary or “economic” migration prevalent in migration scholarship and policy making. Foregrounding labour can also elucidate how in the long run, migrants, whether deemed forced or voluntary, may be informally integrated into the political economies of host nation-states while being formally excluded. However, the precarity of informal inclusion does not necessarily provide a firm ground for migrants to secure formal recognition of their (human) rights.

The hardening of nation-state borders against refugees and asylum seekers, along with donor reluctance to provide aid for protracted conflicts that are not deemed a foreign policy priority, have led to a renewed interest in “refugee livelihoods” (Betts et al., 2017; Easton-Calabria, 2015; Jacobsen, 2014; Jansen, 2018; Omata, 2017; Trapp, 2018; Werker, 2007). In response to policy concerns about refugee “dependence” on humanitarian aid and the “burden” placed on host nation-states, this body of scholarship has sought to investigate the income generating activities that refugees engage in. Unlike analyses led by the concept of encampment, studies of refugee livelihoods view and present refugees as agents, rather than as objects of humanitarian governance whose “form of life” is determined for them by the host nation-states and humanitarian aid organizations they are posited as being subject to (Feldman, 2018; Perdigon, 2018).

Some scholars laud refugee “entrepreneurship,” which in their analysis is stifled by host nation-states and humanitarian organizations’ attempts to limit the activities that refugees initiate in order to sustain themselves and their families (Jacobsen, 2014; Jansen, 2018; Rosenberg-Jansen, 2024; Werker, 2007). However, other scholars have raised important concerns about how the material and intangible gains of “successful” entrepreneurial activities are unevenly redistributed within refugee households and kin groups, exacerbating existing inequalities and generating new ones (Omata, 2017; Trapp, 2018). These concerns highlight the necessity of examining shifts in the social relationships within refugee and migrant groups, particularly in response to shifts in the local and global political economies that they are part of (Bakker, 2007; Frederici, 1999).

A focus on historical shifts helps to unseat the assumption that the articulation of social relationships in terms of “fictive kinship” or “kinship as an idiom” (Geertz, 1963; Geertz & Geertz, 1975) points to the existence of a “traditional” moral economy, that is less exploitative or more egalitarian than “modern” (capitalist) political economy. Moreover, an analysis of how labour is organized and its fruits unevenly distributed within a labouring group deemed to be led by “traditional” norms may also help to problematize the assumption, that a strict division of labour is maintained across the group with women performing unpaid reproductive labour and men engaged in waged productive labour. This assumption appears to be shared by policy makers who view low rates of women’s participation in waged labour as an indication of their “underutilization” and “disempowerment” (Olmsted, 2005), as well as by those feminist scholars who view “traditional” local economies as more

egalitarian—rather than as differently inegalitarian—than what emerged as a consequence of the incorporation of local economies into the world capitalist economy.

2.2 Precarious Labour and the Predicament of Palestinian Camp Refugees in Lebanon

The term “precarity” has come to dominate discussions of contemporary labour conditions in the Global South as well as the Global North (Betti, 2018; Breman, 2013, 2020; Munck, 2017; Standing, 2011). Referring to poorly remunerated work performed in unsafe and unregulated conditions on temporary part-time contracts or in the absence of formal contracts, the global proliferation of precarious work is considered in large part to be a consequence of neoliberal reforms implemented by nation-states in different parts of the world from the 1970s onwards (Bakker, 2007; Frederici, 1999; Harvey, 2005; Standing, 2011). In many Global South nation-states, the reforms were implemented in order to receive assistance from the IMF and Global North states in restructuring national debt. The precise reforms implemented were different in different nation-states. However, the stated goal they held in common was that of promoting “freedom” and “economic growth” by limiting governmental regulation of markets, while at the same time encouraging the inculcation of “market rationality” and “entrepreneurship.”

Neoliberal scholars and policymakers promoted labour market flexibility on grounds of efficiency and higher labour productivity. These policies were implemented concomitantly with the reduction and privatization of social welfare provision. This has had the consequence of shifting risk and the reproductive costs of labour away from employers and nation-states onto workers and members of their households (Bakker, 2007; Frederici, 1999; Lambert & Herod, 2016; Standing, 2011). According to economist Guy Standing, neoliberalism has resulted in the tiering of labour markets with the continuation of a few salaried and benefited positions alongside a majority of temporary and part-time positions. This tiering of labour markets parallels the tiering of rights in relation to nation-states, with asylum seekers placed at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Standing’s critics view his claims as universalizing the labour compact established between nation-states and labour unions in the Global North after the Second World War (Breman, 2013, 2020; Breman & Van der Linden, 2014; Munck, 2017; van der Linden, 2012). They raise the question of whether precarious labour—in terms of living *and* working conditions—has always been the norm of capitalism. Moreover, given that integration into what became the global capitalist economy of the regions referred to as the Global South occurred through European colonization, imperialism, and the expansion of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, has the trajectory of precarious work in the Global South been different than in the Global North? These scholars have argued for the necessity of connecting older debates regarding “informal labour” with current discussions of precarity in the Global South.

If “formal labor” is understood as referring to the worker “freely” entering a contractual agreement with an employer according to which the individual worker’s labour power is exchanged for clearly stipulated remuneration and working conditions, formal labour has not been the historic experience of most workers in regions referred to as the Global South. Many did not “freely” enter the labour market as they were compelled by their debts to local merchants/moneylenders, or did not have a formal (legally recognized) contractual relationship with their employers. Rather, that relationship may have been understood by both parties in terms of “kin” obligation, as in the case of a child placed by her impoverished family in the household of a prosperous neighbour or co-religionist. Moreover, “self-employment” can be a form of hidden wage labour when the worker is dependent on a particular patron. The dependence may be masked by its articulation in the discourse of amity, neighbourliness, and community. Lastly, given its continued importance in securing the survival of labouring households, women and children’s waged and unwaged labour must be foregrounded in analyses of precarity in the Global South.

The term “informal economy” was coined by the anthropologist Keith Hart to refer to the income generating activities of a group of impoverished rural-urban migrants living in an informal neighbourhood in Accra (Ghana), where he conducted fieldwork in the 1970s (Hart, 1973, 1975, 2009). Hart critiqued their classification in national census data as “unemployed” on the grounds that it disregarded the productive activities the migrants were engaged in, as well as the small amounts of capital accumulation it facilitated for an equally small number of those informally employed. According to Hart, the key distinction between formal and informal employment is “whether or not labour is recruited on a permanent and regular basis for fixed rewards” (Hart, 1973, p. 68). In this context, the term “informal” is understood as referring not to the kind of labour performed—skilled vs. unskilled—but to the conditions in which it is performed—unpredictable, unregulated, and often unsafe. Hence, Hart’s critics highlighted the necessity of examining the ways in which activities deemed “informal” are intertwined with what is considered to be the formal economy, instead of treating them as a distinct and isolatable sphere (Breman, 1976a, 1976b, 1976c).

Since informality is understood in relation to the norms regulating production, consumption, and redistribution shared by a group of people, it may involve activities deemed immoral or illegal (Hart, 1973). An example would be a camp refugee making use of remittances from family members resettled in another nation-state to establish an informal business providing drinking water to other inhabitants of the camp. If the water is acquired from a reservoir maintained by the host nation-state without the state’s formal permission, or by bribing a local official, its provision may be considered illegal even though a much-needed service is being provided. Similarly, from the perspective of the refugee entrepreneurs’ kin, being required to purchase the water from a kinsperson—even at a discounted rate—may be seen as immoral. These activities may enable the refugee entrepreneur to accumulate a small amount of economic and social capital. At the same time, they may further conflict within the kin group, particularly if other members—rightly or

wrongly—perceive the accumulation to have been made possible by their unreciprocated labour (Hart, 1973, 1975).

In other words, the social relationships that a given individual is part of facilitate the productive activities—formal or informal—that they are able to engage in. These relationships also direct the redistribution of what is produced as a consequence of that labour. Discourses of kinship and solidarity notwithstanding, the channeling of what was produced may or may not result in an equitable redistribution through the social relationships that enabled production in the first place. Inequitable redistribution, in turn, facilitates capital accumulation, generating power inequalities which may be mitigated by the discourse of kinship, or brought into stark relief. Such an understanding of informality problematizes the claim by scholars, who see themselves as critics of neoliberalism, that the articulation of social relationships through the discourse of kinship evinces the existence of an older “moral economy” that presents an alternative to “modern” (capitalist) political economy (Allan, 2013). It also problematizes neoliberal policy makers’ assumption that facilitating entrepreneurship will inevitably reduce poverty and improve living conditions for all.

Early scholarship on Palestinian camp refugees in Lebanon was primarily interested in their capacity for nationalist political mobilization and contribution to the struggle for Palestinian national liberation (Franjeh, 1972; Peretz, 1977; Peteet, 1992; Sayigh, 1979; Sirhan, 1975; Turki, 1974). The informal and formal activities that refugees were engaged in within and outside camps, in order to provide for themselves and their families, were not given systematic consideration. Nor was there a sustained analysis of the ways in which these activities involved camp refugees in local and regional political economies through the formation of new social relationships of unequal exchange. Mirroring the concerns of anti-colonial nationalists regarding rural-urban migrants in the Global South (Fanon, 1961), the problematics of these studies were formulated in terms of whether Palestinian camp refugees possessed a revolutionary consciousness and whether such a consciousness was necessary for national liberation.

Viewed as having been forcibly de-peasantized by their expulsion in 1948, camp refugees were thought to lack a “modern,” proletarian consciousness. According to some scholars this was due to their unintegration into the political economies of the urban centres adjoining the camps of their residence (Peretz, 1977). According to others, it was a consequence of the camp refugees having retained traditional *fellah* values and social relationships in resistance to their forced dispossession (Sayigh, 1978, 1979). Moreover, with regards to national mobilization, a shared experience of forced displacement and dispossession was claimed to have rendered class and regional divides irrelevant (Peteet, 1992; Sayigh, 1978, 1979; Turki, 1974). Regardless of whether *fellah* traditionalism was valorized as authenticating Palestinian nationalism or critiqued as undermining its emergence, it is rendered problematic by the accounts of first-generation camp refugees themselves.

Consider the following account of the Galilean village of ‘Amqa’ during British Mandate rule (1922–1948), excerpted from the life history of a first-generation camp refugee collected during fieldwork in Burj al-Barajneh camp in 2006.

Nadia: What was your neighbourhood like? Was everyone from the same family?

Abu Imad: Yes, they were related. Yes, almost. In the past, during the time of Turkish colonization, this neighbourhood was for my family. But the modern buildings weren't for the same family. You could build wherever you wanted. It wasn't important to build next to your relatives.

Nadia: Why did things change?

Abu Imad: I don't know how to explain this, but people became not that *mutashaddid* to their families. I mean, it became not important for a man to build his house next to his brother or his parents. It was fine to live a bit further away from your family. Also, it depended on the quality of the land and on the climate. It was up to you. It wasn't important to be that close to my brother. Maybe the piece of land is not enough to build next to my brother or my cousin, and it might not be enough for us all. It was proof of *wa'y*, and healthy proof. For example, my uncle was a little far from our house and his neighbours were not related to him. People stopped being so clannish. Maybe in the past, they worried about the cattle, or were afraid of being attacked. They used to think they could defend each other if they were living close by. Maybe this was long ago in the past, because those houses were very old. In the new century, after the First World War, you started to see people being more open toward each other. There was *wa'y*, interrelationships, and communication...

Abu Imad's account highlights some of the ways in which social relationships in his village had changed with shifts in the region's location within the global capitalist economy during British Mandate rule. Abu Imad attributed these changes to "*wa'y*," an Arabic word which is translated as "consciousness," "awareness," or "wakefulness" and used by camp refugees to refer to the consequences of modernization. The Arabic word "*mutashaddid*" refers to a person who is rigid or dogmatic in their views. The phrasing of Abu Imad's answer suggests that "traditional" norms of patrilocality notwithstanding, actual practice was shaped by the exigencies of environmental conditions and security considerations. This raises the question of whether norms operated any differently in societies that were deemed "modern."

It has been well established by historians of the Ottoman period that the agrarian economy of the Galilee was connected to the world economy through the production of cash crops for market exchange, as well as through the consumption of imported goods not produced regionally (Firestone, 1990; Owen, 1981). These historical ties as well as those established through regional and intercontinental migration (Norris, 2017), problematize the assumptions of isolation and immobility underlying representations of *fellah* traditionalism (Latif, 2011).

Nadia: But Hajje, if your father was Palestinian and your mother was from Lebanon, how did they get married?

Imm Walid: I'll tell you how they got married. There was famine in Lebanon. Locusts infested and ate everything. There was famine and my grandfather died, my mother's father. My grandmother had four daughters and one son. The uncle of the boy was immigrating to Argentina. He took the boy, and the boy was four years old. My grandmother and the four girls were alone and there wasn't any food, so my grandmother took her daughters to Palestine.

Nadia: Why?

Imm Walid: Because there wasn't famine in Palestine. My grandmother told people her story and asked them to help her find a place to live. They told her to go to Imm Yusuf. They said to her "Imm Yusuf has houses." So, my mother's mother lived in the house of my father's father and worked for them... Many people from the south (of Lebanon) were

going to work in Palestine, or to sell their goods there. They were meeting in Palestine and getting married. There was a girl from my village, married to a Lebanese man...

Imm Walid's account highlights the ways in which the political economy of the Galilee was connected to regional and intercontinental political economies through trade, migration, and intermarriage. Many of the first-generation camp refugees I interviewed spoke of the labour migration from French Mandate Lebanon to British Mandate Palestine in the years preceding the establishment of the nation-state of Israel in 1948. During the Second World War constraints on international shipping and the British Mandate authorities' development of Palestine as a military base led to a rise in the demand for local agricultural produce and generated a range of wage labour opportunities (Nadan, 2006; Smith, 1986). Migration to and from rural areas was shaped by the seasonal nature of agricultural labour, which also facilitated the part-time practice of non-agricultural skills, as well as circular migration to urban areas. This suggests that precarious labour, as well as migration—whether rural-urban or across borders—were very much a part of the rural economies of North Palestine and South Lebanon by the first half of the twentieth century. It also problematizes the assumption that all those categorized as peasants in anti and postcolonial thought—a term used to refer to a very broad range of relationships to cultivation and land ownership—were dispossessed in the same way by their historic incorporation into what became the global capitalist economy (Wolf, 1977).

2.3 How Has Migration Historically Shaped the Labour Market in Beirut?

Scholars who have taken a global history approach to labour and migration have argued that the expansion of the global capitalist economy has always been linked to the differentiation and segmentation of workers, and the use of migration management to create various forms of “unfree” labour (Castles, 2015; van der Linden, 2012; Wolf, 1982). Differential denial of equitable work conditions and remuneration has been and continues to be justified on intersecting grounds of age, gender, and the physical, moral, and intellectual characteristics ascribed to “the people” the worker is deemed to belong to. This approach highlights the importance of taking a historical and global perspective to the study of migration and its management in order to better understand the establishment and maintenance of “local” labour regimes, as well as the particular ways in which they are understood by those who are involved in them. In addition to problematizing the sharp distinction between “forced”/“political” and “voluntary”/“economic” migration prevalent in contemporary debates regarding citizenship and rights, this approach allows for a consideration of ways in which labour differentiation may occur despite formal prohibitions against discrimination, or legal restrictions on the employment of “foreigners.”

Contemporary discussions of migration and precarious labour draw on the concept of labour market segmentation initially proposed in the 1970s by scholars

studying the persistence of differential wages and working conditions along lines of race, ethnicity, and gender in the United States (Bonacich, 1972; Reich et al., 1973). Some scholars argued that segmented labour markets emerged, not due to prejudice on the part of employers who were only interested in maximizing their profits by utilizing the cheapest available labour, but due to local workers' fears that migrants would lower wages and labour conditions across all sectors of the local economy (Bonacich, 1972). Others argued that employers played an active role by taking advantage of existing gender, racial, and ethnic conflicts to undermine labour mobilization and break strikes (Reich et al., 1973). Yet others highlighted the role of the state in guaranteeing the "cheapness" of labour by regulating migration and repressing labour mobilization through the use of violence (Burawoy, 1981).

These debates point to the necessity of carefully examining the political economic configurations particular to a given situation, as well as historic shifts within these conditions. Positing a universal migrant condition in terms of reduction to "bare life" (Agamben, 1995) may be effective in mobilizing solidarity. It does not, however, facilitate a nuanced understanding of actual conflicts, and may contribute to the banalization of the painful lived experiences of migrants themselves (Latif, 2008).

Debates around migration and labour market segmentation also highlight the importance of considering the particular political economic configuration of the sending and the receiving locales, as well as the historic relationship between the two. These may play an important role in whether a particular group of migrants is legally recognized as forced or voluntary. Legal recognition, in turn, determines the rights formally accorded by the host nation-state to the migrant group. The formal accordance of rights is no guarantee of their implementation in everyday life. However, their complete absence limits the possibility of redress.

The Palestinians fleeing the violence that accompanied the establishment of the nation-state of Israel in 1948 were formally recognized as having been forcibly displaced by the neighbouring postcolonial nation-states—Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon—they sought refuge in. However, none of these states chose to sign the 1951 UN Convention on the Rights of the Refugee, or the 1967 protocol which expanded the protections provided by the Convention to apply universally to all persons fleeing conflict and persecution. Instead, each host nation-state extended a different set of rights to those it recognized as Palestinian refugees (Albanese & Takkenberg, 2020).

King Abdullah's regional ambitions played an important role in the Jordanian annexation of the West Bank and the 1949 extension of Jordanian citizenship to all its Palestinian inhabitants, including refugees from other parts of Palestine (Sayigh, 1997). The Jordanian state also sought to expand public services and encourage economic growth by drawing on the capital and "highly skilled" labour of middle- and upper-class Palestinians, particularly those who had had experience of civil service and international trade under the British Mandate. However, Palestinian political mobilization was strictly restricted. Although naturalised Palestinians were extended the same political franchise as the local population, women, and all men

who did not own landed property or other taxable assets were denied the vote, effectively excluding most Palestinians.

In Syria, a presidential decree of 1956 granted Palestinian refugees registered in the country equal status with Syrian citizens regarding employment, trade and military service. Unlike Jordan, the rights of citizenship were not extended, although a relatively large number of Palestinians were able to acquire naturalization through kin ties or the possession of skills prioritized by Syria's rapidly expanding military and bureaucracy (Sayigh, 1997). The Lebanese state, however, imposed restrictions on Palestinian employment, ownership of property, and naturalization (Albanese & Takkenberg, 2020).

The differences in the rights extended by these neighbouring host nation-states to Palestinians may in part be explained by the differences in their political economies, as well as that of Mandate Palestine. Until its dissolution at the beginning of the twentieth century, the regions that today comprise the territories of the nation-states of Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, as well as the Occupied Territories of Gaza and the West Bank, were part of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The integration of these territories into what became the global capitalist economy occurred during Ottoman rule but was highly uneven and differentiated (Islamoglu-Inan, 1987; Owen, 1981; Traboulsi, 2007). The regions that became the postcolonial nation-state of Lebanon (1946) were more integrated into the world economy through the manufacture of silk for long-distance trade, and through migration to the Americas, as compared to the territories that became the postcolonial nation-states of Syria (1946) and Jordan (1946). These differences were further heightened during the rule of the British and French Mandates established in these territories by the League of Nations after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War One.

Historical scholarship on the regions that were administratively brought together under the French Mandate for Lebanon (1923–1946) indicates that the integration of these regions into the world economy during Ottoman rule led to the emergence of a sectarian political economy directed by long-distance trade, migrant remittances, and the provision of financial services (Amel, 2020; Khuri, 1969; Owen, 1981; Saba, 1976; Traboulsi, 2007). At the time of the establishment of Mandate rule, agricultural production absorbed a large portion of the local labour force but was dominated by a small number of wealthy families drawn from the elite of various Christian and Muslim sects. Inadequate remuneration and the precarious conditions of agrarian labour fueled indebtedness, regional and intercontinental migration, as well as dependence on migrant remittances.

The provision of financial services, dominated by a small number of primarily Christian families, generated great wealth but employed a fraction of the local labour force. Access to wage labour in the cities was facilitated by networks of social relationships, and social services such as education and medical care were provided by the charitable organizations of different sects to their own members. Moreover, the constitution adopted by the French Mandate Authority in 1926 institutionalized sectarian membership as the basis of the system of representation and administration.

With the establishment of the nation-state of Israel in 1948, the Palestinians who sought refuge in Lebanon, were displaced from a labour market segmented by gender and race to a labour market segmented by gender, citizenship, and religious sect. The emergence of a market segmented between Arab and Jewish labour has been well studied by historians of Mandate Palestine (Bernstein, 1996; Nadan, 2006). While no formal legal restrictions were put in place on employment, distinct hiring patterns were observable with the concentration of Jewish labour in Jewish owned enterprises and of Arab labour in Arab owned enterprises. This has been attributed to the goal, shared by employers and workers, of establishing a Jewish nation-state in Palestine, and the mobilization of labour organizations such as the Histadrut in support of that goal (Bernstein, 1996).

The small number of Arabs employed in Jewish enterprises were mostly involved in the production of agricultural commodities, and to a lesser extent in construction. Though the Mandate Authority employed relatively fewer Jews than Arabs, those employed tended to be “high skilled.” “Unskilled” work was sub-contracted to Jewish contractors who made use of Jewish and Arab labour, but at different wage levels (Bernstein, 1996). It has been argued that alongside extensive Jewish land purchases from absentee Arab landlords, conditions in the Arab rural areas were exacerbated by labour market segmentation (Nadan, 2006; Peretz, 1977).

The terms for the organization of the post-independence political economy of Lebanon were reached in 1942 through an unwritten “gentlemen’s” agreement between representatives of the Maronite (Christian) and Sunni (Muslim) elites. Retrospectively referred to as the National Pact, it proposed the continuation of sectarian capitalism, with Christians relinquishing French protection in exchange for Muslims rescinding demands for unification with Syria. The independent Lebanese republic, envisioned as a *laissez-faire* state, would continue to facilitate the growth of those sectors of the economy involved in importation, tourism, and the provision of financial services. While these sectors generated significant profits, they employed only a small portion of the region’s labour force and were dominated by a few wealthy families from different Sunni and Christian sects. The bulk of the newly independent republic’s labour force was employed in the agricultural sector. However, wages and working conditions continued to decline after independence, propelling waves of transnational and rural-urban migration (Nasr, 1978; Saba, 1976; Traboulsi, 2007).

According to some scholars, migration facilitates labour market segmentation in that the poorer the migrating group and the fewer the material resources available to it for its survival, the less the incentive required to push it into entering the local labour market on unequal terms (Bonacich, 1972). Misrepresentation of prevalent labour conditions and wages, or migrants’ lack of knowledge about the local labour market can also play a role. Moreover, the less the migrant group is able to rely on its state of origin for the protection of its interests, the more vulnerable it is to the use of coercion and to unfavourable conditions in the host labour market. Lastly, workers’ willingness to put up with undesirable conditions is higher if they view their situation as temporary and their future as being elsewhere. They may avoid

involvement in labour disputes and prefer to organize amongst themselves, creating associations that compete with local labour unions.

These insights are helpful in understanding the social relationships that emerged between the Palestinian refugees, Syrian migrant labour, and Lebanese rural-urban migrants competing for precarious employment opportunities in Beirut before the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975. They also shed light on the particular form taken by Palestinian camp refugees' political mobilization in Lebanon during the 1960s–1970s. In the words of a second-generation Palestinian camp refugee I interviewed in 2006, “All they cared about was that these people (the PLO cadre) will bring us back to Palestine, and we don't want these camps anymore.”

Lebanese labour and citizenship laws attempted to regulate the migration and employment of non-citizens in ways that reinforced the existing structuration of the Lebanese economy (Peretz, 1977; Sayigh, 1952; Smith, 1986; Traboulsi, 2007). The Lebanese state placed few restrictions on the import and export of capital. The financial and “human” capital brought by wealthy and middle-class Palestinian refugees from 1948 onwards, and by Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi emigres after the implementation of socialist policies and agrarian reforms in those countries during the 1950s–1960s was welcomed. This enabled some Palestinians to achieve rapid upward mobility, and to provide employment—often on precarious terms—to their impoverished compatriots in the camps. A similar dynamic has been noted in scholarship on Syrian migrant and refugee workers in Lebanon (Chalcraft, 2009; Sajadian, 2022).

The informal and precarious labour of Palestinian camp refugees and Syrian rural-urban migrants was incorporated on terms favourable to landowners and entrepreneurs. The Lebanese Labor Code of 1946 required foreign nationals to be in possession of a permit in order to work or practice a profession (al-Natour, 1997; Lampman, 1954). However, these stipulations were waived for workers considered temporary and casual, particularly in agriculture and retail. The requirement for Palestinians to be in possession of a work permit in order to practice a profession or engage in “skilled” labour, was waived or unevenly implemented until the early 1960s (al-Natour, 1997). Middle- and upper-class Palestinians, as well as many working-class Palestinian Christians were able to use the social and/or economic capital they possessed to acquire documentation which facilitated their naturalization.

Before the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975, the industrial sector in Beirut consisted of a few large firms who subcontracted to numerous small-scale workshops and manufactories. This division of labour allowed the small-scale enterprises to survive, while enabling large companies to hold down their own wages and maximize profits by shifting the risks of the business cycle onto the small-scale manufactories. In order to earn profits as large as in the commercial and financial sectors, industrialists developed an employment policy “of consuming and wasting an apparently unlimited workforce” (Nasr, 1978, p. 11). Consider the following excerpt from the life-history of a first-generation, Palestinian woman refugee collected during fieldwork in 2006:

Hajje Badriyye: ...the Palestinians were working in different jobs. I worked in factories. I worked at the Jaber factory and the Ghandour factory, also at a tin factory. Do you know how much they paid me daily at the Jaber factory? I was eleven or twelve years old when I started working at the Jaber factory. I worked at a biscuit factory and at a spaghetti factory. They made it, and we rolled or rapped it out...I worked there for two or three years. Maybe more.

Lebanese law permitted employers to pay those under the age of twenty less than the legal minimum wage. Employees could also be fired at will by being paid 2 months' salary as indemnity, a requirement waived in the case of those foreign workers such as Hajje Badriyye, whose states did not offer such reciprocal treatment to Lebanese workers. Large firms attempted to maximize profits by maintaining a high labour turnover, a strategy facilitated by the existence of a substantial labour reserve comprised of Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian migrant and refugee labour.

The labour market in Beirut and its environs that the first generation of Palestinian camp refugees was forced to enter upon their displacement in 1948 was segmented along lines of religious sect and citizenship, in addition to gender and age. Palestinian camp refugees competed for informal and precarious work with rural-urban migrants from Lebanon as well as from Syria. This is brought out in the following account excerpted from the life history of a first-generation, camp refugee man collected during fieldwork in 2006.

Abu Hasan: I swear by our Qur'an. I am not lying. You can ask whoever you want. If a woman wanted to fill water, we had to get a permit from the gendarmerie. I used to sell vegetables on a cart dragged by a donkey. One day the donkey defecated, and the gendarmerie fined me because of the donkey's stool. I paid the money even though all the area was sandy. We suffered a lot in our life here in Lebanon...I was raised as an orphan. I used to carry flour from the port. I was paid half a lira. I had to walk for a long distance and sometimes go up to the seventh or tenth floor to sell the sacks, and they would give me half or one lira. I worked many jobs. I broke rocks and you couldn't recognize my face from the dust. Also, in construction. All of it was hard work... No people have suffered as we have in Lebanon. They are like the Jews. They are *unṣurīn*. There isn't any work. Some Syrians used to visit my grandfather to play cards with him. Our neighbour was taking some wood for the elderly, so my grandfather told me to go and work with him. I went, but I ran into the gendarmerie. They said to me, "Come here." But I ran away. So, they took our neighbour instead.

Nadia: Why?

Abu Hasan: Because I ran away. My grandfather came and told me that they took the man, and they tortured him. They pulled out his ten nails...

Abu Hasan's narrative interspersed descriptions of the harsh and unregulated conditions of the various jobs he worked over the course of his life, with accounts of the legal restrictions and extra-legal violence he and other Palestinian inhabitants of the camp experienced at the hands of the Lebanese military police who administered the Palestinian refugee camps during the 1960s. The Arabic word *unṣurī* is rendered in English as "racist" but does not have the same associations with skin colour and other physical features that have come to be acquired by the word in English. Rather, *unṣur* refers to "origin" or "stock," and hence, depending on the particular context, can signify religious sect or nation. The terms of Abu Hasan's account highlight the

operation of labour market segmentation by linking together the harshness and precarity of his living and working conditions with the mediation of rights through *unṣur*.

Access to employment and social services, for citizens and non-citizens alike, whether in the small public sector, or the large private sector, was facilitated by *wāṣṭa*. Literally “mediacy” or “intercession,” the term is used to refer to the social capital that a given individual can call upon through the unequal relationships of exchange that they are involved in. The term may also be used metonymically to refer to the social relationships which enable capital accumulation. These social relationships may be articulated in the discourse of nation, sect, kinship, amity, or neighbourliness. It would, however, be a mistake to view them as forming an unchanging system of patronage even if presented as such by those involved in them, since both the relationships as well as the capital accrued from them change over time (Gilsenan, 1977; Lomnitz, 1988; Peters, 1972). This is highlighted in the following excerpt from the life history of a second-generation camp refugee:

Saeed: If anyone from the village needed money for an operation or for a funeral, this could be done through a family, or all the inhabitants of the village, or of the neighbourhood. It depends, but he who wants to run it (the committee) must have money and he should be well known. He can't establish it just like that. Human nature likes to gather around the important person who has weight or a position. He might have money, or maybe he belongs to a party, or maybe he's an important employer, or he has work abroad. So, people gather around the important person. If an ordinary person came and said, “I want to establish a league,” they would make fun of him.

Nadia: Certainly. Were these important families the same in Palestine?

Saeed: Not necessarily. Maybe some of these families weren't important, but maybe after they left Palestine, someone of this family got educated and worked and he became rich. So, he could establish a league. To be able to form a league, it is important to be rich.

Nadia: But in the beginning, the UNRWA manager of the camp, or the leader of the party, were they from the same families?

Saeed: In the beginning, yes, they were. To be employed at UNRWA you must be educated. Most of the people were *fellahin*, and they weren't educated. Few people were educated at that time. To be an employee, you should be educated. Otherwise, how would you read or write. Some people who had money in Palestine and brought their money with them, they didn't live in the camp for a long time...

Saeed's account refers to the various *lajnāt* (committees or leagues) that camp refugees have organized for themselves over time, in order to have a mechanism for pooling together resources in the face of adversity. Scholarship on Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon has viewed the existence of *lajnāt* as confirmation of the depeasantized refugees' retention of tradition in the face of national dispossession (Allan, 2013; Hajj, 2017; Hanafi & Long, 2010; Sayigh, 1979). However, as Saeed's account indicates the social relationships undergirding the *lajnat* are understood by their members in different terms, which may change over time. The prerequisite, however, is the uneven accumulation of economic and social capital on the part of an individual.

That this capital can be accumulated in different ways—through salaried employment in a humanitarian aid organization, membership in a political party, migrant remittances, or being in the economic position to employ others—underscores the ways in which both the social relationships and the capital accumulated change over

time with changes in a given political economy. Treating this shifting assemblage as a system of “traditional” patron-client relationships may preclude consideration of these changes. It may also make it difficult to reach a better understanding of the ways in which, despite the Lebanese state’s formal prohibitions, the precarious labour of Palestinian camp refugees has been incorporated into Lebanon’s political economy, though on terms that have generated new inequalities.

2.4 Precarity and Gendered Divisions of Labour

Given the centrality of women’s waged labour to the survival of camp refugee households, particularly in the early decades of dispossession (1950s–1960s), its disavowal by many Palestinian women and men camp refugees whose oral histories I collected in the early years of my fieldwork, was puzzling. As an ambitious young woman graduate student from Karachi, it was easier to view the disavowal as a remnant of traditionalism, than to recognize it as a rejection of the exploitative conditions of Palestinian refugee wage labour, and their consequences for the organization of reproductive labour within refugee households. Consider the following account of a Palestinian woman refugee’s childhood collected in 2006.

Imm Shadi: My father became sick. When we had to flee Palestine, it was traumatic for him.

Nadia: What made him sick?

Imm Shadi: He had a nervous shock...They left everything in Palestine because they thought they would return...So they started to work for other people to earn some money, to feed their children. At the end we went to Anjar...I still can’t forget what happened. I was a child... When there were storms, the tents would fly, and people would be left sitting in the rain. The father would hold the post of the tent because he thought he could forbid the tent from flying away...So we got out of Anjar and went to Sour, but it was the same difficult life and the same suffering. The man couldn’t find work to feed his family. There wasn’t work...So we went to Tripoli... My mother started to work because she had seven children and my father was sick. They would pay her one lira. It wasn’t enough for a big family. We didn’t live our childhood. Some people say that they forgot, but I didn’t forget...The mothers would go to the beach to collect rocks. They made clay and used it to build a wall around the tent to keep the water from getting in... They gave some supplies, but it wasn’t enough. They kept promising the people that they would return, but no one returned...I feel sad for my grandson, because he doesn’t have any of his civil rights, and he is deprived of his right as a child. You have been to our house, and you know that my sons have been out of work for more than a year. They have children and they have expenses. These things still trouble us now and I am more than sixty years old. I remember when we were children. We lived in a small room. It was my mother who built the room. Every day we would wait for my mother to come home, and she wouldn’t come home until after the sun had set. She would work all day and they would only give her one lira.

Imm Shadi’s memories of her childhood highlight the difficulties faced by her parents in ensuring the family’s survival after they were forced to flee their village in the Galilee in 1948; difficulties that were compounded by her father’s condition. The humanitarian aid that was provided through the coordination of the Lebanese state, the Lebanese Red Cross Society, and the International Committee of the Red

Cross (ICRC) did not meet the refugees' basic needs. In addition, wage labour was difficult to obtain, involved long hours and was very poorly remunerated. In the words of an anthropologist who conducted fieldwork in the 1970s, it was "work that Lebanese labour would not do" (Sayigh, 1978, p. 109).

Social norms upholding the propriety of a gendered division of labour and space facilitated labour market segmentation, making it acceptable to pay women less. This, in turn, had the effect of making it easier for camp refugee women rather than men to secure the precarious employment that was available. Gender norms of the time—shared by many Palestinians, Lebanese, and Syrians—tied the social recognition of masculinity to a group of male kinsmen's demonstrated ability to protect their female kin from harm and humiliation (Khuri, 1969; Sayigh, 1978). Hence, across gender, many camp refugees experienced their inability to conform to the gender norms they shared with their Lebanese employers and Syrian and Lebanese competitors as deeply shameful (Latif, 2012).

At the same time, women were not absolved from their responsibility for reproductive labour, the work that goes into the subsistence, upbringing, and care of members of the household. Feminist scholars have long pointed to how the undervaluation of reproductive labour subsidizes capital accumulation and raises the burden on women in the absence of social provision if norms around the gendered division of labour do not change (Dalla Costa, 1972; Frederici, 1999; Olmsted, 2005). In situations such as the one described by Imm Shadi, the responsibility for cooking, cleaning, laundry, and the care of sick, elderly, and infant members of the household would fall on the eldest female child too young to be able to secure work outside the home. Given the Lebanese state's formal prohibition on the camp refugees' construction of durable structures, the difficulties of this labour were compounded by the absence of infrastructure in the form of a sewage system and regular access to water. Hence, Imm Shadi's poignant statement, "We didn't live our childhood." Her account is also significant for highlighting the generational continuity of precarity for Palestinian camp refugees. "These things still trouble us now and I am more than sixty years old."

The following excerpt from fieldnotes written in 2006 describes some of the ways in which Palestinian camp refugee labour remains precarious despite several generations obtaining formal education and acquiring the means to make significant improvements to the infrastructure of the camps they inhabit.

I visit Manal to help her with an assignment she has for her counselling workshop. We talk about the social structure of the camp. How population density and the close relationships between people are both good and bad. Good because they keeps social problems—such as the youth taking drugs—from getting out of control. Bad because people are able to interfere in each other's' lives to a degree they wouldn't otherwise be able to. Manal says that social and domestic problems have their cause in the economic situation. Lack of work creates problems between husband and wife, parents and children. Since young men are out of work, there is nothing else for them to do, so they take drugs. One of Manal's assignments consists of questions about a case study. "You're a counsellor at the center. A teenage girl comes to you. She is depressed. Cries a lot. Upset because her parents quarrel a lot. I ask Manal if it doesn't seem unrealistic to her that the girl in the case study gets so upset over her parents fighting. Manal says, "On the contrary this is very common. Imagine it's

the end of the month. You've run out of money. That's how the fights start. The woman asks for housekeeping money. The man doesn't have any. He accuses her of being wasteful. They fight. It affects the children. At this age (adolescence) they are very sensitive. It's not just difficult on the man. It's also really hard on the woman. She doesn't just sit at home. If the man is at work all day long, comes home at night to eat and sleep, the woman is responsible for everything at home, the children. She wants to hear some words of encouragement, but he has none to give." She gives her husband as an example. "He is an accountant, but because he is Palestinian, he has to work as a contractual worker. He comes home at night around 11 pm or midnight, and is too exhausted to do anything except eat and go to sleep, only to do the same thing the next day and the day after next. He only gets to see his children on Sunday. When he leaves in the morning, they're asleep. When he returns, they're in bed. But there is no other solution.

As Manal's account indicates, the conditions of Lebanon's political economy, and the terms on which Palestinian camp refugees have come to be informally integrated into it, continue to render their labour and lives precarious, even if as in the case of Manal and her husband, they possess formal qualifications as "skilled" labour. Manal's account also suggests that an increase in women's participation in wage labour is no guarantee of an improvement in their well-being if no provision is made for the reproductive labour expected of them.

After the inception of the war in Syria in 2011, large numbers of Syrian and Palestinian refugees from Syria settled in Burj al-Barajneh camp by renting or purchasing housing from Palestinian camp refugees, and establishing shops and small businesses in the camp. This increased competition for informal employment, exacerbating an already precarious situation for Palestinian camp refugees and their Lebanese class counterparts. Consider the following excerpt from an interview conducted with a second-generation, camp refugee in 2014.

Sheikh Nassir: Firstly, Palestinians in this camp suffer because the Palestinian in Lebanon is deprived of most of his rights as a human being. Job opportunities, the ownership of property and all these issues. Before the issue of the Syrian refugees, we had already been suffering from an economic crisis in this country. Even the Lebanese themselves are suffering. Job opportunities are scarce, and there isn't much money. But Allah has afflicted the Syrians with this affliction; and affliction is a grace for the Muslim... Our brothers the Syrians who are afflicted, they sought refuge in Lebanon as it is closest. Most of them came here, because even before the war, most of the Syrians didn't go abroad, to Iraq, to Jordan, to Pakistan. They didn't. Most of them come to Lebanon. They know how everyday life is in Lebanon. So, this led to the fact that most Syrian refugees came to Lebanon. The UN estimates the number of refugees to be 1,200,000. The population of Lebanon doesn't exceed 4,000,000. Now it has increased by 20%. This has had an effect. In this camp live 25,000 Palestinians. They have shared many problems of daily life. More than around 20,000 Syrians came. This doubled the camp. It has led to fewer job opportunities for the Palestinian young men in this camp. The Palestinian was suffering even before the Syrians sought refuge in Lebanon. Now, the suffering has increased, really. Even the *bī'a*. I mean, the camp had the capacity to dwell 20,000. Now, there are 45,000 to 50,000 people living in this camp. When walking in the streets you notice how crowded they are. It's full. The camp became full. This has also affected the situation in the camp. Even people's spirits have become low. I might sympathize with you, but others might not. From a religious point of view, I say I cannot prevent people from working, having a house, trading or having a shop. It's not up to me. From the point of view of religion, I cannot object. But others don't see things from a religious point of view, and wouldn't say "These people have been

afflicted and are seeking refuge.” They would say, “They’re here taking our money, my job, the place I live in, which I shared with them...”

Sheikh Nassir prefaced his answer to my question about the impact of the migration of Syrian refugees to Burj al-Barajneh camp by highlighting both the precarity of the Lebanese political economy and the legal constraints on Palestinian employment and property ownership in Lebanon. This emphasizes the consequences, for Palestinian camp refugees, of the shift from the circular migration of Syrian men to Syrian families seeking refuge and work with the advent of the war in 2011. “The camp became full.” The Arabic word *bṛa* is usually translated as “environment,” but also refers to the milieu in which one feels at home, underscoring the ways in which space is socially produced.

It is worth noting that the sheikh, a local religious figure, viewed the constraints on Palestinian employment and property ownership as a deprivation of human rights, while at the same time, drawing a parallel with “our brothers, the Syrians.” However, the sheikh also emphasized that other Palestinians in the camp who, “don’t see things from a religious point of view,” would not be able to exercise the compassion that is required of believing Muslims. Sheikh Nassir’s analysis problematizes assumptions about the “ignorance” and “naivete” of community-based, Muslim religious figures, whether lauded as “autochthonous” or vilified as “anti-modern” and “irrational.” His account also raises questions about the ways in which labour market segmentation operates, as well as the ways in which it is experienced. As (Sunni) Muslim refugees, Palestinian and Syrian refugees should be brothers in faith and circumstances. However, as Palestinian and Syrian labour, they are competitors for precarious informal employment secured through ever shifting relationships of unequal exchange.

In an essay titled, “Wageless Life,” historian Michael Denning sought to underscore the continuities between the form ascribed to wagelessness in the imperial metropolises of global capitalism—“unemployment”—and its conceptualization in the colonized and postcolonial peripheries—“informality.” Denning’s analysis highlights the dispossession and appropriation from which both “unemployment” and “informality” have emerged over the course of the historical processes termed “global capitalism.” The generational experiences of Palestinian camp refugees in Lebanon underscore the importance of examining ways in which social relationships shape the experience of labour and the distribution of what it produces. Tracing the shifts in those relationships over time, may facilitate a multi-scalar analysis, and hence a better understanding of the relationships of the “local” to the “global.”

The oral histories of multiple generations of Palestinian women and men inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh camp gathered in the course of long-term field research, problematize misperceptions of unintegration, whether lauded or condemned as traditional/autochthonous. Researchers who have also conducted ethnographic fieldwork in long term refugee camps and “informal” settlements located in postcolonial nation-states in Asia and Africa have observed similar dynamics (Alimia, 2022; Monsutti, 2020; Omata, 2017). Notwithstanding the Lebanese state’s formal constraints on Palestinian refugee employment, the accounts of Burj al-Barajneh camp’s

Palestinian inhabitants underscore how social relationships that pre-existed the displacement of the first generation in 1948, as well as the new relationships that emerged subsequently, facilitated the circumvention of those formal constraints—albeit in ways that simultaneously resisted and contributed to labour market segmentation. The multi-generational oral histories of Palestinian camp refugees in Burj al-Barajneh also highlight the problems inherent in treating these social relationships as an unchanging system of patron-client ties. Such a view precludes understanding of how the social and economic capital accrued through these relationships may be transformed, and may transform the relationships themselves, complicating both a celebration of refugee entrepreneurship as well as the portrayal of stateless labour as “bare life.”

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Chapter 3

Humanitarian Aid



Nisrin: "I want to stop working. I hate it. I come from work, and I just want to cry...I sleep every day for 1–2 h because when I get back from work, I have a pain in my neck. Work, then cook for the kids, clean the house. The kids know to leave me alone and be quiet when I sleep, or I will go crazy...There is more pressure on me when my husband isn't working... I have to be more careful...They feel less like a man...When he stays at home because he doesn't have work, it doesn't feel normal...He can't go anywhere because there is no money. He has to ask me (big smile). But when he is earning, I am not careful. When I'm angry, I show it."

(Fieldnotes dated September 2003)

The streets around the PRCS hospital and Sameera and Haneen's houses have been paved with tar. When I remarked on it, Hala said that now the water doesn't drain when it rains. She said that not a single engineer came to oversee the work. Yesterday when we visited Sameera in the morning, workmen were digging up the tarmac to expose the old drains. "What is this stupid and pointless work!" Hala exclaimed. I said, "They're exposing the drains." "Well why didn't they think of it earlier? They're just trying to steal everyone's money." Trying to make a bad joke out of it, I said, "Well this way they're trying to give people work." "They are stealing people's money," was her rejoinder. According to Abu Muhammad, UNRWA was given several million dollars to improve the infrastructure of the camp. They decided to sub-contract to a private company whose workers are untrained. They've now paved and unpaved the alleys three times.

(Fieldnotes dated June 2011)

These excerpts from my field notes highlight some of the ways in which the provision of humanitarian aid has shaped the political economy of Burj al-Barajneh camp. The first set of notes recount a conversation with a second-generation Palestinian woman refugee employed at the time in a local NGO as an afterschool teacher. The second set of notes refers to my initial impressions of returning after a 2-year absence. Both excerpts indicate the importance of humanitarian aid not only in terms of the services provided, but also as a source of employment for refugee and migrant labour. This complicates the representation of aid as encouraging refugee dependence. It also raises the following questions: i) How has the provision of aid to the Palestinian refugees inhabiting Burj al-Barajneh camp been shaped by regional and global shifts in the organization of aid provision? ii) How have these

shifts in aid provision been experienced by Palestinian camp refugees as beneficiaries and as humanitarian labour?

3.1 Problematizing Humanitarian Governance

Over the last two decades, critiques of humanitarianism have come to be dominated by the concept of “governance” (Barnett, 2011; Fassin, 2012; Feldman, 2014, 2018; Hanafi & Long, 2010; Moyn, 2020). This is understood as referring to formal procedures established with the stated goal of regulating and sustaining human existence. In other words, the administration of how basic infrastructure, potable water, waste management, energy, security, and the health and education services deemed necessary to human well-being are made available to a given group of people. This use of the term reflects the recognition that public services, which in many parts of the world had come to be provided through nation-states, have with the implementation of neoliberal reforms, been privatized and sub-contracted to “non-governmental” and “private” organizations (Betts, 2013; Duffield, 1997; Harvey, 2007; Moyn, 2020).

This conceptualization is also reflective of concomitant paradigm shifts in development thinking regarding regions referred to as “the Global South.” Subsequent to the oil price crises of the 1970s, large-scale, state directed infrastructure projects of national development, funded by loans from the US, the UK, and other former colonial powers, were replaced by small-scale and short-term projects with local NGO “partners.” Funds are made available through applications for grants and sub-contracts from the aid institutions of “Global North” states, multilateral organizations, and international “private” donors. This raises the issue of whose understanding of what is needed for human well-being is prioritized, as well as to whom local NGOs are ultimately accountable (Duffield, 1997; Mihr, 2018).

Analysts of humanitarianism as governance highlight contradictions between the humanitarian discourse of “compassion,” and efforts aimed at controlling and containing those identified as being in need (Fassin, 2012; Feldman, 2014, 2018; Moyn, 2020). Echoing Enlightenment critiques of absolutist states in eighteenth century Europe and twentieth century anti-colonial critiques (Latif, 2018, 2021), humanitarian governance is deemed illegitimate for not being representative of those it administers. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s analysis of power in societies deemed modern, and on Giorgio Agamben’s critique of the state, the provision of public services through humanitarian governance is viewed as rule through the production of “docile bodies” (Foucault, 1991, 1995) and reduction to “bare life” (Agamben, 1995, 1998).

Critiques of humanitarianism as governance highlight power inequalities in contexts and spaces ostensibly guided by a benevolent concern for fellow humans. Critics argue that the provision of what is needed to sustain life is deployed as a mechanism of control. What is provided is the base minimum, if that. Concern for suffering humanity is used as a moral justification for the exercise of this authority, as well as its illegitimate extension over non-citizens. Moreover, there is no

possibility for reciprocity in the relationship between the humanitarian and the beneficiary, as it consists of an unequal exchange in which the beneficiary is required to be grateful and prove their deservingness by “telling their story” (Fassin, 2012; Feldman, 2018). These analyses draw on older critiques of aid as a mask for Western imperialism (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh & Pacitto, 2020; Jad, 2009; Paulmann, 2013). At the same time, they point to contiguities in the procedures historically developed in parts of the world considered “the Global North” in order to address “the social problem” nationally (poverty alleviation), as well as transnationally (development and humanitarian aid). Lastly, they foreground the operation of a “moral economy” of sentiment used to justify violent intervention, both domestically and abroad (Fassin, 2012).

These analyses provide a powerful critique of humanitarianism, which emphasizes transnational processes and interconnections, and foregrounds the consequences of privatizing, sub-contracting, and outsourcing the provision of infrastructure and public services. However, the only consideration of historical shifts possible within such a framework is a teleology of an ever-encroaching power that exists apart from the human beings who wield it. While acknowledging the existence of different actors within humanitarian governance, this body of scholarship presents them as working seamlessly together toward an inexorable end; a phenomenon rarely observed in the actual operation of human groups.

In order to critique what is viewed as an illegitimate exercise of power justified by self-interested appeals to humanity, competition and conflicts occurring within and between state, “non-profit,” and “private” entities are disregarded. Neither is there a consideration of how this competition plays out in relation to the formal rules of “impartiality” and “neutrality,” that over the course of the twentieth century came to constitute the social field of transnational humanitarianism. This has the effect of obscuring spaces that such conflicts may open up for some beneficiaries/objects of humanitarian governance to accumulate social and economic capital—spaces not of resistance, but rather room to maneuver, enabling change—not necessarily for the better—to occur.

Moreover, teleological narratives of progressively increasing control make it more difficult to recognize the presentation of old solutions as innovations. An example is the recent revival of interest in and promotion of refugee livelihoods as a means of achieving self-sufficiency and reducing the burden on unwilling host nation-states (Easton-Calabria, 2015; Sayigh, 1952). Lastly, if the provision of what is needed for human well-being is viewed only as a technique of control, it becomes difficult to answer the question of how that provision should be organized. Given how onerous it is to perform reproductive labour in the absence of piped water and consistent access to fuel, refusing to consider the question of how to equitably organize the provision of basic infrastructure, comes across as an assertion of “privilege.”

Though the precise relationship between humanitarianism and capitalism remains contested, scholars concur that a “modern” concern for strangers in need, emerged over the course of the eighteenth century, alongside the global expansion of commodity production, long-distance trade, and monetary exchange (Barnett, 2011; Davis, 1987; Haskell, 1985; Paulmann, 2013). This concern was initially

articulated by members of the “bourgeoisie”—a new class that had emerged as a consequence of the increasing integration of different parts of the world into a capitalist economy led by European colonization and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. What continues to be debated is the extent to which this concern for suffering strangers—as articulated by white, bourgeois abolitionists for example—facilitated humanitarians’ self-deception about their implication in the suffering of the “freely” working local poor (Davis, 1987; Haskell, 1985).

Analyses of humanitarian governance argue that it is enabled by a moral economy of sentiment (Fassin, 2012, 2020; Feldman, 2018). Beneficiaries are required to demonstrate their abjection, deservingness, and gratitude by “telling their stories.” This also enables aid organizations to raise funds for their operating expenses. These analyses are an important intervention in debates regarding concepts of value within the contemporary global capitalist economy, since they highlight ways in which value is not limited to the monetary. However, unlike older understandings of the concept of moral economy (Thompson, 1971), these critiques of humanitarianism, appear to view what they deem “moral”—values and affects—as set over and apart from the organization of labour and the accumulation of capital.

In light of the global tiering of labour and the inequality of working conditions within occupations, regardless of their designation as “skilled” or “unskilled,” an understanding of what is deemed “moral” as existing autonomously of what is dismissed as “political economy”—the organization of labour and circulation of capital, appears disingenuous. An unwillingness to examine humanitarian aid provision in terms of flows of labour and capital precludes an understanding of the ways in which aid shapes the political economies of long-term refugee camps and the ways in which these economies are connected to their environ and to the global capitalist economy.

Humanitarian aid shapes the political economies of refugee camps and the regions in which they are located, not only through the provision of relief and basic welfare services, but also through the employment of a limited number of refugees and host state citizens in the provision of aid. A focus on the moral economy of humanitarian aid provision abstracted from a consideration of its political economy, may obscure shifts over time in who inhabits the subject positions of “humanitarian” and “beneficiary” by obscuring the social and economic capital accumulation made possible for a small number of beneficiaries through waged and salaried employment as humanitarian labour.

This chapter proposes instead to focus on historic shifts in the organization and provision of humanitarian aid in terms of labour and capital. Such an approach may facilitate a better understanding of how humanitarian aid provision to Palestinians refugees in Burj al-Barajneh camp has been shaped by broader shifts in the global aid industry, shifts that have often presented old solutions such as the employment of refugees in host economies as innovations (Easton-Calabria, 2015). It also foregrounds the significant role played by the political economies of host states and their shifting relations with sending regions in shaping host state policy towards refugees, including the formal classification of migrants as forced or voluntary, and the kinds of aid made available to them.

An examination of humanitarian aid providers as employers, as well as the social capital required to access the services and employment they provide, may facilitate a better understanding of the stratifications that emerge in long-term refugee camps, as well as shed light on ways in which aid provision can exacerbate labour market segmentation in host economies (Jansen, 2018; Omata, 2017). Moreover, such an approach foregrounds the variability and shifts in refugees' experiences of humanitarian aid that is obscured by a primary focus on the governance of refugees' "form of life/legitimate way of being." Accounts of the invariable rhythm of this life (Feldman, 2018), echo narratives of the immutable tradition deemed to govern the life of the autochthonous native.

Lastly, if humanitarian governance is deemed illegitimate on grounds of being funded and administered by "Western" secular and Christian organizations, are problems of unequal exchange resolved when aid is provided by humanitarian actors perceived as originating from regions considered "the Global South?" In what follows, these questions are examined through an analysis of the various local, regional, international, state, multilateral, and "private" initiatives that have provided humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh camp since its establishment in 1949.

3.2 A Historical Overview of Aid Provision to Palestinians in Burj al-Barajneh Camp

Viewing humanitarian aid solely in terms of a homogenizing mechanism of biopolitics—or from the opposite end of the political spectrum, encouraging "dependence"—may obscure differences in what is made available to different groups, or to the same group over a period of time. What is provided, and how that provision is organized, in terms of its funding and the labour employed and/or mobilized on an unpaid basis, are shaped by the political economies of donor and host states, local attitudes towards the particular group of refugees, as well as local views about the state's responsibilities towards citizens and non-citizens. Donors' and humanitarian actors' paradigms regarding aid may be significantly modified by local conditions. The spaces to maneuver that this may open up for some refugees problematize their characterization as compliant objects of governmentality. At the same time, it cannot be assumed that the agency made possible for some refugees results in beneficial change for all. The following section provides a brief overview of the major providers of humanitarian aid to Palestinian refugees inhabiting Burj al-Barajneh camp, as well as historic shifts in the organization of provision.

Those Palestinians who sought refuge in Lebanon, from the violence accompanying the establishment of the nation-state of Israel in 1948, were displaced to a political economy organized on sectarian lines. The regions which were brought together under the authority of the French Mandate for Lebanon in 1920, had been connected to the world economy through commodity production, trade, and labour

migration since Ottoman times (Amel, 2020; Gilsenan, 1984; Khuri, 1969; Owen, 1981; Traboulsi, 2007). A long-term consequence of the intensification of these ties was the emergence of local political economies in which opportunities for capital accumulation and wage labour were linked to belonging to particular religious sects. Under the French Mandate, sectarian belonging was formalized as the official basis for political participation (Amel, 2020; Traboulsi, 2007).

This status quo was kept in place by the nation-state established at independence from French Mandate rule in 1946. In addition to maintaining the existing sectarian balance of power, the new state was firmly committed to *laissez faire* principles and minimal public expenditure on basic infrastructure and social welfare. Education, healthcare, and other social services would continue to be provided by the charitable organizations which each religious sect had established for its own members (Cammett, 2014). These charitable organizations had been endowed by the “new” elites that had emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century as a consequence of the heightened integration of the region into what had become a globe spanning capitalist economy.

The establishment of “modern” charitable societies in the Ottoman Empire during the late 19th and early twentieth centuries, by bourgeois women who were often related to prominent male nationalist leaders has been well documented by historians of gender (Fleischmann, 2003; Thompson, 1999). These developments were part of a world-wide phenomenon of bourgeois women in imperial powers as well as in colonized regions leading movements for moral and social reform, facilitated by the view that as women they were “naturally” disposed to good works. At the turn of the nineteenth century, in the Ottoman Empire—as well as in the rapidly expanding US—women’s increasing participation in public affairs was enabled by the expansion of women’s formal education and increased leisure time with the attending desire to put this accumulated capital to “good use” (Faroghi, 2023; Tyrrell, 2015). Involvement in the provision of formal education and social welfare services was seen as a socially appropriate way for bourgeois women to participate in the public life of the “imagined community” their families sought to lead. At the same time, these services varied greatly with the differential capital accumulation of the elite of the particular group in question.

Research conducted in the archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in Geneva, as well as reports published by British and American aid workers (de St. Aubin, 1949; Richardson, 1950; Soltau, 1949) indicate that assistance to those dispossessed by the establishment of the nation-state of Israel (1948), was initially provided by representatives of the newly independent Lebanese state, local charities affiliated with different Muslim and Christian sects, the Lebanese Red Cross, and by the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees (UNRPR)—a temporary initiative authorized by a UN General Assembly resolution in November 1948. The UNRPR was mandated with the coordination of the relief efforts of a number of humanitarian aid organizations, such as the World Council of Churches, the Near East Foundation, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the League of Red Cross Societies (LRCS), of which the Lebanese Red

Cross was a member. This multiplicity of aid providers may in part be reflective of the hegemonic view at the time that the provision of what was needed for human subsistence was a matter for voluntary associations and religious charities, rather than a primary responsibility of the state to its citizens (Easton-Calabria, 2015).

As in the case of several former Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, a Red Cross society was first established during the French Mandate, in the regions which later became the independent nation-state of Lebanon (Benthall, 1997; Soltau, 1949). Named the Franco-Lebanese Red Cross society, it was co-founded by the wife of the High Commissioner for the French Mandate and the wife of a prominent local Catholic judge. The society was staffed by young women volunteers from well-to-do local families, who by visiting the sick “gained some knowledge of how poor people lived” (Soltau, 1949, p. 312). After national independence in 1946, the society was renamed the Lebanese Red Cross, but the manner of its operation was not significantly changed. This may in part account for why according to the LRCS report to the UNRPR for August–October 1949, “In the beginning the Lebanese Red Cross Society showed very little interest in medical care for the refugees.”¹ The primarily Sunni Muslim Palestinian refugees might not have been considered by the leadership of the Lebanese Red Cross as falling within their remit. Eventually an agreement was reached. Under its terms the LRCS was responsible for paying the salaries of medical personnel and providing medical supplies for two mobile clinics, which were operated by the Lebanese Red Cross Society.

LRCS reports to the UNRPR also indicate difficulties in maintaining cooperative relationships with the Lebanese state. Consider the following excerpts from the reports for November 1949 and January 1950:

In a small country like Lebanon, which is already densely populated and has a delicate balance to maintain between Moslems and Christians, refugees are not allowed to accept employment, and the Government has shown a tendency to hand over all responsibility for their welfare to the League.²

In Lebanon, the Governmental Central Committee for Refugees has decided to relieve itself of the responsibility for paying for water and electric supply to refugee camps and is looking to the League to defray this expenditure. Negotiations on the matter are proceeding, and it is hoped that the government will continue to discharge this small liability.³

These excerpts highlight some of the ways in which in the immediate aftermath of their forced displacement, the humanitarian aid provided to Palestinian refugees, was shaped not only by the geopolitical balance of power at the time, but also by

¹LRCS. (1949, August–October) *Report to the United Nations Relief to Palestine Refugees on the part of the League of Red Cross Societies in the Palestine Refugees Relief Programme for the months of August, September, and October 1949*. IFRC archives (LRCS Box 19,740), Geneva, Switzerland.

²LRCS. (1949, November). *Report to the United Nations Relief to Palestine Refugees on the part of the League of Red Cross Societies in the Palestine Refugees Relief Programme for the month of November 1949*. IFRC archives (LRCS Box 19,740), Geneva, Switzerland.

³LRCS. (1950, January). *Report to the United Nations Relief to Palestine Refugees on the part of the League of Red Cross Societies in the Palestine Refugees Relief Programme for the month of January 1950*. IFRC archives (LRCS Box 19,740), Geneva, Switzerland.

Lebanon's sectarian capitalist economy. The quotes underscore the need, on the part of humanitarian aid organizations, to negotiate consent and establish cooperation with host nation-states, in order to be able to provide services. Lastly, the quotes indicate conflict over who should shoulder the fiscal responsibility of aid provision. Analyses of humanitarian aid that focus on its "moral economy" in isolation of its political economy, make it easier to disregard the question of how what is needed to sustain human existence should be provided, if public authorities are unable or unwilling to facilitate equitable re-distribution.

This question is also brought up by the archival records of debate over the criteria for determining who of those dispossessed by the establishment of the nation-state of Israel were in need, and hence eligible to receive assistance. LRCS reports to the UNRPR indicate that a census was conducted in February and March 1949, but accurate figures were difficult to obtain for a number of reasons. Refugees inflated figures in order to receive more rations, and it was difficult for "already overburdened field workers"⁴ to carry out detailed investigations. There was constant movement with new refugees arriving from Palestine, and existing refugees seeking to move to Lebanon from Syria or the Transjordan in search of opportunities for work. Moreover, as the conflict continued increasing numbers of refugees exhausted the resources they had possessed and were made destitute. Another issue was the eligibility of the large number of Lebanese who had been living and working in Palestine when war broke out. Some were Bedouin, others were labour migrants, and yet others had purchased land and permanently resettled in Palestine. Very few had documents that could prove their nationality. Lastly, "powerful local political influences" were brought to bear upon the registration of "certain refugees of doubtful authenticity."⁵ Hence, the LRCS proposed the following definition of eligibility to the UN:

Any person who had permanent residence and principal occupation in Palestine from which as a result of the Palestinian conflict he has been deprived and who is without sufficient resources for basic maintenance shall be considered a refugee eligible for UNRPR relief.

These eligibility criteria were maintained by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the agency "temporarily" established by the UN in 1949, to provide aid to Palestinian refugees upon the completion of operations by the LRCS, and the other humanitarian organizations who had responded to the UN's call for assistance.

Palestinian camp refugees' own accounts of this period, however, emphasized pre-existing ties between notable families from Tarshiha village in the Galilee and

⁴LRCS. (1950). *Report of the Relief Operation in behalf of the Palestine Refugees conducted by the Middle East Commission of the League of Red Cross Societies in Conjunction with the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees 1949–1950*. IFRC archives (LRCS Box 19,724), Geneva, Switzerland p. 38.

⁵LRCS. (1950). *Report of the Relief Operation in behalf of the Palestine Refugees conducted by the Middle East Commission of the League of Red Cross Societies in Conjunction with the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees 1949–1950*. IFRC archives (LRCS Box 19,724), Geneva, Switzerland p. 45.

Burj al-Barajneh village on the outskirts of Beirut. Consider the following excerpt from the oral history of a second-generation refugee collected in 2006.

Marwan: Some of Tarshiha's inhabitants came to Burj al-Barajneh, to an area one kilometer away from what is now the camp. Immediately, the grandfather of the minister Bassem Sabeh took care of them, because of his patriotism and his love for the Palestinian people. Also, he was the *mukhtār*, and at that time the *mukhtār* had an important social role. He was considered a leader. So, the inhabitants of his area treated us well. Some stayed at the mosque and others stayed in houses.

Nadia: Did they rent the houses?

Marwan: No, they didn't pay rent. He let them stay for free. Also, they stayed at the mosque. They stayed for a while at these places...Now I will tell you something personal. My father's uncle was one of the notables of Tarshiha and of the Galilee. He was renting a plot of land near what became the camp. This land belonged to the Sabeh family. Because my uncle was a leader of his village, Tarshiha, the notables of Burj al-Barajneh reached an agreement with him.

Nadia: Did they know him from before?

Marwan: He knew the grandfather of al-Sabeh because he had trading relations with him. He was an agent for the British tobacco company. He wanted to help his relatives, so they stayed in the area. Nahid will show you where it is. Near the entrance to the camp.

Nadia: Near Ain al-Sikke?

Marwan: No. Inside the camp. Near Bassam's internet cafe. A little further. That's where they put their tents.

Nadia: Where did they get the tents from?

Marwan: From the Red Cross.

Nadia: Yes, because there wasn't UNRWA in the beginning.

Marwan: Not UNRWA, the Red Cross. So, they started with these tents. And the people who were staying at the mosque, some of them moved to that area. The land was sandy. After a while, the owner of the land came.

Nadia: Which family was he from?

Marwan: They said he was from the Mnaynmeh family.

Nadia: Were they Shi'a?

Marwan: Shia? What did she say? I don't think he was Shi'a. So, this man wanted to sue them. He wanted them to leave his land. There was a military officer named Jindary. He was a Lebanese leader. He said to the man, "These people are refugees. You have two choices: return them to their lands or find them a land." This officer was very cooperative with the Palestinians. They were living in a miserable situation. So, he found them a place. At that time, it was a very deserted area, so the refugees refused to move there. The officer understood them. He said, "Where do you want to put these people? In a desert? These people want to work. They want to live their lives." So, he said to them, "Stay where you live now, until you can return to your country." In their conscience, they were sure they would return soon. So that is how the camp began. The Red Cross was distributing supplies for the people. Then UNRWA was established.

This account problematizes representations of refugees as "speechless emissaries" ascribed to humanitarian governance (Malkki, 1996). Marwan's account makes clear that the establishment of Burj al-Barajneh camp came about as a consequence of pre-1948 socioeconomic ties between village notables; ties that traversed the borders demarcated by the British and French Mandates for Palestine and Lebanon. The account also problematizes scholarly claims about forced displacement leveling all pre-displacement stratifications and distinctions (Sayigh, 1978), by highlighting the important role played by refugees' differential possession of moveable

social and economic capital in determining the kinds of assistance they were able to secure for themselves after being displaced. Marwan's emphasis on the authority held by his great-uncle, an authority which continued to be recognized in displacement, might in part constitute a response to the long-standing disparagement of Palestinian camp refugees as squatters and usurpers. Lastly, the account highlights the limited space to maneuver that may be opened up for some refugees as a consequence of internal differences and conflicts within and between the various institutions that comprise a (host) state.

In 1949, the UN General Assembly established the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for a 3-year period, to provide assistance to those Palestinian refugees who were determined to be "in need," and had sought refuge in the neighbouring nation-states of Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. This "temporary" measure was in response to the failure of the peace negotiations mediated by the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP). Both the Israeli and Arab governments refused the UNCCP's compromise proposal to allow some of the refugees to return to their homes, while resettling the remainder in neighbouring states (Albanese & Takkenberg, 2020; Schiff, 1995).

After the failure of the negotiations, the UNCCP invited a US delegation to visit the region and recommend a program for the integration of the refugees that would simultaneously promote the economic development of the region and make the refugees "self-sufficient." The delegation was led by the president of the Tennessee Valley Authority, an agency that had been established by the US federal government during the Great Depression to implement a program of economic development in the Tennessee Valley. The Clapp Mission as it came to be known, recommended the establishment of an agency under the auspices of the UN which would lead a program of "public works" aimed at the economic development of the region. Refugees would provide the labour for these projects which would both generate employment and stimulate economic growth, phasing out the need for international assistance (Albanese & Takkenberg, 2020; Sayigh, 1952; Schiff, 1995).

The establishment of a humanitarian agency mandated by the international community with facilitating the resettlement of a particular group of "forced" migrants was in keeping with the migration management practices of the interwar period (Easton-Calabria, 2015; Karatani, 2005; Long, 2013). The League of Nation's High Commissioner for Refugees, established after WWI, dealt with specific groups of people displaced by particular "high-profile" conflicts, such as those fleeing the Bolshevik Revolution and survivors of the Armenian genocide. The Office of the High Commissioner operated on a strict "no charity" policy and had a very limited budget. The dispossessed were expected to contribute their labour and any capital they possessed towards efforts to sustain and resettle them.

Nevertheless, a key difference with the inter-war period was the significant financial and political support provided by the US for the establishment of UNRWA (Bocco, 2009; Schiff, 1995; Albanese & Takkenberg, 2020). Material from the IFRC archives suggests that the United States' Cold War project of battling "the spread of Communism" and Soviet hegemony, may have played an important role

in directing this support.⁶ However, by the mid-1950s, opposition from Palestinian refugees and host-states, as well as concerns about mounting costs, led to a major shift in UNRWA policy. Refugees continued to reject efforts to resettle them, and host nation-states refused to be responsible for the provision of relief assistance. The program of regional economic development and refugee employment through the construction of large scale “public works” was replaced by the provision of primary healthcare, formal education, and vocational training.

UNRWA’s provision of formal education was initially criticized by some Palestinian scholars as inadequate (Abu-Lughod, 1973; Sayigh, 1952). In the early years, schooling was limited to the provision of primary education, and the refugee teachers hired were thought to be insufficiently educated themselves. Moreover, given the need for all members of the household to labour for its survival, student drop-out rates were high. However, at the time, public provision of education for host nation-state citizens was extremely limited, and in Lebanon, organized through the charitable foundations of religious sects. In 2003, when I began fieldwork in Burj al-Barajneh camp, it was not uncommon to hear of Lebanese families attempting to get their children registered in UNRWA schools. Those Palestinian refugees who were able to graduate from UNRWA schools during the 1960s–1970s, were often able to find “skilled” employment in the oil producing countries in the region.

Criticisms of UNRWA operations in terms of an exercise of “humanitarian governance” (Feldman, 2018; Hanafi & Long, 2010), point to the significance of the social services it provides, as well as its importance as an employer of Palestinian refugee labour, given formal restrictions on Palestinian “skilled” employment in Lebanon. However, these criticisms may obscure the limited nature of the services provided. UNRWA does not administer, or police Palestinian refugee camps. Neither does it provide basic infrastructure in the form of piped water, electricity, or telecommunications services to the inhabitants of camps. Moreover, its existence remains temporary, and its capacity to provide services is entirely dependent on the consent of the host nation-state—or in the case of Gaza and the West Bank, the occupying power—as well as the donor funds it is able to secure for each budget cycle. Lastly, though UNRWA employment has afforded some camp refugees opportunities for salaried labour with benefits, their number has always been very small in relation to those in need of regular work. This, in turn, has contributed to uneven accumulation and stratification within camp communities. Consider the following excerpt from my field notes, dated September 2003.

Story of Palestinian politician’s wife who put all the seamstresses in the camp out of business. Until 2 years ago, families made uniforms at home, or used hand me downs, or paid seamstresses in the camp. Now, every year, small changes are made so that new uniforms have to be obtained. The politician’s wife secured a contract from UNRWA to supply the uniforms. She can’t sew herself, so she buys the material in Syria and has it sewn there because it’s cheaper.

⁶LRCS. (1950, April). *Report to the United Nations Relief to Palestine Refugees on the part of the League of Red Cross Societies in the Palestine Refugees Relief Programme for the month of April 1950*. IFRC archives (LRCS Box 19,740), Geneva, Switzerland.

This account highlights some of the ways in which the provision of humanitarian aid can shape the political economies of refugee camps as well as of the broader region in which camps are located, enabling capital accumulation on the part of a small number of refugees. In addition to problematizing the representation of refugee camps as isolated from their environ, the account highlights possibilities for agency that humanitarian aid may facilitate for a small number of refugees at the expense of the group as a whole.

Uneven capital accumulation also played an important role in the establishment of Palestinian organizations that provide healthcare and welfare services to primarily—but not exclusively—Palestinian camp refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Gaza, and the West Bank. By the late 1960s, a new Palestinian elite had emerged in diaspora linked to the post WWII growth of the oil economy in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf protectorates (Smith, 1986a, 1986b). The growth of these economies provided Palestinian entrepreneurs with new investment opportunities, which with their knowledge of English, contacts built during the Mandate, and participation in transnational trade networks, they were well positioned to capitalize on. Palestinian professionals who migrated to the Gulf during this period, were able to form companies that were highly lucrative even before the rise of oil prices in the 1970s.

By the mid-1960s, Palestinian entrepreneurs led several corporations and trading companies that had built or were constructing large infrastructure projects in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and other Gulf states. This brought them into competition with emerging local elites and middle classes, who in Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, brought pressure on their rulers to implement policies that would privilege “autochthonous” citizens. Unable to transform the economic capital they had accumulated into political power, many Palestinian elite in the regional diaspora donated to the different political parties that comprised the PLO, in particular, to Fateh and the social welfare organizations affiliated with it (Brand, 1988; Smith, 1986a, 1986b).

In 1967, in order to ameliorate the limited health care services provided through UNRWA, Palestinian doctors and medical staff, who were members of Fateh, established a medical service for Palestinian camp refugees in Jordan (Brand, 1988). The following year, the organization changed its name from Fateh Medical Services to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS). Soon after the Palestinian National Council declared the PRCS to be the official health organization of the PLO. During this period, the PRCS established itself in Lebanon and Syria, and expanded its operations and range of services. These developments were in part shaped by shifts in the relationship between the Palestinian political parties and host nation-states. In 1969, Yasir Arafat, the head of Fateh and Emile Bustani, the commander of the Lebanese armed forces reached an agreement in Cairo by the terms of which the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon were removed from the authority of the Lebanese deuxième bureau and placed under the authority of the PLO. The PLO was also permitted to launch military operations against Israel from the southern border regions of Lebanon. In 1970, after its expulsion from Jordan, the PLO established its base of operations in Lebanon.

The PRCS set up several hospitals in Lebanon during the period that the PLO's primary base of operations was in Lebanon (1969–1982). Most of these hospitals also had dental clinics. Medications were provided free of charge, while services were either free or at minimal cost. Patients who required treatment in facilities outside the PRCS system had all expenses covered. The PRCS also ran vaccination drives and public health campaigns in the refugee camps. The PLO provided half of the operating budget of the PRCS. The remainder came from donations from other Red Cross and Crescent societies, and from PRCS chapters in Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, the UAE, Qatar, Morocco, and Sudan. Assistance was also provided by the World Health Organization and supporting societies in France, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the US. (Rubenberg, 1983). PRCS services were not restricted to Palestinians, but were open to all those in need. This was particularly significant in Lebanon, given minimal state provision of healthcare and its organization along sectarian lines.

Most of the doctors, nurses, and other medical staff employed at the PRCS were and continue to be Palestinians. Many grew up in the camps they continue to serve. Their education and training were made possible by scholarships provided by the Cuban and Eastern Bloc states, and disbursed through the political parties comprising the PLO. Some scholars view the provision of these scholarships as evidence of Third World internationalism—a transnational movement of solidarity during the Cold War between nationalisms that saw themselves as allies in their struggle against Western imperialism (Khalili, 2007). Other scholars consider the scholarships—as well as the PLO's provision of welfare services—as neopatrimonialism aimed at maintaining support for the PLO among Palestinian camp refugees (Fiddian-Qasbiyeh, 2015; Issa, 2021). At the same time, the terms of the scholarships—recipients were required to return to serve their nations of origin—as well as the fields of study—medicine, engineering, dentistry, media and communications—support recent re-assessments of the Cold War as a competition between “socialist” and “capitalist” conceptions of development (Bernard, 2023; Griffiths & Cardona, 2015; Katsakioris, 2021).

The PLO's withdrawal from Lebanon in 1982, and the increasingly violent conflict between the political parties comprising it, began the process of a steady decline in support from the Palestinian elite in the regional diaspora (Smith, 1986a, 1986b). Funding for the PLO's welfare wings was decreased, necessitating reductions in the services they provided. The situation worsened over the course of the 1990s with the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and the end of the Cold War. The PLO had also lost political and financial backing from many of the major oil producing states in the region. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 brought matters to a head when the PLO did not condemn the Iraqi state's actions. Kuwait and other nation-states in the Gulf retaliated with a mass expulsion of Palestinians. A few years later, after the signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO (1993–1995), international and diaspora funds were re-directed to Gaza and the West Bank, as the designated territories of the proposed Palestinian nation-state.

These regional developments occurred alongside global shifts in views regarding the relationship of the nation-state to its citizens. In many regions referred to as “the

Global North,” state provision of infrastructure and social services was reduced and privatized through outsourcing and sub-contracting. These measures were promoted as reforms that would decrease government expenditure and citizens’ “dependence” on the state, while at the same time increasing the efficiency of service provision by creating markets for public services and encouraging private entrepreneurship in its provision (Duffield, 1997; Harvey, 2007). In regions referred to as “the Global South,” the reduction of state expenditure on social welfare and the privatization of state-owned infrastructure were key components of the structural readjustment programs required by the World Bank and the IMF in order to receive assistance with foreign debt management. In place of state provision of public services, NGOs were promoted as facilitating democratization and the growth of civil society in parts of the world whose development was deemed to have been hindered by authoritarian rule (Duffield, 1997; Jad, 2009).

Neoliberal reforms dovetailed with shifts in development paradigms in ways that encouraged the proliferation of NGOs and the growth of a market in aid (Duffield, 1997). In the immediate post-WWII period, development thinking was led by the idea of “convergence through modernization” understood in unilinear and universal terms (Bernstein, 1971; Portes, 1976). Policy makers in former colonial powers as well as in their former colonies believed this convergence to be best achieved by large-scale, state-led, infrastructure projects that would stimulate industrialization in regions that had formerly been under colonial rule and generate wage labour opportunities. The projects were funded by loans from former colonial powers, the US, and the USSR, and employed donor states’ citizens as “skilled labour”/technical experts.

By the 1990s, this had given way to short-term “partnerships” with local communities mediated by regional and international NGOs, with the goals of “empowering” local communities and “building their capacity.” Donors preferred to fund NGOs for short-term projects through a formally competitive process of applications, rather than providing direct assistance to internationally recognized states. This was particularly the case for those postcolonial nation-states that were experiencing violent conflict, as donors sought to distance themselves from governments perceived as perpetuating human rights violations (Duffield, 1997). In addition, an increasing number of UN responsibilities were subcontracted to the aid agencies of “Global North” states such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department of the European Commission (ECHO). These organizations further sub-contract to regional and local NGOs. Fierce competition for the same sources of funds has had the consequence of discouraging collaboration between local NGOs, to the detriment of the services they provide, and accountability to the local communities they claim to empower (Duffield, 1997; Mihr, 2018; Suleiman, 1997).

In Lebanon, the provision of formal education, healthcare, and welfare services had historically been organized through the charitable foundations of different religious sects that were endowed by the elite of those religious sects. Access to public services was facilitated by *wāstā*—the social capital accrued from belonging to the sect or through engagement in unequal relationships of exchange with middle class

and elite members of the sect. Viewing these relationships in terms of a “traditional” system of patron-clientage obscures shifts in who was party to the relationships, what was exchanged, and how the exchange was understood by those involved in it (Gilsenan, 1977; Lomnitz, 1988; Peters, 1972). It also obscures the operation of unequal relationships of exchange in organizations deemed “modern”—such as state welfare agencies, multilateral aid organizations, “private” philanthropic foundations, NGOs—and the process of applying for grants and sub-contracts.

The establishment of the PLO’s base of operations in Lebanon in 1969, shifted the balance of power not only between Palestinian and Lebanese elites, but also between Palestinian camp refugees and their Lebanese class counterparts. The PRCS and the social welfare wings of the PLO were significant not only for their provision of healthcare, education, and welfare services, but also as a source of salaried employment that could improve living conditions and facilitate class mobility, albeit for a limited number of Palestinian camp refugees and their Lebanese class counterparts. The consequences of the PLO’s withdrawal from Lebanon in 1982, fell heavily on Palestinian camp refugees. In addition to being held responsible for the Lebanese civil war, Palestinian camp refugees experienced the curtailment of much needed welfare services at the same time that one of the few avenues of salaried employment that had been open to them was closed.

Over the course of the 1990s, the attenuated social welfare wings of several Palestinian political parties, were reconstituted as NGOs registered with the Lebanese government. Other NGOs were founded by local activists who had been part of middle-class, leftist circles sympathetic to the project of Palestinian-Lebanese solidarity. NGOs affiliated with newly emerging Islamist political parties were also established. The Lebanese state’s restrictions on Palestinians forming “autonomous associations” were circumvented by NGOs constituting administrative boards comprised of Lebanese citizens, and led by well-known Palestinian activists (Suleiman, 1997). Palestinian NGOs remain heavily reliant on international donors, and their credibility is frequently questioned by Palestinian camp refugees. At the same time, they have become an important avenue for “skilled” labour and precarious salaried employment for younger generations of Palestinian camp refugees attempting to secure middle class stability on the basis of the higher education that their parents worked hard to provide for them.

3.3 Depoliticization?

Critiques of “humanitarian governance” build on older criticisms of aid as a strategy of de-politicization. This raises the question of how “politics” and “the political” are understood. Older criticisms of UNRWA viewed its creation and continued existence as a tool of US and British neo-imperialism aimed at making Palestinian refugees “dependent,” “more comfortable,” and hence, less “revolutionary” (Fiddian-Qasmieh, 2019; Schiff, 1995). The proliferation of NGOs was critiqued in a similar vein as a new form of “dependence” on “the West,” aimed at coopting local

social movements in postcolonial nation-states by encouraging the formation of a “globalized elite” accountable to foreign donors rather than to local communities (Jad, 2009).

Building on these older critiques, more recently, it has been argued that humanitarian governance depoliticizes by perpetually deferring the question of legitimacy in approaching the situation as “temporary,” and in refusing to see refugee camps as “political spaces” (Feldman, 2014, 2018). That UNRWA was established to facilitate Palestinian refugees’ resettlement in neighbouring host states, is indisputable, as is the considerable support that the UN agency received from the US government in the past. What is debatable is whether this indicates a refusal to see refugee camps as “political spaces.” The understanding of “politics” underlying this critique, appears to disregard any initiative that does not take the form of political parties and internationally recognized states. It presumes that in losing their claim on their state of origin, refugees are uniformly dispossessed of the capacity to act. Moreover, it dismisses refugees’ own attempts to secure the material conditions of their existence as “reduction to bare life.”

Consider the following excerpt from the oral history of a first-generation Palestinian woman refugee collected during fieldwork in Burj al-Barajneh camp in 2006.

Imm Wissam: As I said before, the Lebanese used to say to us, “If you had been *mnāh*, you wouldn’t have left your country. They blame the elders, but there was nothing at that time... We were living in peace. We had land. We used to plant the land and sell the harvest. It was a beautiful life. It’s true I was only 10 years old, but I’ll never forget those days or how we used to live... Some, they do research about what the UN did for us, and they ask us was the UN useful for us, or not? In my opinion the UN wasn’t useful for us, because *yumnaḥūnā* everything, schools, flour, rice, sugar, supplies. These supplies were good for poor people, but they weren’t good for the people who had land. They say there is no surrogate for our land. From the beginning, if the UN hadn’t offered these services, we might have been returned to Palestine by now. If we had refused everything the UN gave, we might have returned. Do you remember the displaced Palestinians who stayed at Marj al-Zhour? Lebanon didn’t welcome them. They spent 6 months in Lebanon under the rain, then they returned to Palestine. If the UN and Lebanon hadn’t welcomed us and offered these services, we might have returned to Palestine. Also, if Jordan and Egypt hadn’t welcomed the Palestinians, we might have returned to Palestine.

Imm Wissam’s assessment of the humanitarian assistance provided by the UN concurs with older criticisms of UNRWA as making Palestinian refugees “more comfortable” and “less revolutionary.” The word *yumnaḥūnā* can be translated as “they gave us”, “they granted us” or “they afforded us.” The displaced Palestinians she spoke of were several hundred Hamas and Islamic Jihad activists who were deported by the Israeli state in 1992 to a village on the border with Lebanon, in retaliation for the abduction of an IDF soldier. The activists sheltered in tents until their return was negotiated. Imm Wissam’s account highlights the wide range of relationships to land obscured by the use of the term *fellaḥ* (peasant). She explained that the humanitarian assistance provided through the UN could not compensate families such as her own for what they lost. Unlike landless agrarian workers—also referred to as *fellaḥīn*—her family lived on and lived from the land they owned. The loss of

autonomy and dignity that ensued with their forced displacement is alluded to in the first sentence by the word *mnāḥ*. Literally, “good”, the word also connotes physical well-being, as well as moral rectitude.

Imm Wissam’s account supports the claim that the provision of humanitarian assistance can contribute to labour market segmentation by subsidizing the cost of reproducing refugee labour (Sayigh, 1952). The receipt of relief may enable refugees to offer their labour at rates that would be too low for locals. This provides employers with a bargaining tool with which to force down wages and working conditions, heightening resentment on the part of locals, particularly if the host state’s provision of welfare services to its own citizens is limited. This raises the question of whether it is possible for the provision of what is needed to sustain human existence to not be political, when that provision is precarious, uneven, and facilitated by the possession of capital?

Critics of humanitarianism as governance have also argued that aid provision depoliticizes by operating as an economy of morals (Fassin, 2012, 2020). Regardless of the intentions of the humanitarian, the unequal conditions of the social relationship between benefactor and beneficiary, “make compassion a moral sentiment with no possible reciprocity” (Fassin, 2012, p. 3). The only “counter gift” with which the beneficiary can respond, is by telling their story of suffering and redemption. In this view, the moral economy of humanitarianism depoliticizes, as it does not permit the beneficiary to demand their right. The inequality of the exchanges comprising humanitarianism cannot and should not be denied. However, the terms of the critique raise the question of what might be obscured by this conceptualization of moral economy. Consider the following excerpt from field notes about Burj al-Barajneh camp written in 2003:

October 22, 2003

Strange experience today when helping Hanan write thank you letters to her “mum” in Germany and her “father” in Malaysia for the money they send her. Her mother interjects with what she thinks is appropriate/necessary for Hanan to say in the letters. Thanks for the money. Greetings and regards. A few sentences about Palestine and how bad things are over there (Hanan must affirm her connection to them? Why can’t she talk about the awfulness of life in Beirut? What is the reason for this?) and how this makes her really sad. Preparations for Ramadan in the letter for the Malaysian, but not in the letter for the German. Her mother and I both insist on this (instinctively?) but Hanan doesn’t understand why. I find myself putting appropriate “thanks”, “I am a genuine case,” “I am using your money well” sorts of expressions in the letter I dictate to Hanan. Hanan says that she likes her German “mum” better than her Malaysian “father”, as her “mum” visits her almost every year and takes her to fun places and really cares about/gives her what she wants. Her father just sends money and a letter but never visits, even though in each letter Hanan asks him to. “Maybe it is difficult for him because he works.” “Maybe,” I suggest, “He can’t get a visa for Lebanon.” Hanan looks quite surprised and disbelieving until I explain my own visa story. Perhaps because of the closer relationship she feels (and her mother also feels) towards her German “mum,” the letter to her has a detailed paragraph about the health of everyone in her family. Not listing this to appear a “truly needy case” but because this is genuinely the news of her family she considers important to share with her “mum”.

Hanan’s mother and I knew each other from the local NGO at which she worked, and where I was volunteering during field research. She asked me to help her

daughter as her own English language skills were limited. Having had to write several such letters for the scholarships I had received, I was glad to help. As the notes indicate, an abstraction of moral economy from political economy may obscure the very limited space for the beneficiary to maneuver in, opened up by the economy itself.

Hanan was able to formulate her claims in the discourse of kinship, with regards to what was due to her as an adoptive child. Her preference for her German “mum” who treated her as a person, rather than as a religious obligation or a cause, as well as the information she decided to include in her letter problematizes the claim that the only possible relationship is one of indebtedness; the only counter gift to present oneself as the deserving pitiable object sought by the benefactor. Moreover, it can be argued that in conditions of precarity, the considered presentation of a self as “deserving,” is a deeply political act. Lastly, the account problematizes the claim that humanitarian actors from regions referred to as “the Global South” provide an alternative to “traditional” modernizing and secular humanitarian aid organizations from regions considered “the Global North” with regards to the power inequalities between benefactor and beneficiary, and the imperative to demonstrate deservingness (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh & Pacitto, 2020).

3.4 Refugees as Humanitarian Labour

Since the 1990s, the “aid industry” has become an important source of salaried employment in postcolonial nation-states for the increasing number of university graduates seeking to attain, or to maintain middle-classness, previously securable through employment in state bureaucracies (Clark, 2004; Farah, 2009; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2019; Pascucci, 2019). Given the Lebanese state’s restrictions on Palestinian labour, humanitarian aid organizations have historically served as an avenue for a limited number of camp refugees to secure salaried employment and accumulate social capital within their communities. At the same time, wages, working conditions, and terms of employment for refugee labour have varied with classifications of skill, the labour practices of a given organization, as well as the funds it is able to raise.

In the early years, Palestinian camp refugees employed by UNRWA tended to be engaged in work considered “unskilled” and hired on a temporary basis. In subsequent generations, the attainment of formal education through UNRWA schooling, enabled some camp refugees to secure “skilled” work that was better remunerated in terms of wages, duration of contract, job security, and provision for sickness and retirement. This facilitated their migration out of Burj al-Barajneh camp. However, in recent decades, working conditions, particularly in lower ranked positions, have become increasingly “precaritized.” In part, this is reflective of the financial difficulties faced by UNRWA with the reduction and withdrawal of support from states that had historically been significant donors. It is also reflective of the use of “flexible” labour practices in other UN agencies and international humanitarian aid

organizations with the stated goals of decreasing labour costs and increasing the efficiency of service provision.

These shifts coincided with the proliferation of local NGOs, in part facilitated by international NGOs and multi-lateral organizations' increased use of sub-contracting and out-sourcing (Duffield, 1997). Working conditions in local NGOs tend to be precarious with little transparency around hiring, wages, benefits, promotion, and job security. Consider the following excerpt from an interview conducted in 2014 with a Palestinian woman refugee from Burj al-Barajneh camp, who has worked with a number of different local NGOs.

Nadia: Is there a difference between the assistance provided by religious NGOs and the other NGOs?

Suad: When these NGOs started, there was difference in name, but in how they operate, there is no difference.

Nadia: What was the difference in the beginning?

Suad: As I told you before, the religious NGOs started by teaching religion. The social NGOs were service NGOs. This was the difference. But later both of these NGOs made people want to join them. As Ahmad said to you, there is no teamwork at these NGOs. There is the head of the NGO, you don't know what he is doing, or how much money he gets. The same thing happened with the Islamic NGOs. There is a single individual who runs all the others. If he likes this person, he can continue to work. If he wants to fire him, he fires him. If he wants to raise his salary, he does. If he wants to promote him, he does. If he wants him to be a spy... The second thing is that both kinds of NGOs aren't working freely. Each one represents the donor that gives him money... It depends on the agenda or the donors who support these NGOs, whatever their objective is in reaching out to people. So, they continue to help, this one imposing on you and that one imposing on you. But neither of them is working for your interest. They are working for the donor's interests. The proof of this, if I disagree with him, for example, I might discuss with one of these Islamic groups. If I didn't agree with him, he might call me an atheist, and reject me, even though I am a Muslim, I am veiled, and I pray and fast... If you mention the word "NGO" people will say they are thieves. If anyone is able to open an NGO, he steals as much as he can. He doesn't care that he improves his situation, and the people keep on being poor. He humiliates you if he wants to give you even a lira. Although this money is your right, this aid has come to you, but they don't give it to you with dignity. They must humiliate you to give you even a little bit of it. So, both kinds of NGOs are the same. All your loyalty must be for them, otherwise you'll be rejected, and you will have nothing. Both kinds of NGOs are working in the same system...

That Suad responded to my question about services provided by local NGOs, with an account of her experiences as a beneficiary and as an employee, highlights the multiple ways in which the provision of humanitarian aid shapes the political economies of refugee camps. Her account emphasizes key similarities in the operation of both "religious" and "secular" NGOs as mechanisms for unequal redistribution accessed through the differential possession of social capital. Transparency about wages and working conditions within local NGOs is often discouraged by recourse to the discourse of "volunteerism" and "spiritual calling." By referring to receiving what has been raised on her behalf as her right, Suad problematizes the characterization of humanitarian aid provision as depoliticizing. At the same time, her account raises the question of how to organize the equitable distribution of what is needed for human well-being.

Critiques of humanitarianism as an illegitimate form of “governance,” and as constituting a moral economy of pity that requires beneficiaries to perform deservingness are important in highlighting power inequalities in a sphere of human action constituted by discourses of a shared humanity. At the same time, the terms of the critique make it difficult to pose—and thus address—the question of how the (re) distribution of what is needed for human well-being should be organized locally as well as globally in ways that are just. As this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, humanitarian aid shapes—but does not determine—the political economies of long-term refugee camps not only through the particular services provided, but also as a source of employment for a very small number of camp refugees and host state citizens. This complicates representations of humanitarian aid as encouraging dependency, and at the same time highlights the necessity of examining how aid provision might contribute to the rise of new inequalities and hierarchies by enabling limited and uneven social and economic capital accumulation for a small number of refugees and host-state citizens. The accounts of Palestinian inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh camp analyzed in this chapter, highlight the importance of an approach that is both historical and multi-scalar in its attempts to understand “local” and shifting power inequalities generated by the global political economic processes comprising humanitarianism. The organizations involved in providing humanitarian aid to Palestinian camp refugees in Lebanon, the kinds of assistance provided, and the criteria used to determine eligibility/deservingness have changed over the decades with shifts in global and regional balances of power, as well as with shifts in aid paradigms. However, questions of accountability have remained a constant, since what is provided, how, and to whom is ultimately determined by donors. Moral economy critiques of humanitarianism that insist on decoupling affect and non-monetary forms of value from the organization of labour and the accumulation of capital obscure the significance of humanitarian aid organizations as employers of precarious refugee labour. Moreover, these critiques make it difficult to consider the question of whether the problem of reciprocity is resolved if the humanitarian shares a particular “imagined community” with the beneficiary.

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Chapter 4

Politics as Work



The view of Palestinian camp refugees in Lebanon as forming an insular, homogenous, and “traditional” community bound by ties of actual or fictive kinship has persisted in recent scholarship on the relationship between camp refugees and the political parties comprising the PLO (Allan, 2013; Hajj, 2017; Hanafi & Long, 2010; Issa, 2021). Some scholars view the exercise of authority legitimated by the discourse of kinship as a mechanism deployed by camp refugees in order to curb the power of political parties (Hajj, 2017). Others argue that in the absence of centralized Palestinian authority, traditional forms rooted in religiosity and kinship have proliferated in the refugee camps (Hanafi & Long, 2010). Yet others view Palestinian camp refugees’ participation in political parties as based on personal relationships and mediated by conceptions of kinship (Allan, 2013; Issa, 2021).

In these analyses, the different political parties comprising the PLO—different in terms of their stated political position, as well as the support and funds they have historically been able to mobilize—are presented as an unchanging monolithic and predatory entity confronting an equally homogenous and unchanging “subaltern.” The relationship between these two entities is regarded as one of patron-clientage, emerging from a perceived decline in national solidarity, attributed to the withdrawal of the PLO from Lebanon (1982) and its leadership’s decision to compromise the camp refugees’ right to return during the Oslo Accords (1993–1995) (Allan, 2013).

This body of scholarship is important for highlighting the predicaments facing Palestinian camp refugees in Lebanon with the post-Oslo shift of the locus of nationalist struggle to Gaza and the West Bank. It draws attention to the sense of betrayal experienced and articulated by second and third-generation camp refugees, particularly those who as young men fought in the militant wings of the political parties comprising the PLO during the Lebanese civil war—a sense of betrayal that, prior to the mounting criticism of the Palestinian Authority, tended to be disregarded in scholarship that considered itself to be in solidarity with Palestinian nationalism.

However, the portrayal of Palestinian camp refugees as forming a homogenous entity vis-à-vis an equally monolithic bloc—the PLO, on the one hand mirrors contemporary critiques of the state and of humanitarian governance. On the other hand, it oversimplifies the complicated and shifting relationships of camp refugees to Palestinian political parties as the encounter between an encroaching foreign power and a subaltern autochthon. This chapter proposes a conceptualization of “politics as work” in order to reach a better understanding of the different forms taken by Palestinian camp refugees’ political activity.

Recent scholarship critically examining the concept of labour has argued that positing a sharp distinction between labour and work—one that limits labour to market-oriented activity performed in exchange for monetary remuneration—may make it difficult to recognize productive activity that does not take that form (Denning, 2016; Narotzky, 2018; van der Linden, 2012; Weeks, 2016). This distinction often upholds the view that power inequalities and the extraction of value are limited to relationships considered “capitalist,” and absent from those deemed to be operating within a “moral economy” of solidarity and kinship. A conceptualization of politics as work allows for the possibility of recognizing political activity as a means of earning a livelihood and as a means of realizing oneself as a valuable and valued member of a social group. This approach may enable a better understanding of the fine—and shifting—line between mobilization and exploitation. Viewing politics as work, in this sense, facilitates an examination of the different forms taken by Palestinian women and men camp refugees’ political activity, as well as the ways in which these forms have been shaped by shifts in the local and regional political economies of which Burj al-Barajneh camp is a part.

4.1 “They Were Simple Peasants...”

Scholarship on Palestinian camp refugees’ political activities emerged concomitantly with the PLO’s establishment of its base of operations in Lebanon during the early 1970s. Engaged with contemporaneous debates regarding “Third World Revolution,” the problematics of this body of scholarship was formulated in terms of whether camp refugees possessed a “modern” revolutionary consciousness, and whether the possession of such a consciousness was necessary for postcolonial national liberation (Fanon, 1961; Franjeh, 1972; Peretz, 1977; Sayigh, 1978; Sirhan, 1975; Turki, 1974).

Across Asia and Africa, many twentieth century anti-colonial and anti-imperialist intellectuals and political leaders viewed revolution as the reclaiming of national sovereignty from foreign powers, to be accomplished through the establishment of an autonomous nation-state governed by “legitimate” representatives of the “indigene.” In this context, the valourisation of particular groups as autochthonous strengthened anti-colonial and anti-imperialist claims to nationhood, sovereignty, and territory. At the same time, anti-colonial nationalists’ pre-occupation with modernization and development, which they viewed as having been obstructed by

colonial rule, rendered those deemed autochthonous, vulnerable to being marginalized and treated as primitives in need of remedial intervention (Latif, 2023).

Early scholarship on Palestinian camp refugees viewed them as lacking a “modern” political consciousness (Franjeh, 1972; Peretz, 1977; Sayigh, 1978). Camp refugees were thought to have been depeasantized by their forced displacement in 1948 and unable to secure formal employment in Lebanon. Some scholars viewed camp refugees’ perceived retention of tradition as attesting to their sense of belonging to the territory from which they were expelled, and as a way of resisting that displacement (Sayigh, 1979; Sirhan, 1975; Turki, 1974). Moreover, the experience of dispossession was claimed to have erased all pre-1948 distinctions in the face of the difficult conditions of camp refugee life. The figure of the *fellah* turned camp refugee, on the one hand, served to exemplify the autochthon of the struggle for national liberation. On the other hand, the naivete and traditionalism accorded the autochthon justified the mobilization of camp refugees primarily as fighters and their sidelining from positions of authority within the political parties comprising the PLO (Latif, 2011; Peteet, 1991).

The terms of this discourse mirrored contemporaneous assertions about rural-urban migrants who had established informal settlements on the outskirts of large Latin American cities, and of urban centers in French ruled Algeria (Bourdieu, 1964; Fanon, 1961; Munck, 2017; Perlman, 1975). These spaces were thought to be unintegrated into the “modern” political economy of colonial and formerly colonial urban centers. In a similar vein, their inhabitants were thought to hold on to “traditional patterns” such as maintaining extended family networks and being firmly committed to religiosity and a sense of fatalism (Perlman, 1975, p. 136). Disparaged by the right as an “invasion” and a “blight” to be eliminated, they were lauded by many on the left as the only authentic revolutionary subject in the struggle against colonialism and imperialism.

Both sides of this political spectrum concurred in viewing those deemed the “wretched of the earth” as unintegrated into the “modern” capitalist economy that had emerged as a consequence of “Western” imperialism and colonial rule. Similar to the scholarship on informal economies in “the Third World,” which viewed those social relationships as distinct and isolable from what was deemed formal, this body of scholarship failed to recognize the integration of those termed “marginal” or “lumpenproletariat” into “formal” and “modern” urban political economies on terms unfavourable to them. Moreover, this paradigm did not allow for a consideration of the uneven effects of this integration on a group of people treated as homogeneous. Lastly, the view that the rural areas from which migration took place had somehow remained untouched by capitalism belies historical and anthropological scholarship demonstrating the increasing integration of those regions into a world capitalist economy since at least the seventeenth century (Mintz, 1986; Owen, 1981; Wolf, 1982).

The characterization of the first-generation of Palestinian camp refugees as naïve former peasants who lacked a modern political consciousness—a view shared by middle class and elite Palestinians, as well as by many second-generation camp refugees is problematized by first-generation refugees’ accounts of their lives before

1948. Consider the following excerpt from an interview with a first-generation Palestinian refugee and his Lebanese wife, conducted in 2006 in Burj al-Barajneh camp:

Abu Imad: I remember the long enclosure in Akka... I also remember the markets we used to go to. The weddings and feasts... But then there was the Second World War... Later there was the rebellion, and my father was one of the rebels. We used to go from Akka to Jaffa, and we were kids. The rebels used to give us bags to take to Jaffa. We didn't know what was in these bags, but it seems that there were explosives. When I started to grow up, the troubles began, and I was imprisoned at Akka jail. My parents fled Palestine before me... I was in prison. My parents left. Later when I was released from jail, I fled by boat. It was on the 15th of May.

Nadia: Let's go back to Akka. What was your neighbourhood like?

Abu Imad: It is close to the sea. When we went out of our house, we were on the beach.

Nadia: What work did you do?

Abu Imad: We were just kids. But, later when my father was imprisoned because they accused him of being a communist... He was committed to Palestinian patriotism, even though our neighbors were Jewish.

Nadia: So there were Muslims, Christians...

Abu Imad: There were Muslims, Christians and Jews in the neighbourhood.

Imm Imad: He was breastfed by a Jewish woman.

Abu Imad: In the same building, there was one house for Muslims, two houses for Christians and one house for a Jewish family. Once my mother got sick and the doctor forbade her from breastfeeding. We had a Jewish neighbor, so she breastfed me.

Nadia: They were good to you?

Abu Imad: The Eastern Jews didn't discriminate. The Arab Jews didn't have this fanatic discrimination.

Imm Imad: Were they your neighbors, Abu Imad?

Abu Imad: Yes, they were. Even when they started to occupy our land. My neighbors moved to Jaffa. I missed them a lot. I used to go to Jaffa to visit them... I followed them to Jaffa, and my mother came and took me home. We had been in difficult conditions. Our parents were always arrested. My mum was wanted.

Nadia: Really? Why?

Abu Imad: Because she was working with the rebels.

Imm Imad: His mother was from Tarshiha.

Abu Imad: She carried eggs, and under the eggs she was smuggling grenades...

Nadia: How did your mother meet your father?

Abu Imad: There was a notable person from the X family in Akka. My mother worked for him as his cook. He was my father's neighbor. My father used to visit him. He met my mother. Then they got married.

Nadia: Did you visit her family in Tarshiha?

Abu Imad: Of course, we used to go to Tarshiha...but they were farmers.

Nadia: Was their life different from your life in the city?

Abu Imad: Certainly, there is difference between the city and the countryside. My father used to live close to the sea. He was a fisherman, but he also worked in construction when the sea wasn't suitable for fishing. We used to help him, but then the troubles started, and we stopped working... Life in the city needs work and everyone was busy with his work. Each one takes a different path, while in the villages the people work on their land. They see and help each other all the time. At night they visit each other, while in the cities the men go to coffee shops or to the cinema. The city is different from the village....

Nadia: The revolution in the 1930s, did it start in the cities or in the countryside?

Abu Imad: It began in the countryside. My maternal uncle was with them. My father joined because he was communist.

Nadia: My father too.

Abu Imad: Whoever was a communist, used to have a death sentence. My father was surveilled all the time, so he was always escaping and hiding.

Abu Imad's account complicates the characterization of camp refugees as former peasants whose political mobilization only began with the PLO's establishment of its base of operations in Lebanon. His narrative of how his parents met and got married highlights the role of labour migration in connecting the political economies of Galilean villages such as Tarshiha to coastal entrepôts such as Akka. Lastly, his account of being breastfed by a Jewish neighbour when his mother was too ill to nurse him, and the conflicted bond that this established between the two families problematizes simplistic understandings of the Israeli Palestinian conflict as driven primarily by religious and cultural difference.

Historical scholarship on conditions in rural Palestine during the British Mandate paints a grim picture of increasing indebtedness and landlessness with the concentration of ownership in the hands of a small number of absentee landlords based in Mandate Syria and Lebanon (Khalaf, 1997; Nadan, 2006). These conditions propelled waves of migration from the countryside, as indicated by Abu Imad's account of his mother and her family. At the same time, a split labour market emerged with Zionist political pressure on immigrating Jews to hire Jews over Arabs and to offer them better wages in order to further the establishment of a Jewish nation-state in Palestine (Bernstein, 1996; Nadan, 2006). The Jewish Agency, an NGO established in 1929 with the goal of facilitating Jewish immigration to Palestine, claimed that land sales to Jewish owners would stimulate the predominantly Arab rural economy by modernizing it. The consequences of these political economic shifts for relationships between Arab Jewish, Muslim, and Christian labour are alluded to in Abu Imad's response, "Yes, they were (neighbours), even when they started to occupy our land." Precariously employed Arab, non-Jewish, women and men in rural and urban areas responded by mobilizing for political action.

4.2 Burj al-Barajneh Camp in the Early Years (1949–1969)

Prior to the Cairo Agreement between the PLO and the Lebanese Armed Forces (1969), various aspects of life in Burj al-Barajneh camp were administered by UNRWA, Lebanese military intelligence, known as the deuxième bureau, and an ad hoc group of older male representatives of Palestinian villages that had a large number of inhabitants in the camp. The role played by each entity is highlighted in the following excerpt from the oral history of a second-generation refugee who had been active with one of the political parties comprising the PLO.

Nadia: During this period was there a *dīwān*, or a place for the men to gather in Burj camp?

Hisham: At the entrance of the camp. There was a place there like the present office of the Popular Committee. Men from each village used to gather there. If someone had died or if something had happened, they would gather to talk about it. If someone wanted to build,

or if there was an issue that had to be discussed, then they would decide what to do. So, there was a resource. There weren't any village associations but there was a mosque group.

Nadia: Why didn't they have an association for each village as they do now?

Hisham: Because they were all together and a man from each village represented his village and spoke on its behalf to the others.

Nadia: There weren't that many people from Fāra?

Hisham: There were a few people from Fāra here, my father, my uncle, and a few other people. We are few here. All of our village's inhabitants are in Rashīdiyya, not Beirut.

Nadia: So, the leaders were from Tarshiha or Kwīkāt, or from the villages that have more people from their village here?

Hisham: Yes, but for us there was my father and my uncle, and there were two or three families from our village.

Nadia: Maybe in Rashīdiyya they had associations?

Hisham: At that time there weren't any associations because people were too busy trying to earn a living to keep alive. Especially in Rashīdiyya. They didn't know about associations. Each person was working to be able to feed his family. They were working the land. They didn't know anything more than this.

Nadia: But if there was a problem between someone from the camp and someone from outside, who would resolve the problem?

Hisham: Here in Beirut, or in Rashīdiyya?

Nadia: Here in Beirut.

Hisham: Here the committee would meet to resolve it. If it was the camp inhabitant's fault, they would hand him over to the gendarmerie

Nadia: This is before the political parties came?

Hisham: There weren't any political parties. There was the *deuxième bureau*. They were in charge here. If there was a problem, the *deuxième bureau* interfered to put an end to it. If there was a fight between a Palestinian and a Lebanese, and if it was the Palestinian's fault, they would take him away and beat him and put him in jail. But if it was the Lebanese's fault, they would bring them together to make it up between them.

Hisham's account highlights the role of the ad hoc "committee" of male village elders in resolving disputes within the camp, particularly with regards to construction and land use within the space of the camp. Under Lebanese law, camp refugees could not own land. However, within the space of the camp, the male head of the household was considered the owner of the physical structure of a dwelling, but not the land on which it was built. This ownership was registered with the UNRWA camp director, making it possible for housing within the camp to be rented, bought, sold, and inherited. The account is also significant for its description of the Lebanese military intelligence—the *deuxième bureau*'s policing and surveilling of Palestinian refugee camps. Under President Shihab, the authority of the *deuxième bureau* was considerably expanded in part to thwart the rise of an independent trade union movement (Traboulsi, 2007).

After the Cairo Accords (1968), "formal" authority over the Palestinian refugee camps was transferred from the *deuxième bureau* to the political parties comprising the PLO. In place of the ad hoc "committee" of Palestinian male village elders who had mediated disputes within the camp as well as between the camp and the Lebanese authorities, "popular committees" were now established drawing from those adult male inhabitants of the camp who were considered cadres of political parties comprising the PLO. This history of the establishment of "popular committees" complicates their presentation in recent scholarship as evidence of the PLO's

“true nature”—a predatory state seeking to control/mobilize a subaltern group (Hajj, 2017; Issa, 2021).

It is indisputable that though termed “popular committees,” these bodies were not formed through a process of universal suffrage in which all adult inhabitants of the camps participated. At the same time, these committees were “popular” in both continuing and reconfiguring a pre-existing institution formed by Palestinian camp refugees themselves in order to organize their social relationships. Since their initial establishment after the Cairo Accords, the particular relationships between a particular “popular committee” and the Palestinian, Lebanese, and Syrian inhabitants of a given camp have shifted considerably. These shifts have been shaped not only by changes in the “formal” relationships between Palestinian political parties and the Lebanese and Syrian states, but also by changes in the particular local political economies of different camps.

Hisham’s characterization of the inhabitants of Rashīdiyya camp, located in the agricultural south of Lebanon, as not knowing anything more than how to eke out a living, indicates that conditions in rural camps were harder than those in camps at the outskirts of a large city, such as Burj al-Barajneh camp. This characterization is corroborated by scholarship on the poor working conditions and low wages in the agricultural sector at the time (Nasr, 1978; Nasr & James, 1985; Traboulsi, 2007). At the same time, it echoes the discourse of the precarious worker, whether rural or urban, as lacking a “modern” political consciousness.

Yet, Hisham’s account also elucidates some of the factors that were at play in undercutting and reconfiguring pre-1948 sources of “traditional” rural authority in the context of the refugee camps in Lebanon. Those who had once owned the land they had lived on and cultivated no longer possessed it. Moreover, the kinds of work that camp refugees were able to secure tended to be precarious and poorly remunerated. As Hisham replied to my importune questions, “At that time there weren’t any associations because people were too busy trying to earn a living to keep alive.” Lastly, his account highlights the unequal balance of power between the stateless refugees’ and their Lebanese class counterparts.

4.3 *Thaūra* (1969–1982)

The word *thaūra*—which is rendered in English as “revolution” or “uprising”—is still used metonymically by camp refugees to refer to the political parties comprising the PLO, as well as the period of time that their military operations were based in Lebanon (1969–1982). The word *fidāʾī* (plural *fidāʾīyīn*) denotes a person who sacrifices themselves for a cause. Across generations, it is still used by Palestinian camp refugees, to refer to those who fought in the military wings of the political parties comprising the PLO, until its official withdrawal from Lebanon in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion in 1982.

It is commonly thought that political mobilization within the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon occurred as a result of the relocation of PLO bases of operations

from Jordan to Lebanon in the 1970s (Issa, 2021). However, fieldwork confirmed that camp inhabitants who had been politically active and/or involved in armed struggle during 1948 and earlier, had remained politically active after their dispossession, despite deuxième bureau repression. The following excerpt from an interview with a second-generation woman, describes the repressive conditions camp refugees braved in order to organize.

People started to get educated and think. The youth felt that they had to do something. They started having meetings, but the gendarmerie was always walking, listening and spying at the door... People would tell each other to be careful of what they said because they knew they were being spied on. If they wanted to talk, they would ask someone to watch at the door... I remember at the beginning of 1966, my mother sent me to buy tomato sauce. In the past, it didn't come in bottles or cans, so we would bring a plate to buy it... The shop was next door to my house. I was walking, when I saw two men wearing *kūffīya*. Their eyes were covered. I was so scared, I started screaming. My mother heard me and came out of the house. She thought I had fallen, and broken the plate... I told her, "I saw two men wearing..." She didn't let me finish. She put her hand over my mouth and said "Don't say anything. If someone asks you why you screamed, say you saw a dog." I didn't know why my mum wanted me to tell a lie, since she always told us it was wrong to lie. I asked her, but she just told me not to say what I had seen. Everything happened so quickly. A few minutes later the police came running and they asked my mum if she had seen any men passing by. My mother said no. It was clear that I had been crying so they asked me why I was crying. I told them I had seen a dog. Afterwards, my mother and I walked to the shop to buy the paste. On our way back she explained why she had told me to lie. She said, "Do you know who those men are? If we had told the police the truth and showed them where the men had gone, they would have caught them and put them in jail." Then she told me that those men were the ones who would bring us back to Palestine.

Kulthum's family were a rural family that had owned the land they had lived on and cultivated. Their village had been among the small number of villages in Mandate Palestine that had a school. Two of her uncles had been active in the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM), a pan-Arab political group that emerged in the 1950s and mobilized against Western imperialism. One of her uncles was arrested and extrajudicially killed by the deuxième bureau. Kulthum's account suggests an association of political mobilization with increased access to formal education. Within this view, the loss of Palestine was in large part due to the naiveté, ignorance and the lack of political consciousness of its rural masses who had been denied access to formal education. Kulthum's account also indicates that by the late 1960s, especially after the Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank in 1967, it had become evident to the camp refugees that neither the international community, nor the Arab states could be relied upon to secure their right to return.

In the wake of widespread Palestinian criticism of the Palestinian National Authority, established after the conclusion of the Oslo Accords between the PLO and Israel (1993–1995), the relationship between Palestinian political parties and Palestinian camp refugees in Lebanon has received greater scholarly attention (Allan, 2013; Hajj, 2017; Hanafi & Long, 2010; Issa, 2021). An important contribution of this body of scholarship has been to highlight the camp refugees' marginalization within considerations of "the Palestinian question." However, as its critique is phrased in terms of a system of patron-clientage it reiterates earlier

characterizations of camp refugee traditionalism without carefully considering the ways in which the PLO's provision of salaried employment and social services during the 1970s–1980s changed social relationships within individual camps. It also forestalls a consideration of what may appear to be contradictory—labouring to return, while at the same time building in the place of forced displacement.

Imm Hasan: Who allowed us to build these houses? Before it wasn't allowed to push in a nail. We built for ourselves and for our sons. Without them (the *fidā'īyīn*) we couldn't build anything. Where would our sons have lived? Now, my sons are living in their own houses. This camp is our home. Are we able to buy a house for \$30,000 USD? Some people's income is not enough to pay \$200 USD per month for a rented flat. Is it true, what I'm saying?

Nadia: It is true.

Imm Hasan: We live here in our houses happy and satisfied. Now we have bathrooms inside our houses. Also, we have running water. Each minute, we thank God.

This excerpt from an interview with a first-generation woman conducted in Burj al-Barajneh camp in 2006 indicates that the coming of the *thaūra* not only released camp refugees from deuxième bureau surveillance, but also allowed them to improve the material conditions of their lives. Regardless of generation and gender, camp refugees' accounts made clear that this improvement was understood and experienced in terms of being free—if in possession of the required capital—to improve one's dwelling by building rain and wind-proof roofs and private toilets, instead of being forced to make use of communal latrines.

The coming of the *thaūra* also led to an expansion in the provision of basic infrastructure. The newly established popular committees were tasked with administering the provision of piped water and electricity, the digging of wells, and the maintenance of sewage pipes. The committees also took over the task of registering housing and administering land use. As explained earlier, the committees were drawn from the adult male inhabitants of a camp on the basis of their membership in the political parties comprising the PLO. Each political party appointed a representative to the committee, while the committee chair was always a member of Fatah. A number of 'respected elders' were also appointed to the committees in order to give consideration to the will of the *āhālī al-mukhayyam*—families of the camp. These developments contributed to the reconfiguration of social relations within the camp, alongside establishing new positions of authority and social relationships of unequal exchange.

Scholars concur that the PLO's establishment of its base of operations in Lebanon had a significant impact on the political economies of the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, as well as on Lebanon's sectarian political economy (Allan, 2013; Brynen, 1990; Denoeux, 1993; Johnson, 1986; Picard, 2000; Rubenberg, 1983; Sayigh, 1997; Traboulsi, 2007). However, there is considerable debate regarding the historical consequences of the large influx of Palestinian capital, formal and informal opportunities for wage labour, and the network of social services extended through the PLO to Palestinian camp refugees as well as to their Lebanese class counterparts.

Political scientist Cheryl Rubenburg, who conducted field research in Lebanon in 1982 immediately before the Israeli invasion, provided a comprehensive overview of the various labour, medical, educational, and welfare institutions established as part of the PLO's non-military infrastructure in Lebanon (Rubenberg, 1983). In addition to providing much needed medical care to Palestinian camp refugees and their Lebanese class counterparts through hospitals and clinics established in refugee camps, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) also ran a school for nurses and para-medical personnel in Beirut. A number of camp refugees and their Lebanese class counterparts completed professional training at the institute and were able to secure salaried positions.

Similarly, the Palestine Martyrs Works Society (SAMED) which had initially been established to provide vocational training to the orphans of those who had died in the service of the national cause, was reorganized and expanded to provide training and employment to all Palestinian refugees who sought it. The stated goal was to counter the discrimination Palestinian labour faced in the Lebanese industrial sector, while at the same time producing goods for mass consumption at prices affordable for their producers. Forty-six factories were established in Lebanon, and five in Syria. They produced textiles, ready-to-wear clothing, woolen blankets, plastic dishes and utensils, leather goods, military uniforms, shoes, furniture, children's toys, sesame candy and oil, and "traditional" clothing. In Lebanon, SAMED began producing for export to those Arab and Eastern European countries with whom the PLO had diplomatic ties. According to Rubenberg, the wages that were paid were comparable to the wages received by Lebanese workers in the industrial sector. However, SAMED workers also received a regular monthly payment for their spouse, and a monthly allowance for each child, along with free medical care for themselves and their families.

Scholarships for higher education at universities in the USSR, Eastern Europe, and Cuba were also made available for a number of camp refugees through the political parties comprising the PLO. Their recipients were thus able to gain professional training and credentials in occupations deemed "skilled" with the possibility of salaried employment. At the same time, camp refugee accounts as well as scholarship suggest that these interventions unsettled existing unequal relationships of exchange not only within the Palestinian refugee camps, but also more broadly in Lebanon by generating new social fields for the accumulation of *wāṣṣa* (Brynen, 1990; Fiddian-Qasbiyeh, 2015; Johnson, 1986; Sayigh, 1997).

Consider the following extract from an interview with a second-generation woman refugee who trained as a nurse at the institute run by the PRCS.

Kulthum: When the *thaūra* started to spread, before it came to Beirut, I remember that people thought they were like a message from God. The women were knitting sweaters, hats, and shawls for the *fidāʾīyīn*... During the night, some youth would knock on the doors. They would carry plastic bags. People would give them food, and this food was taken to the *fidāʾīyīn*. At that time the *fidāʾīyīn* were still in the mountains. And people loved and helped each other, because they thought the *fidāʾīyīn* are the salvation. People who had money were buying supplies to give to them. We didn't know who they were. They came at night. When they came, we gave without asking...

Nadia: Do you think that during the *thaūra* people had better lives and became more mobilized?

Kulthum: There were positive and negative things. One of the positives happened at the beginning of the *thaūra*, but it wasn't fair. They helped the people, but for some they built them very big houses, and it depended on the *wāṣṭa* people had. But at least it became permitted for people to build their houses or to improve them. If someone had money, he was now able to build. In the past he needed a permit and *wāṣṭa*. So, then people started to improve their houses. The second good thing was establishing the PRCS hospitals for the people. Also, scholarships for students. Students were able to continue their education in Russia, Romania, Bulgaria etc.

Nadia: Were there jobs for them after they finished their studies?

Kulthum: Yes. They established the SAMED factories, also the hospital administration, and the nursing and doctors' programs. Also, there was the engineering maintenance section. All these things improved the lives of the Palestinians. The Palestinians were working before. I don't know how the conditions were, but most of them were working....

Nadia: Not like now.

Kulthum: Not like now. Also, when the *thaūra* was here, they provided many services. There were free services like medical treatment. These things improved living conditions. But at the same time there were problems. Many students left school.

Nadia: I heard that from other people too. They stopped being interested in education.

Kulthum: There were two things. Some people stopped being interested in education and left school, while other people became more interested and took scholarships to finish their studies. The people who left school, they left it to join the PLO. The other thing that was wrong, or that Fateh did wrong, was that the terms of membership weren't determined.

Nadia: What do you mean by that?

Kulthum: For example, we don't allow kids who are 10 or 13 years old to join the party. This was a mistake that the *thaūra* made. It's true that their aim was to take back our country, but they shouldn't have allowed children to join them... Another thing, the scholarships encouraged students to get fake certificates. Some students hadn't finished twelfth grade, so they bought certificates, took the scholarships, and travelled. Also, it depended on who had more *wāṣṭa*. They didn't give the scholarship only to the students who deserved it. They gave it both to those who deserved it and to those who didn't deserve it.

Kulthum's account complicates analyses of the relationship between camp refugees and the PLO which present the political parties as a predatory state seeking to coopt and control the refugees (Hajj, 2017; Issa, 2021), a characterization that appears to build on earlier views of the camp refugees as forcibly de-peasantized autochthons in need of modernization and mobilization (Latif, 2011). Kulthum's account of the relationship between the camp refugees and the *fidā'īyīn* before the Cairo Accords emphasizes camp refugee women's reproductive and care labour for the *fidā'īyīn*, as well as camp refugees' attempts towards reciprocal exchange with the brave young men risking their lives. "When they came, we gave without asking." However, over time, when what could be exchanged changed in form and value to housing, access to scholarships, and opportunities for salaried employment, a new social field for the accumulation of *wāṣṭa* came into existence, transforming the local political economies of Palestinian refugee camps, as well as their relationships with their host-state environs. Lastly, Kulthum's account indicates the increasing significance of violence work as a source of salaried employment for young male camp refugees, which also facilitated their family's access to medical and social services. "The people who left school, they left it to join the PLO."

Some historians view the *thaūra*'s failure to secure Palestinian national liberation as a consequence of corruption and nepotism (Sayigh, 1997). It is argued that the political parties comprising the PLO established a system of patron-clientage by disbursing salaries to all those—Lebanese and Palestinian—who enlisted in the military wings of the political parties or were part of their non-military organizations. Depending on the financial resources of the political party, additional benefits such as building grants and materials, marriage and cost of living allowances, and pensions were also provided. Moreover, the distribution of political offices, employment, and access to other resources was through informal bargaining and used to ensure compliance within the rank and file of the party, as well as to gain the support of a wider Lebanese constituency.

The view that politics can only be conducted honorably if one lives for politics and not from politics (Weber, 2009 [1921]), was shared by many first and second-generation camp refugee men who had been actively involved in the *thaūra*, and were willing to speak to me about their retrospective assessment of what they had been part of.

Nadia: When the *thaūra* began here, were you with them?

Abu Imad: Yes, I was.

Nadia: How were the camps at this time, the time of the *thaūra*?

Abu Imad: There wasn't much work. Some people were living from joining the *thaūra*. I wasn't living from the *thaūra*. I was paying for them. When we started joining the *thaūra*, I was paying for them... Because my work situation was good at that time.

Abu Imad had been politically active for most of his life, and both his mother and his father had been part of a militant leftist group during Mandate rule in Palestine. His reply to my question indicated that in his view it was only possible to be a true revolutionary if one did not need to live from the cause. His reply also highlights recognition of the ways in which the figure of the autochthonous, de-peasantized, camp refugee turned guerilla was deployed in nationalist discourse to gloss over class differences.

In her work on women's participation in the *thaūra*, anthropologist Julie Peteet characterized the following statement made to her by a 54 year old woman from Jaffa as typical of middle- and upper-class Palestinian attitudes towards their compatriots in the camps: "As for the rich...they should give money to the Resistance because it is working for them, as Palestinians. They [the camp people] send their children to die. The least the rich can do is give money" (Peteet, 1991, p. 88). Hence, the valorization of the fellah-guerilla as the autochthonous figure of Palestinian national liberation not only justified camp refugee participation in the struggle at the level of its rank-and-file, it also enabled the significantly higher loss of camp refugee life to be presented as self-sacrifice for the nation.

Camp refugees' political work tended to be gendered, with fighters primarily being male (Peteet, 1991). At the same time, parental objections towards unmarried young women engaging in political activity could be deferred through the support of a politically active brother. The following extract from an interview with a second-generation woman indicates the discourse deployed in order to counter the

older generation's discomfort with the threat posed by politics as work to norms of gender segregation that were bound up with securing recognition of respectability within one's community.

Nadia: What else do you remember about the *fedayīn* when you were young? I heard that there were women's unions and youth groups.

Hala: When the *thaūra* began, girl and boy were joining the revolution. They were all training, because at that time we needed to learn to protect ourselves. We needed to create our existence. We needed to be strong. I trained for 3 months.

Nadia: Was it a good experience for you?

Hala: Yes, it was very good. I was trained on many kinds of weapons.

Nadia: You and your sister were together?

Hala: She and I were in the same training bloc. It was called the X bloc. It was the first place the Israelis bombed during the invasion. During training they used to tell us to hide whenever we heard enemy planes, because it was dangerous.... I trained for 3 months. For us it was necessary for every child, girl, boy, man, woman and old person to be armed. Firstly, because we needed to be aware of our cause, and secondly, because as camps we suffered a lot from the war. We suffered a lot. There was war all the time and you know that the camp is a small place, so if we weren't aware and trained, how could we protect ourselves?

As Hala's account indicates, a discourse of necessity was deployed in order to circumvent the older generation's concern for the reputation of the camp's young women. Political participation, particularly military training, was presented as a national as well as a communal obligation incumbent on all regardless of gender and age. The prevalence of this discourse did not translate into practice in all cases. A number of second-generation female refugees spoke of being forbidden by their parents to participate in military training. However, as Hala's account indicates, military training was significant in fostering a sense of empowerment, purpose and cohesion that was simultaneously national and local.

4.4 War Economy

Drawing on field research with young militiamen in Sierra Leone and Liberia, anthropologist Daniel Hoffman pointed to the erasures inherent in approaches that focus primarily on identity as the lens through which to analyze postcolonial violence. According to Hoffman, "To fight was not so much to take on the enemy as to take up a labour... One might do so at the behest of a patron or under duress, and one might do so as part of a political project and with a real sense of grievance. These are not mutually exclusive" (Hoffman, 2011, p. 41). Moreover, the underlying logic organizing work whether in mining, forestry, plantation agriculture, or violence was one of making labour available for "just in time" production, based on whatever opportunities presented themselves (Hoffman, 2011, p. 42). My fieldwork indicated a similar logic at work in the political economy that emerged in the course of the Lebanese civil war (1975–1991). This is brought out in the following excerpt from my field notes:

Today, Jalal uncharacteristically enters a political argument with a *shāb* (youth) whom I'm supposed to be interviewing in a couple of days. The *shāb* is pro-Fateh, and he and Jalal start arguing over political affiliations and loyalty in the camp. He claims that *al-‘ashā’iriyya* disappeared with the *thāūra* and the political parties. I butt in, “But when they joined political parties it was *biṭarīqa ashā’iriyya*.” Manal turns to me with approval. Jalal says he was with Fateh, then Saiqa, and then General Command. The *shāb* wants to know/understand how this was possible. Jalal talks about how it was impossible to feed one's family and kids during the sieges if one did not join one of the parties. Later, after he has left, when Manal praises the *shāb* for his intelligence, knowledge of history, and political analysis, Jalal disagrees. “He doesn't understand a thing. What he says is what he has learned from being affiliated with Fateh. They probably help him with his university fees and so he ‘loves’ them.”

(Fieldnotes from May 2006)

The Arabic word *al-‘ashā’iriyya* is usually translated as “tribalism” or “clannishness.” *Biṭarīqa*, may be rendered as “route” or “mode.” If *biṭarīqa ashā’iriyya* is understood in terms of “kinship as idiom” (Geertz & Geertz, 1975), the ways in which shifting relationships of unequal exchange are re-presented in the discourse of kinship, may be misperceived as an unchanging structure of primordial loyalties. The Palestinian political parties listed by Jalal were engaged in a bitter internecine conflict during 1984–1993, also involving the Syrian military and intelligence services and the Shi'a Amal militia who had been former Fateh allies. The exchange between Jalal and the *shāb* highlights the significance of violence work during the Lebanese civil war, while at the same time underscoring Hoffman's claims regarding the inadequacies of identity as the primary lens with which to examine postcolonial violence.

The growing significance of violence work as a source of livelihood, particularly for those male camp refugees who left school to join the PLO, has to be placed within the context of the political economy that emerged in Lebanon during the Lebanese civil war. Analysts of this war economy have highlighted the various ways in which it was connected to the global capitalist economy through the licit and illicit flows of capital and commodities (Hourani, 2015; Picard, 2000; Traboulsi, 2007). During 1975–1983, militias affiliated with various Lebanese political parties emerged within local neighbourhoods with the stated goal of protecting the sect they identified with. Initially they were financed by local entrepreneurs, and unlike the *fidā’iyyīn*, did not receive a regular salary. They supplemented their earnings through looting the territories under their control, and by racketeering at the checkpoints they created to establish that control. Syrian troops sent to intervene in the conflict, inserted themselves into this thriving war economy by extortion, looting, and the re-export of gas, wood, iron, tires, and fuel.

During the 1980s, beginning with the Lebanese Forces (an umbrella organization comprising various Christian militias), Lebanese militia fighters began to receive salaries with a concomitant change in their status from “neighbourhood youth” to “servicemen.” After having secured control of key revenue generating sectors such as cement production and petroleum importation, militia leaders/entrepreneurs began to invest in communications technology and maritime transport, in addition to drug production and trafficking. The profits generated were deposited in banks headquartered in regions considered “the Global North,” invested in real estate in

Lebanon, and utilized for currency speculation. The restoration of state sovereignty in the early 1990s preserved the power Lebanese militia leaders had accumulated over the course of the war through their incorporation into government and civil service.

In the late 1960s, a number of the political parties comprising the PLO formed alliances with left-leaning Lebanese political parties. Shared commitment to the national liberation of Palestine and Lebanon was fostered through military training, as well as co-work at PLO-established economic enterprises and non-military organizations. The discourse of pan-Arab and anti-imperialist fraternity derived additional force from the intermarriages and social relationships that had formed between Palestinian camp refugees and their Lebanese class counterparts.

Analyses of the Lebanese civil war date the unravelling of the relationship between the PLO and its Lebanese Shi'a allies as beginning during the late 1970s (Hagopian, 1985; Norton, 1987; Sayigh, 1997). The PLO had become increasingly unwilling to allow the Lebanese army to deploy in the areas under its control in the south. Villagers in the predominantly Shi'a areas near the southern border, where the PLO had established military bases were caught between the *fidāʿiyyīn* and the IDF. Moreover, the Amal movement, a Lebanese Shia' political party formed in 1974, had gained considerable success in presenting itself as the sole protectors and guarantors of Shi'a interests in Lebanon.

However, camp refugee accounts, as gathered from interviews and conversations during fieldwork, spoke of a sudden and seemingly inexplicable shift beginning with the first Amal siege of Burj al-Barajneh, Shatila, and Rashīdiyya camps in 1985. The accounts of men camp refugees who had trained and fought alongside Amal fighters, in particular, indicated a deep sense of betrayal. By contrast, the accounts of those who had not been involved in violence work, particularly women, tended to emphasize the brutality of the violence perpetrated by Amal militiamen. The following excerpt is from an interview conducted in 2006 with two women camp refugees who had been children at the time.

Dalal: At the beginning of the siege, people had everything, but in the last month nothing was left... At the beginning, my brother was helping his friends' families, but at the end, there was nothing. At the end, we only had one tin of hummus and tomato sauce. We ate everything... we were starving, so my brother sneaked out to get some grass. There were weird insects on the grass. Also, there was a sniper, but my brother didn't care. He said, "I'm not going to die of hunger." I hadn't eaten for two days. I'd only had water. The grass tasted bitter. But my brother cut it up and added salt and water. All of us were asleep. He woke us up, and each one of us had one spoon of this grass thing. Enough to be able to go back to sleep.

Haneen: For us it was the same. The only difference was that my mum didn't use up all the flour. She wouldn't give us any bread. She was saving it for my older brothers because they were fighting, so they had priority. We also ate grass and *tahīna*...

Dalal: We made *halāwi* from some roots.

Haneen: We did all these things during the war, during the 6-month siege...my mum used to store flour at our house. During the war we left our house. When we ran out of everything, my mum went back to our house, but it had been bombed. She found the flour, but it was all mixed with dust and stones. She tried to separate the sand and the grit using a soft scarf. Then she baked the flour into bread. But when we ate it, we could taste the sand.

Also, at the end, we used to have a cat. One day when my brother started guard duty, he found the dangling corpse of the cat. It had been slaughtered. He went to my mum and said to her, "Look, this is a piece of meat from our cat." I don't remember if he ate it, or if my mum threw it away. But the *shebāb* who slaughtered the cat, they ate it. They put spices and they ate it. I think they also ate dogs...

Nadia: Wait a minute, what about the political parties? Didn't they have food?

Dalal: No. No one had anything. No one had any food.

Haneen: It wasn't permitted to enter or leave the camp. Even if you had stocked up, your supplies would run out.

Nadia: But I heard that if you knew anyone from Amal, you could bribe him into getting food and medicine?

Haneen: That happened after we were completely exhausted. After we ate the cats. Because I got out, and I brought food.

Dalal: But that was after they allowed us to leave the camp. I'll tell you what happened... You know that there are many corners in the camp. There was a corner called the Liberation Front corner. There were fighters there, and these fighters belonged to Fateh. They were giving weapons in exchange for food. People spoke about this, but we never got any of this food. At least they gave something. Here, in our area, we didn't get anything.

Haneen: I remember something from the end of the war. At the end, people had nothing left to eat. There were some corpses at the hospital. Some of the Amal fighters asked a Shi'a sheikh if it was permitted to eat the flesh of these corpses.

Nadia: Why didn't they ask him to let people have food?

Dalal: Because they wanted to shame him. It was a matter of shame just to tell him, "What more do you want to do than this?" They used to raise pieces of bread on a long stick and say to us, "Look, here's bread. We are eating, while you are starving."

Haneen: What did the sheikh say to them?

Dalal: It was a starvation siege, so that people would be unable to fight. So that we'd die from starvation, even after they had stopped shooting at us.

Haneen: So, at that time what did he (the sheikh) say to them (Amal fighters)?

Dalal: He said no. I won't permit them (camp refugees) to eat corpses. But they (Amal fighters) kept on asking, and he kept on refusing. In the end he negotiated with them to allow people to leave the camp to get food.

Haneen: I remember something that happened. I remember that they brought flour, and they burnt it.

Dalal: Yes. The Red Crescent tried to get some flour into the camps. In Shatila, five *shebāb* died on the flour truck. If you watch the video tape, you can see how they killed these *shebāb* one after the other. They also killed the truck driver when he reached the camp entrance... Just as the truck stopped, they killed him. So, they weren't able to bring flour. Later the Red Crescent was able to bring flour, but it was full of sand. It was the first thing we ate during our starvation.

Haneen: Then they began to allow women to leave the camp. But when the women would return with food, they would shoot at them. They killed many women.

Dalal: Listen to what happened. There was a supermarket for the Shi'a.

Haneen: Now it is the X supermarket. They [Amal fighters] would take us to this supermarket.

Dalal: There was also a supermarket close to al-Quds school [UNRWA school]. We had a lot of money. We were burning it in order to stay warm. It was so weird. They would allow money to enter the camp, the fighters' salaries, but they wouldn't allow food in. So when the women were able to go out, they had a lot of money to buy food. They were buying rice, lentils, kerosene, batteries, and tobacco. They would enter from one door and exit from another door. At the exit, there were fighters waiting for us. They would mix up all the food. They would mix the rice with the kerosene and the lentils. Then they would say to us, "Take your food." Some of them would take everything we had bought. That's what they were

doing. We were paying for nothing. We would buy at the entrance, and they would take everything away at the exit. Also they would search everything. For example, if we were carrying tinned sardines or batteries, they would take it away because they thought that the batteries were for the fighters to use for the wireless. Also that the tobacco was for the fighters or the *shebāb*. They would beat the women carrying tobacco.

Haneen: I used to hide the batteries.

Nadia: How old were you?

Haneen: I was about 7 years old... Something happened to me during the 6-month siege. At that time, women were permitted to leave the camp. You had to register your name, and there were some army men [in charge of registration]. So, my mum, my younger brother, and I went out. If you wanted to return to the camp, you had to return from the same place you had exited. On the way back, there was a man from Amal known as "the amputated hand man". He and his men captured us in the market and took us in a mini-bus and brought us here [the camp]. They didn't want us to re-enter from where we had exited. There was another passage. It was known as the Jalbout passage. They wanted us to take that way, but my mum refused because whoever took that passage, ninety-nine percent, he wouldn't make it. There was a car on the way to the camp. Whoever reached that car, meant he or she survived death. But if you reached the car, and they shot you, you would die. That's why my mum refused to take that way. The Amal fighters and the Lebanese army kept on negotiating for about four or five hours. At the end the Lebanese army took us after long negotiations with the Amal fighters. They allowed us to pass. As we were about to pass, the fighter ["amputated hand man"] said to my mum, "If you take this way, I will kill your kids in front of you, and you won't be able to take their bodies. I'll leave them [their bodies] in the street." She is a mother. You know how a mother feels for her children, and my younger brother began to cry. Also, I remember while we were waiting, a car passed us. There were Lebanese inside it. They felt bad for us, and said to my mum, "Come with us. You can stay at our house." But my mum refused and said to them, "I have other children in the camp. I must go to them." So, at the end, my mum said [to us], "You go first, and I'll come after you." My brother and I passed. My brother was carrying something on his head. He looked so funny. Till now, whenever I remember that, I laugh a lot.

Dalal: Can you imagine her carrying a big bag? It was almost the size of a bed. When she heard the shots, she almost fainted, and my uncle started to shout at us because he was worried. He thought something had gone wrong.

Haneen: Once when I left the camp with my neighbour's daughter, Amal fighters captured us again and wouldn't allow us to return to the camp. I was very young. I was about 7 years old.

Nadia: Habibtī, weren't you scared?

Haneen: Honestly, no. You don't know the meaning of fear.

Dalal: You get used to the situation.

Haneen: You grew up on war and bombing. There wasn't anything else.

Dalal: There was nothing else.

I was told by several camp refugees that, compared to the Israeli invasion in 1982, the Amal sieges were far worse. When asked why, they replied that during the invasion there had been lulls in the bombardment that had made it possible to get medical aid to the wounded, collect and bury the dead, go outside, buy food, cook, bathe and carry out other routine tasks. The bombardment during the sieges, however, was continuous. Heavy weaponry—including tanks provided by the Syrian state—was used against the cinderblock constructions of the camp. This was supplemented by snipers strategically placed in high rise buildings around the camp, from which points they had a clear shot into houses on the camp's boundary. Electricity and

water supplies were cut off. Food and medical supplies were allowed in only at the very end of the 6-month siege. As Dalal bitterly remarked, "It was a starvation siege."

Violence was deployed in a manner as to be simultaneously physical and psychological, as is evident from: i) Dalal's account of the way in which the PRCS truck was prevented from delivering relief supplies to Shatila; ii) Haneen's account of hunger driving people to eat pets; iii) Dalal's description of the way in which her brother risked his life to bring grass for his family to eat in order to stay alive; and iv) Dalal and Haneen's accounts of the ways in which Amal fighters harassed, and attempted to terrorize women and children bringing food supplies back to the camp. Their accounts reveal the ways in which terror and privation were used, in combination with killing and destruction, with the intention of eradicating camp community in its material, as well as intangible forms. By putting camp refugees in the position of being forced to eat items not considered human food, forcing mothers to choose between which of their children to feed, subjecting parents to the sight of their children's slaughter, as well as male kin to the sight of the humiliation, wounding and/or killing of their female kin, Amal fighters attempted to make those camp refugees who were still alive feel less than human. The ferocity of the violence is highlighted by the militiamen's petitioning of the Shi'a cleric in an attempt to shame him into acknowledging the brutality he had sanctioned.

However, as Dalal and Haneen's account renders amply clear, making another feel less than human does not necessarily translate into the other seeing himself as less than human. Dalal's brother risked his life to bring food to his family. Haneen's mother not only refused to abandon her children trapped in the camp, she refused as well to be cowed by the Amal militiaman's threat to kill her children in front of her. Despite the militiamen's unpredictable alternation of harassment with rape, shooting to wound, and shooting to kill, women and children continued to attempt to bring food and smuggle other supplies into the camp.

These examples reveal the limitations of analyses led by 'agency', as well as of 'bare life'. Agency is an inadequate term for characterizing situations in which life or death are the only options. Camp refugees did what they did because they saw no other choice. The accounts they gave of their experiences of violence, however, contrast their own resourcefulness under siege to the stark limitations of those besieging them. To characterize camp refugees in scholarship as having been reduced to 'bare life' would produce in writing a narrative that the perpetrators of violence were unable to establish.

In January 1988, after two and a half years of failed attempts to take over Shatila, Burj al-Barajneh and Rashīdiyya camps, Amal announced a formal end to the War of the Camps as a "gift" to the Palestinian uprising that had begun a month earlier in Gaza and the West Bank. However, in May 1988, the camps were besieged again, this time by Palestinians aligned with dissident groups that had broken away from Fateh in the early 1980s. Camp refugees refer to this war as the Abu-Musa War, for the *nom de guerre* of Colonel Said Maragha, leader of Fateh-Intifada, one of the dissident groups. Of all the periods of camp refugee history, the Abu-Musa wars were the least spoken about.

Camp refugees occasionally made reference to the presence of the Syrian military intelligence, and to being harassed by the soldiers who manned the Syrian army checkpoints at the camp's entrances. These checkpoints were established when Shatila and Burj al-Barajneh fell in July 1988 to the combined forces of Fatah-Intifada and the Syrian army detachment sent to support them. In cooperation with the Syrian army, camp refugee members of Palestinian groups aligned with the Syrian state took over internal control of the camps through a coup d'état of the Popular Committee and institutions associated with it. Syrian army checkpoints, established at all major entrances to the camps were maintained until 2002. Camp refugees could not enter or leave without presenting their identification papers for inspection. This also applied to children on their way to and from UNRWA schools that were located outside the camps. Male camp refugees between the ages of fifteen and sixty viewed as being 'Arafat loyalists' were taken away for questioning. Those who returned had been imprisoned under terrible conditions and tortured. Some never returned.

Due to camp refugees' unwillingness to speak of this period, as well as the paucity of documentation in news reports and scholarly analyses, it was difficult to establish the exact identity of the dissident fighters, as well as what took place in the aftermath of the camps' fall. According to the memoirs of Suzy Wighton, a Scottish nurse who volunteered at the PRCS hospital in Burj el-Barajneh during the Amal sieges and the Abu-Musa war, the dissident fighters for the most part were Palestinian refugees brought in from Lebanese Tripoli (Wighton, 1990). In Wighton's words: "There is the same military plan as the camp wars... The same policy of bringing fighters from outside so they have no emotional ties applies here. Palestinians are brought from Tripoli to fight those in Beirut, from Syria, from all over." However, given the labour migration of Palestinian refugees from camps in other parts of Lebanon to the Beirut camps over the decades, and intermarriage, Wighton's assumption of a lack of emotional ties between Palestinian camp refugees from different parts of Lebanon may be questioned.

The following extract from a conversation I had with a second-generation camp refugee and her husband in 2006, appears to support the claim that the Abu-Musa fighters did not come from the Beirut camps. However, it also suggests that, even if inhabitants of the Beirut camps did not take up arms in this internecine war, there were those who collaborated with the Syrian army and military intelligence in the detention, torture, and disappearance of their friends and neighbours.

Soha: We haven't ever had any traitors in the camp.

Nadia: But what about the people who collaborated with the Syrians?

Soha: That's all politics.

Nadia: Yes, but if they lived in the camps, how could they still be in parties that were allied with Syria?

Soha: They weren't from the camps.

Khalil: [annoyed] There were Palestinians from Syria. There were *ahl al-mukhayyam*.

Soha: During the Abu Musa-Intifada war even though all of Khalil's family were with GC, they didn't take part in the fighting.

Nadia: But what about the people who pointed out the men to the *mukhabarāt*?

Soha: They rounded up everyone who wasn't with the parties that weren't with Syria. Those were the only ones they knew [they could rely on]. All the others they did know, so they took them away. Hadi [her son] was only four then. If he had gone near them, they would have accused him of being an *intifadi*. The Palestinians in Syria, maybe it's the way they were treated. Not like us. I feel that they talk about Syria as if it's their country.

My conversation with Soha and Khalil originally began with them recounting times during their childhood and adolescence when they were interrogated in order to obtain information about family members who were involved in the *thaūra*. My questioning of Soha's claim regarding the absence of traitors in the camp understandably soured the tone of the conversation. It is significant that Soha used the same phrase used by other camp refugees when speaking about infighting within the PLO, the War of the Camps, and camp inhabitants' collaboration with the Syrian military intelligence: "That's all politics." Its use suggests an attempt to separate out the political from the social. Soha's use of the phrase appeared to distinguish between those who participated in the actual fighting—traitors to their community—and those who provided the Syrian military intelligence with information on their community members—'politicians'. This equation of engaging in 'politics' with collaboration has the effect of extending the association to all those who engage in politics, i.e. all politicians, and so expresses a sense of disillusionment with politics and all politicians in the abstract.

4.5 "It Was Better During the War"

Nadia: I heard from people that it was better during the war, but I don't believe it.

Fadia: It was better during the war?

Nadia: I don't know. I don't think so. How could it have been better?

Fadia: Financially it was better during the wars, because all the parties like Fateh were able to give people money.

Nadia: But what about the shelling?

Fadia: We are talking about living. The financial situation was better. Even during the war, it was better. Now, there is no war, but also there is no work. There is no money. If you don't work, there is no money, and it is rare to find a job. Many people are trying to find a job, and when they find out that you are Palestinian, they don't hire you. If they hire you, they give you a low salary. They won't give you compensation (when they lay you off) ... Whenever they want, they can kick you out...

Nadia: What do you think about this Hisham? Do you agree with Fadia?

Hisham: About what?

Nadia: About work. Were there more opportunities in the past?

Hisham: There was war all the time in the past, so there weren't job opportunities.

Nadia: Before the war, in your father's time?

Hisham: They weren't educated people to feel this difference, because all of them were working... Those who were educated, they migrated. The educated didn't come to Lebanon and they didn't stay in Lebanon. Some of them went to Saudi Arabia, or Abu Dhabi, or Kuwait, or Qatar. Most of them worked as teachers. Most of those who were *fellahin* in Palestine, worked in the orchards when they came to Lebanon, or in construction, or as carpenters. That is why they didn't feel that there was something they were forbidden from. When the next generation grew up and got educated, after being educated they found there

was no chance to work. So, they felt there was discrimination. Now there are doctors and engineers, but they are not allowed to work. Also, at that time, the war started. There is no chance to work as a doctor or an engineer while there is war. So, they didn't feel the difference either. Also, the majority migrated during the war. They travelled to the Gulf. The Gulf wasn't developed as it is now. It had just started to develop. There was oil and money, but there weren't educated people. So, all who migrated were working. At that time people didn't feel that there was pressure. Then it wasn't possible to accept more people in the Gulf, because there weren't as many opportunities as before. The educated completed their studies, but they didn't find work. In the past, whoever finished his education, would use his *wāṣṭa* to migrate to the Gulf. It wasn't necessary to work in the field he had studied. At least he was working. That's why now you feel there is a difference, because (in the past) they had other options. They were able to migrate to work. Now there is no place to go. Now they study and stay here.

When I began fieldwork in Burj al-Barajneh camp in 2003, I often heard Palestinian camp refugees refer to the Lebanese civil war as a better time. Fadia's response to my question makes clear that this should be understood as an indictment of the precarity of working and living conditions in a designated period of “peace.” The end of the Lebanese civil war was concomitant with regional and global political economic shifts that had the effect of greatly reducing avenues for salaried employment open to the camp refugees. The PLO's military withdrawal from Lebanon after the Israeli invasion of 1982 was accompanied by a withdrawal of its economic activities and social services. After the Oslo Peace Accords between the PLO and Israel (1993–1995), state building efforts were redirected to the Occupied Territories.

The post war economy that emerged in Lebanon was led by financialization. At the same time it became increasingly difficult for Palestinians to secure employment as migrant labour in the Gulf and in Libya. Hisham's account underscores the significance of the oil boom during the 1950s–1980s for social mobility and movement out of the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. “There was oil and money, but there weren't educated people. So, all who migrated were working.” Hisham's reference to this migration having been facilitated by the *wāṣṭa* accumulated by the formally educated highlights the role of social relationships in securing employment in another country. It also points to the chicken and egg relationship that may exist between formal education and capital accumulation. Lastly, Hisham's account raises the question of generational differences in the experience of labour market segmentation. In his view, the effects of this segmentation are felt more keenly by the generations subsequent to the first generation, as they have received formal education and are credentialed as “skilled” labour. “Now there is no place to go.”

This chapter has sought to problematize the view of Palestinian camp refugees in Lebanon as a naive autochthon that lacks a “modern” political consciousness. This view is shared by scholars and journalists who see themselves as sympathetic to the cause of Palestinian self-determination, by middle- and upper-class Palestinians in Lebanon who are not in need of formal refugee status and the limited humanitarian aid that it facilitates; but most importantly, by many Palestinian camp refugees themselves (Latif, 2011). Accounts of multiple generations of Palestinian women and men inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh camp complicate recent critiques of Palestinian political parties and refugee camp popular committees as forming a

predatory state vis-à-vis Palestinian inhabitants of refugee camps in Lebanon (Hajj, 2017; Hanafi & Long, 2010; Issa, 2021). The accounts analyzed in this chapter highlight a multiplicity of views held by Palestinian women and men inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh camp regarding the organizations and institutions that claim to represent them. The accounts also point to important shifts in these views over time with shifts in the local political economy of Burj al-Barajneh camp, as well as shifts in the relationships between the leaderships of Palestinian and Lebanese political parties and the Syrian state. Critiques that posit Palestinian political parties and refugee camp popular committees as forming a monolithic entity that preys on an equally homogenous, disempowered “population,” obscures shifts over time in Palestinian camp refugees’ differential participation in these organizations, as well as shifts in the legitimacy they have been accorded in a particular camp at a particular time period. Palestinian camp refugees’ self-reflections on their varied and shifting participation in political mobilization highlight the importance of viewing politics not only as a vocation, but also as work. However, this requires putting aside assumptions that limit the possibility and desirability of “politics as a vocation” only to those possessing the capital necessary to be recognized as middle-class or elite.

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Chapter 5

Labour Migration



Abu Ahmad: The economic situation at that time was ‘*ādī*. The first time I travelled was to study. I travelled to Germany to seek asylum, and after that to continue my studies. I travelled in 1984, but there was no possibility to work or study, so I returned to Lebanon. I stayed in Germany for three and a half months. After that, I travelled to Spain to continue my studies, and my brother was there. But, because of the security situation in Lebanon, I was forced to return in 1985, during the War of the Camps. After that I travelled to Saudi Arabia, but my travel was for work. I travelled with my sister. My sister’s husband applied for a visa so that I could travel to Saudi Arabia. In 1987, I travelled to Saudi Arabia for work and remained there for a year. In 1991, I got married and had a daughter. It was not permitted to issue (family) reunification visas to Palestinians at that time. That forced me to return to Lebanon. Every 6 months, I used to return to Saudi Arabia to renew my residency. But while I was in Lebanon, my residency in Saudi Arabia expired. After that, I did not try to return to Saudi Arabia.

This quote from an interview conducted by Burj al-Barajneh camp-based researcher and activist, Kholoud al-Hussein, with a fellow second-generation, Palestinian camp refugee in 2024, highlights some of the ways in which the distinction between forced/political and voluntary/economic migration does not correspond to people’s own lived experiences. Abu Ahmad’s reply to Kholoud’s question about economic conditions in Beirut at the time he first attempted to leave, was ‘*ādī*—literally, “as usual” or “normal.” Since, the period in question was during the Lebanese civil war (1975–1991), and in the recent aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Beirut (1982), the PLO’s withdrawal from Lebanon (1982), and the massacre carried out in Sabra and Shatila refugee camps by members of a Maronite militia with the assistance of the IDF (1982), it indicates what a young Palestinian camp refugee could anticipate as the norm at the time, in terms of living and working conditions. The quote also indicates ways in which the forced/voluntary dichotomy determines rights to admission, residence, employment, and education for stateless persons and their families. Lastly, it problematizes the claim that unlike nation-states considered “the Global North,” refugee integration into nation-states considered “the Global South,” is facilitated by refugees sharing racial identities, language, religious traditions, and culture with host-state citizens (Fitzgerald & Arar, 2018).

The distinction between “forced”/political and “voluntary”/economic, institutionalized in the migration management policies of both “Global North” and “Global South” nation-states, is reflected in the paucity of scholarship that uses labour as a conceptual lens to study the migration history of stateless groups. This lacuna suggests the hegemony of a paradigm that views the political and the economic as separate and isolable spheres of human action. If methodological nationalism is recognized as the naturalization of the contemporary world order of “sovereign” nation-states (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002), then it becomes easier to see the rise of the nation-state as a global historical process bound up with the spread of the capitalist world economy. A conceptualization of the nation-state as a transposable form of community imagined as limited, sovereign, sharing a past and a future, and coinciding with territory comprising a single market (Anderson, 2016 [1983]), foregrounds the significance of labour to studies of migration and rights.

The multiple generations of Palestinian refugees inhabiting refugee camps in Lebanon are exemplars of “forced migration.” While the *nakba* (the term Palestinians use to refer to their expulsion in 1948) continues to cast a long shadow, it is one of many migrations experienced by those dispossessed in 1948, as well as by their descendants. In the course of fieldwork in Burj al-Barajneh camp, several first and second-generation Palestinian refugees spoke of migration between camps in Lebanon and in Syria, during 1948–1950, in search of work. This was corroborated by research in the archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

After the Cairo Accord (1968), which enabled the PLO to establish its base of operations in Lebanon, a large number of young men—Palestinian refugees and non-Palestinian Arabs from different parts of the Middle East—migrated to the refugee camps in Lebanon as members of the militant wings of different PLO parties. Some married into camp refugee families. During the same period, large numbers of Palestinian men from the refugee camps in Lebanon migrated to Arab oil producing states. While most were only able to secure precarious “unskilled” positions, some were able to bring their families with them. Other camp refugees travelled to Cuba and the Eastern Bloc for higher education with the assistance of scholarships provided by those states, and disbursed through the political parties comprising the PLO.

This period coincided with the Lebanese civil war (1975–1991), during which survivors of the massacre and destruction of Tal al-Zatar camp (1976) were resettled in Burj al-Barajneh camp. At different points in the civil war, Palestinians from Burj al-Barajneh camp were forced to flee to other parts of Beirut and to seek shelter with family in other refugee camps. With the Israeli invasion of 1982 and the official withdrawal of PLO forces from Lebanon, many fighters and political party officials migrated to Tunisia. In the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (1991) and the Oslo Agreements (1993–1995), Palestinian camp refugees from Lebanon who had been working in the Gulf and Libya, were expelled by those nation-states. Many attempted to rebuild their lives in Burj al-Barajneh camp, large parts of which had been destroyed during the Lebanese civil war, which had ended not long before their forced return.

In 2007, inhabitants of Nahr al-Bared camp in northern Lebanon, sought refuge in Burj al-Barajneh camp after their homes were destroyed in a conflict between the Lebanese army and an armed group of Islamists. With the outbreak of war in Syria in 2011, Syrians and Palestinian refugees living in camps in Syria, migrated to Burj al-Barajneh camp for refuge and for work. At the same time, there has been a steady stream of out-migration from Burj al-Barajneh camp of those Palestinian refugees who have managed to acquire sufficient capital to move to “better” neighbourhoods in Beirut, and elsewhere in Lebanon. From the late 1980s-onwards, there has also been a significant increase in the undocumented migration of young—particularly male—camp refugees to the “Global North” in search of asylum.

This abbreviated history of migration to and from Burj al-Barajneh camp complicates analyses of refugee camps located in “Global South” nation-states, as carceral spaces where refugees are contained and isolated (Agamben, 1995; Agier, 2011; Diken & Laustsen, 2005; Fitzgerald & Arar, 2018; Hanafi & Long, 2010; Hyndman, 2000; Malkki, 1995). Analyses based on “encampment,” tend to focus primarily on host-states’ and humanitarian aid organizations’ formal constraints on refugee mobility. This focus may preclude examination of the informal ways in which camp refugees are integrated into the political economies of their host nation-states and into the global capitalist economy on unequal terms.

Focusing primarily on formal constraints on refugee mobility may also obscure the significant role played by migration in the livelihood strategies of refugees (Monsutti, 2020; Omata, 2017; Trapp, 2018). In addition to problematizing the forced/voluntary dichotomy underlying migration management in “the Global North” as well as “the Global South,” an examination of refugees’ “labour migration” recenters the struggle to earn a living as an inherently political matter. It may also facilitate a better understanding of global migration that is not limited by methodological nationalism (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002).

5.1 Forced/Voluntary Distinction

The distinction between “forced”—political—and “voluntary”—economic—migration, institutionalized in international law after the Second World War, has come to be problematized in recent scholarship (Erdal & Oeppen, 2018; Fitzgerald & Arar, 2018; Karatani, 2005; Long, 2013). Some scholars have argued that the distinction was in part an attempt to create legal migration pathways for those who would otherwise have been deemed un-admittable to countries in the Global North, given their lack of moveable capital, whether financial or in terms of desired “abilities” and “skills” (Long, 2013). Others have highlighted the disjuncture between the legal definitions used by nation-states in their categorization of people on the move, and people’s shifting understandings of their own experiences (Erdal & Oeppen, 2018; Fitzgerald & Arar, 2018).

Scholars have also pointed to the fact that these legal categories may not be transposable across nation-state borders. The same person may be categorized as a

“refugee” in one nation-state, an “undocumented migrant” in another nation-state, and as an “asylum seeker” in a third nation-state. If the relationship between the formal and the informal is understood in terms of a continuum, rather than a binary, it is clear that the person’s experiences of mobility and immobility cannot be reduced to the legal category in which they are formally placed. At the same time, the formal category has important consequences for the rights—if any—that the person can claim.

Until the drafting of the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, there was no international consensus on the legal definition of “refugee” and the rights that could be claimed on the basis of that status. In the early part of the twentieth century, the problem was formulated in terms of “surplus population,” referring to those who were unable to secure a livelihood within the territory they inhabited. Emigration was viewed as the preferred solution to this problem. At the same time, it was difficult to persuade states to permit entry of the poor, regardless of the persecution they experienced (Karatani, 2005; Long, 2013; Venturas, 2015; Vernant, 1953).

After World War One, major receiving states in the Americas and Australasia began to restrict migration in response to economic stagnation and public protests, deploying a discourse of race, autochthony, and eugenics. The League of Nations’ assistance to those fleeing war and persecution was limited to particular groups and particular conflicts, such as White Russians fleeing the Bolshevik Revolution and survivors of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire. This assistance took the form of facilitating the refugees’ resettlement, which remained contingent on their meeting criteria established by receiving states in line with the perceived labour and capital needs of their political economies.

The negotiations for the drafting of the 1951 United Nations Convention took place in a context shaped by the genocide of European Jews during World War Two, the emergence of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Partition of the Indian sub-continent, and the establishment of the nation-state of Israel. In the aftermath of these events, an open refusal to admit those fleeing war and persecution appeared less politically legitimate. At the same time, the criteria established for claiming protection as a refugee privileged fear of persecution on grounds of race, religion, nationality, and political opinion over economic collapse or environmental disasters. Moreover, this was understood as referring to those fleeing the establishment of communist governments in Eastern Europe, rather than to those fleeing the ethnic cleansing that occurred during the Partition of the Indian sub-continent (1947), and the establishment of the nation-state of Israel (1948). Some scholars have argued that this definition of refugee status aimed to discredit socialist conceptions of development based on the right to full employment, by encouraging defection and mass emigration (Bernard, 2023; Fitzgerald & Arar, 2018).

Historians concur in viewing the institutionalization of the forced/voluntary distinction as having taken place in the post-World War Two era (Easton-Calabria, 2015; Karatani, 2005; Long, 2013). Some scholars have highlighted disagreements between the US and the International Labour Organization (ILO), which

contributed to the failure of the ILO organized conference on migration management held in Naples in 1950 (Karatani, 2005). Established in 1919 as an agency of the League of Nations, the ILO had worked closely with the League of Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees during the interwar period, in facilitating the resettlement of particular groups of refugees as migrant labour. Given its experience and permanent status, ILO officials were of the view that it was the best positioned multilateral organization to lead migration management in the post-World War Two era. The United States government, however, preferred the establishment of a specialized agency whose mandate would be restricted to facilitating intergovernmental negotiations, thereby maintaining the principle of state sovereignty in determining migration policy.

Other scholars have argued that the institutionalization of the forced/voluntary dichotomy had less to do with US attempts to stymie what it perceived to be internationalist expansionism on the part of the ILO. Rather, what was at stake were "competing political visions of migration" (Long, 2013, p. 18) associated with competing views of development (Bernard, 2023). The United States and its allies championed the "right of exit" as a freedom of choice, which was thought to increase labour productivity, reduce poverty, and facilitate social mobility. The Eastern Bloc's "right to stay" was associated with the view that full employment, free education, and healthcare were fundamental rights whose provision required that economic production be planned and controlled by the state. In this view of development, the recruitment of migrant labour was condemned as a form of exploitation that generated profit at the expense of labour migrants, and reproduced relations of dependency between sending and host states.

However, the emergence of a system of international labour migration intended to promote "socialist" development, problematizes accounts that posit a sharp dichotomy between the socialist "right to stay" and the capitalist "right to exit" (Bernard, 2023). Similarly, accounts that attribute international erosion of the right to asylum to the initiation of the US led "War on Terror" (2001), obscure nation-states' continued reluctance, during the post-World War Two era, to resettle refugees lacking moveable capital, or deemed to be economically unproductive. Scholars have argued that the discourse of humanitarianism enabled the selective circumvention of immigration quotas by presenting those accorded refugee status as victims of political oppression (Bernard, 2023; Long, 2013). Separating migrants from refugees was also a strategy pursued by the UNHCR in the 1950s in order to facilitate the resettlement of the old, sick, and disabled on humanitarian grounds.

Palestinian refugees were written out of the 1951 Convention on the Rights of the Refugee, which clarifies a refugee's right to waged employment vis-à-vis the state that has granted it refuge (Albanese & Takkenberg, 2020). In 1949, the UN Economic and Social Council appointed an Ad Hoc Committee on Statelessness and Related Problems in order to prepare a revised convention pertaining to the international status of refugees and stateless persons. Whereas France and the United Kingdom were in favour of a broader definition of refugee status, the US preferred the maintenance of a restricted criterion. The US representative to the ad

hoc committee proposed excluding Palestinians from the revised definition of “refugee,” in order to limit groups who could claim the right to be resettled.

Subsequently, when a broader definition centered around the concept of “fear of persecution” was debated in the General Assembly, the representatives of Egypt, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia proposed the following amendment: “shall not apply to persons who are at present receiving from other organs or organizations of the UN protection or assistance” (Albanese & Takkenberg, 2020, p. 80). The representatives justified this amendment on the grounds that unlike other refugees, Palestinians were not outside their country due to fear of persecution, but because of the 1947 decision of the UN to partition Palestine, and because another member state of the UN—Israel—prevented them from returning. This made Palestinian refugees “the direct responsibility of the UN” (Albanese & Takkenberg, 2020, p. 80).

5.2 Migration Management and Labour Market Segmentation

Many scholars view states’ management of migration as playing an important role in the segmentation of labour markets, and the creation of unfree working conditions for migrants as well as for the particular groups of locals with whom they are perceived as being in competition for employment opportunities (Bonacich, 1972; Burawoy, 1981; Castles, 2015; Standing, 2011). The study of labour market segmentation was initiated in the United States in the 1970s in order to understand the historic persistence of gender and racial inequalities. Some scholars argued that, since employers seek to keep labour costs as low as possible, labour market segmentation is in part the consequence of local workers’ preemptive fears of the negative effect of migrant labour on overall wages and working conditions (Bonacich, 1972). This is evinced by representatives of local labour lobbying for the restriction of migration. Other scholars highlighted the role of employers in exploiting existing gender and racial conflicts in order to undermine labour organization and break strikes (Reich et al., 1973). These scholars also pointed to the use of violence by states to repress protests and labour activism (Burawoy, 1981).

Recent scholarship on the global history of migration has revisited these debates in its examination of the use of “free” and “unfree” labour within capitalism (Castles, 2015; van der Linden, 2023). In the post-World War II era, many of the United States’ allies in Western Europe encouraged migration to provide labour for jobs rejected by local workers, and to reduce upward pressure on wages. Guest workers were recruited from Southern Europe, North Africa, Turkey, Finland, and Ireland to provide a buffer against economic fluctuations. During economic downturns, guest workers—unlike citizens—could be returned to their nation-state of origin, reducing the demand on recently expanded social services. After the oil price crises of the 1970s, these recruitment programs were discontinued. “Global North” states established a preference for labour migrants deemed “highly skilled” or “entrepreneurs”

with regards to their possession of moveable capital. Asylum seeking and undocumented migration emerged as pathways for those deemed “unskilled.”

The concept of labour market segmentation allows for a consideration of the different ways in which the actions of local workers, employers, and nation-states in particular parts of the world have contributed to the emergence and persistence of local and global structural inequalities. This may facilitate a better understanding of Palestinian camp refugees’ experiences of labour in Lebanon, as well as in other Arab nation-states to which they migrated during the Lebanese civil war (1975–1991). The discourse of Arab nationalism and Arab states’ opposition to the establishment of the nation-state of Israel notwithstanding, the migration policies of states in the region towards Palestinian refugees have been shaped by their regional ambitions, as well as by the perceived needs of their national economies (Albanese & Takkenberg, 2020; Owen, 2004; Thiollet, 2016). The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which had established its authority over the West Bank in 1948, extended rights of citizenship to all Palestinians who sought refuge in its territories. These rights were not extended to those fleeing the Israeli occupation of the West Bank in 1967. Similarly, Palestinians who sought refuge in Syria in the immediate aftermath of their expulsion in 1948, were extended rights of residence and no formal restrictions were placed on their employment or right to own property.

This was not the case in Lebanon. The political economy of the newly independent nation-state of Lebanon to which the first generation of Palestinian camp refugees were displaced, had been shaped by migration to the Americas, as well as by the emergence of a capitalist political economy moulded by sectarian divides. Beirut’s integration into the world economy, under Ottoman hegemony, resulted in a political economy led by trade and the provision of financial services (Hanssen, 2005; Khuri, 1969; Owen, 1976; Saba, 1976; Traboulsi, 2007). While generating large profits for a small number of entrepreneurs—who also became the political representatives of their religious sects—these economic activities did not provide sufficient wage labour opportunities for waves of rural-urban migrants from the regions brought together under the French Mandate for Lebanon (1923–1946). Dispossessed from rural hinterlands, which were increasingly reorganized towards commodity production for sale in regional and world markets, these migrants sought to migrate to the Americas (Khater, 2001). Remittances as well as capital brought back by returning migrants were invested in agriculture, industry, construction and commerce. The opportunities for wage labour thus generated tended to be made available through networks of social relationships understood in terms of kinship, shared village of origin, and membership in religious sect. These shifts in the local political economy facilitated the rise of new political leaders supported by wealthy emigrants in their families (Khuri, 1969).

In 1942, when Bishara al-Khoury and Riad al-Sulh met to discuss the form of government that would be taken by the independent nation-state of Lebanon, its trade and banking sectors were concentrated in the hands of a small number of Sunni Muslim and Maronite, Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Protestant, and Armenian Christian families. Meeting as the political economic representatives of their respective religious sects, al-Khoury and Sulh reached an unwritten agreement, referred to

as the National Pact. By the terms of this agreement, Muslim elites gave up the demand for Lebanon to be annexed to Syria, in exchange for Christian elites giving up their demand for French protection. The independent nation-state of Lebanon would be governed by a sectarian partnership which would ensure the existing status quo of a *laissez-faire* state.

The first-generation of Palestinian camp refugees was predominantly Sunni Muslim. Unlike their well-to-do Muslim and Christian compatriots who were not in need of humanitarian assistance, Palestinian camp refugees did not possess significant moveable capital in the form of “skills” and monetary assets. Deemed a threat to the delicate sectarian balance of the newly independent Lebanese state, they were granted permission to be temporarily resident. However, they were not permitted to improve the condition of the rudimentary shelters they had built for themselves, or to build more durable structures if they acquired the means to do so (Latif, 2008, 2023). This was in contrast to the incorporation of wealthy and middle-class Palestinians, whose moveable capital contributed to Beirut’s rise as a regional hub for trade and finance, and who were able to secure naturalization. These restrictions on impoverished Palestinians were also in contrast to the settlement and naturalization of predominantly Christian Armenian refugees during the French Mandate, a decision supported by many Christian political leaders and opposed by many of their Muslim counterparts (Traboulsi, 2007).

During the 1950s–1960s, the first generation of Palestinians inhabiting Burj al-Barajneh camp found themselves competing with Lebanese and Syrian rural-urban migrants for scarce precarious work. Scholarship on the post national independence migration of rural and “unskilled” Syrian labour to Lebanon views it as having been propelled in part by the development policies implemented by the Syrian state (Chalcraft, 2009). Land reform, reduced taxation, and agricultural subsidies created an incentive for small owners to acquire capital to improve their holdings and stock. Many sought to accumulate this capital through circular labour migration to Lebanon. Unlike Palestinian camp refugees who had no nation-state to return to, Syrian migrant workers were not perceived to be a threat to Lebanon’s sectarian balance. They could be paid less, in part, because their efforts were directed to the improvement of the material conditions of their families in Syria, where the cost of living was considerably lower than in Lebanon.

Similar to the English word “peasant,” the Arabic word “*fellah*” refers to a broad range of relationships to land including landless labour for hire, sharecropping, and owner-cultivators. After their forcible expulsion in 1948, all those involved in the Galilee’s rural economy lost their means of livelihood. However, first-generation Palestinian camp refugees’ accounts indicate that by the 1940s, some cultivator-owners had rented out part of their land while pursuing regional trade or work in the urban areas. The moveable “capital” they had acquired in the form of literacy, a “skilled” trade, or social relationships extending beyond their villages of origin, played an important role in the kinds of employment they were able to secure for themselves after their displacement. Work with UNRWA was one of the few opportunities for salaried employment open to the small number of camp refugees who had received formal education in Mandate Palestine.

Over the course of the 1960s, UNRWA's provision of basic education and vocational training contributed to an increase in the number of "skilled" Palestinian camp refugees. However, during the same period, the Lebanese state passed laws regulating the employment of non-citizens in Lebanon (al-Natour, 1997). All foreign workers were required to obtain permits from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Exceptions were made for seasonal and casual work, particularly in agriculture and retail. Work permits could be acquired if the worker were married to a Lebanese citizen, or if they had established a business, trade, or craft in Lebanon and had been resident since before 1954. Subsequent to that date, a minimum of 50,000 Lebanese pounds was required in working capital and the employment of at least three Lebanese citizens. These regulations had the effect of institutionalizing segmentation along lines of citizenship in a labour market whose division along sectarian lines was intensifying with shifts in the national political economy (Johnson, 1986; Nasr, 1978).

The increase in UNRWA educated Palestinian camp refugees coincided with the rapid growth of the economies of oil-producing states in the region, and with the beginning of the Lebanese civil war. Narratives of the Lebanese civil war have tended to portray it as a political conflict between different religious sects worsened by the conflict between the PLO and the Israeli state. This has precluded a better understanding of the role of unequal capital accumulation and labour market segmentation in bringing these conflicts to the boiling point; an insight that is lost if differences of sect and citizenship are assumed as neatly mapping onto class inequalities. Such understandings of the Lebanese civil war may also obscure ways in which the political economy that emerged over the course of the war contributed to its prolongation (Hourani, 2015; Picard, 2000; Traboulsi, 2007).

Forced sectarian homogenization of territory under the control of different "local" militias facilitated the emergence of alternative commercial centers and new avenues for entrepreneurship and capital accumulation. The "borders" of these territories were maintained through the use of check points, which also allowed the militias to generate profits through the levy of custom duties and the creation of local shortages and monopolies. During the 1980s, the militias turned into professional organizations whose fighters were paid a salary. Given unemployment and economic paralysis, these salaries were often the only income for their families.

5.3 Labour Migration to Arab Oil Producing States

During the Lebanese civil war, large numbers of Palestinian camp refugees migrated from Lebanon to the rapidly growing economies of oil producing Arab states. Most migrants tended to be single men who, in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, were mainly able to secure "semi-skilled" positions. Those who migrated to Libya tended to be considered "skilled" labour and were permitted to bring their families with them. These flows were facilitated, on the one hand, by the Casablanca Protocol agreed upon by the League of Arab States in 1965, and on the other hand, by wealthy

members of the Palestinian diaspora in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. The Casablanca Protocol accorded Palestinian refugees and Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank the same rights to engage in economic activities as the citizens of Arab League states. Some scholars have argued that this reflected the important role played by Palestinian entrepreneurs in the political economies of several Arab states during the 1950s (Albanese & Takkenberg, 2020). Others have seen it as an instance of “migration diplomacy,” or nation-states’ use of migration management as a “diplomatic” tool to achieve particular political economic goals (Tsourapas, 2017).

The scholarship on labour migration from non-oil producing Arab states to oil producing Arab states has tended to focus on tensions between different understandings of Arab nationalism versus “local” nationalisms in terms of the rights extended to migrant labour from the region (Chalcraft, 2009, 2011; Halliday, 1977, 1984; Jamal, 2017; Owen, 2004; Thiollet, 2016). Some scholars have examined these tensions with regard to the political mobilization of labour migrants in host-states. Others have considered the impact of migrant remittances on sending nation-states. However, little discussion of migrants’ own experiences as well as their understandings of their experiences have been incorporated in the findings of this body of scholarship, which has tended to a macro-scalar analysis.

Some scholars have argued that despite efforts to present Arab nationalism as a unified movement with a single objective, there has been no agreement, since its inception in the nineteenth century, about its relationship with other local and regional understandings of belonging and identity (Owen, 2004). Tensions between pan Arabism and the nationalisms of particular Arab states have often been explained in terms of the division of Arab lands by European colonization and the establishment of Mandate Authorities—a view that suggests methodological nationalism (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). In the early part of the twentieth century, regional support for Palestinians in their struggles against the British Mandate and Jewish settlers was significant in the coalescence of a sense of Arab nationalism. At the same time, newly independent Arab states attempted to make use of pan-Arabism and solidarity with Palestinian nationalism as a means of asserting their legitimacy and protecting themselves from internal opposition. Similarly, the discourse of Arab fraternity has frequently been used to divert attention from direct and indirect intervention in the affairs of neighbouring states.

In the 1950s, the growing oil economies of the Arabian Peninsula provided new investment opportunities to Palestinian entrepreneurs who were able to recoup the financial capital they had invested overseas in bank deposits, shares, bonds, and stocks, (Hanieh, 2010; Smith, 1984, 1986). Their fluency in English and the contacts they had built during British Mandate rule over Palestine (1920–1948) were significant forms of social capital, as many of the Gulf states were still British Protectorates. Palestinian professionals who emigrated to the Gulf during this period, were also able to form companies which were highly lucrative. A new Palestinian elite emerged in the diaspora, that was closely tied to the growth of the oil economies in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. This elite’s relationships with kin in other parts of the region enabled its access to “skilled” and “unskilled” Palestinian labour (Hanieh, 2010; Smith, 1984, 1986), whose migration was facilitated by the

Saudi and Gulf monarchies stated solidarity with the Palestinian cause (Brand, 1988; Chalcraft, 2011; Thiollet, 2016).

The city-states which came to form the United Arab Emirates in 1971, emerged from the treaties of truce, and later protection, that local rulers entered into with the British colonial state over the course of the nineteenth century. Until the discovery of oil on the Arabian shore of the Gulf in the 1930s, the region was of interest to imperial powers primarily for its strategic location on international maritime trade routes. By the mid-1970s, the oil boom had generated a large demand for the construction of infrastructure, and the formal education of the “autochthonous” workforce (Birks & Sinclair, 1980; Halliday, 1977, 1984). This demand was met by the importation of both “skilled” and “unskilled” labour. Managerial positions were staffed by British and American expatriates, while mid-level, “semi-skilled” and “unskilled” positions were filled by migrants from the region, and from South Asia.

The importation of labour was in part a response to insufficient formal education among the local labour force. However, a number of scholars have argued that the use of migrant labour was a deliberate strategy on the part of states, as well as the multinational corporations that dominated oil production until the oil crisis of 1973 to ensure labour control (Halliday, 1977, 1984; Seccombe & Lawless, 1986; Wright, 2021). Some have highlighted continuities with the guest worker regime of labour migration, configured under British colonial rule, that connected British India to regions in the Arabian Peninsula under British hegemony. These guest workers schemes were established after an older system of indenture was brought to an end by the mobilization of South Asian anti-colonial nationalists in the early twentieth century (Wright, 2021). Other scholars have focused on the compromises reached between the British colonial government and local rulers over limiting American influence in the region in exchange for privileging the hiring of Arab workers (Seccombe & Lawless, 1986). Yet others have argued that local rulers and multinational corporations preferred the use of guest workers, as they could be paid less than locals and deported if they attempted to mobilize (Halliday, 1977, 1984).

By the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975, a steady stream of second-generation men from Burj al-Barajneh camp had found precarious work in the UAE, often without formal work permits. The remittances they sent back to their families were crucial to surviving the war. Consider the following excerpt from field notes recorded in the winter of 2004.

When Hala brings out the family album, she and Abu Nabeel point to different pictures and talk about their significance to Hala’s husband and I. There are pictures of a young Abu Nabeel with his friends from when he was in Abu Dhabi. Abu Nabeel tells me that his father and uncle were encouraging him to go to Abu Dhabi in 1975 as the civil war had broken out in Lebanon. “I couldn’t make up my mind. Then one morning I woke up to the sound of shelling from the east of Beirut to the west, and decided there was no point in staying. So, I packed a small suitcase and went to the airport. That was the first day the airport was open, and when the plane took off, I could see the shells flying from east to west Beirut. I thought Abu Dhabi would be a very rich place with streets, hotels, and cars... When they opened the door of the plane, I wanted to go back. The airport was a patch of land in a sea of sand. It was so hot. You know at this time it was still not developed. Very different than it is now. I went to my *khālī* (maternal uncle) who was already there. He told me to go see this person

and that person—all his friends and acquaintances. I went to all of them, and they said we don't have any work for you right now. A few weeks of this and I wanted to go back. So, one day my cousin said to me, "Get your bags. We're going to this nearby "emirate." I thought it would be a short distance. It ended up being a long bus ride. We got there at the crack of dawn, and he said to me, "Yalla, we have to get to work!" He took me to where they needed a metal worker. I'd done this kind of work before when I was here, but they needed proof that I could do the job properly. So, they wanted me to make something. All of them watched me as I did it. I did it fine, so they hired me. One day the army came, and they wanted to check everyone's papers, so I got scared and hid. The owner came and said give me your passport so I can get the necessary permit for you. I told him no because I didn't want to stay in that place, in that job. The whole time I was doing this, I would call and write to my *khālī* to ask if he had found me something in Abu Dhabi, and he always said no. I was stupid not to have gotten that permit. If I had, I would have stayed there and improved my life, and we wouldn't be here now. One day Ahmad and I were walking near the airport, and he said, "Let's go back." So, we grabbed our suitcases and left. At the airport they said to us, "Your passports were stamped for a three-to-six-month tourist visa, and you are leaving after 2 years? Were you working?" We said to him, "We've been trying to get back, but the Beirut airport has been closed." He let us go. He could have put us in jail for a couple of months because that is the penalty for overstaying. When we got out of Beirut airport, there were soldiers everywhere...

Abu Nabeel's account problematizes the distinction between political/forced and voluntary/economic migration institutionalized in international law, as it makes clear that securing a living is never merely an economic matter. His account also highlights the significance of *wāṣṭa* in securing wage labour. Literally, "mediation", the word is used in colloquial Arabic to refer simultaneously to the network of social relationships a person can lay claim to for assistance, as well as the social capital they possess by virtue of the relationships they are recognized as being part of. With close kin already working in Abu Dhabi, Abu Nabeel possessed sufficient *wāṣṭa* to get there during the Lebanese civil war. However, as his account indicates, the *wāṣṭa* he possessed as the young nephew of a stateless migrant engaged in precarious labour deemed "unskilled" was not sufficient to get him work of his choosing. The account also highlights the *wāṣṭa* possessed by his employer as the owner of the production facility, and presumably as a citizen of the UAE. At the same time, the account indicates that as a Palestinian fleeing the civil war in Lebanon, Abu Nabeel and his cousin possessed sufficient *wāṣṭa* in a "brother" Arab country to not be arrested and imprisoned for over-staying their tourist visas and working without a permit.

Abu Nabeel's account is also significant for what it contributes to debates about the political mobilization of migrant workers in host nation-states. In his analysis of the consequences of labour migration for labour organizing in Arab countries, Fred Halliday argued that organizing workers across national divides was difficult, as migrant workers' understandings of their situation were "shaped by political conditions in their country of origin" and primarily oriented towards sending back as much of their wages as possible (Halliday, 1977, p. 13). Moreover, migrant workers were well aware of how easily they could be deported by host-states and replaced by their employers.

Abu Nabeel was the only member of his family to join the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) when the PLO established its base of operations in Lebanon in 1969. Unlike other members of his family who chose to join Fateh, Abu Nabeel explained that he was drawn to the DFLP's stated platform of bringing about a workers' revolution. His decision to try to find work in Abu Dhabi, as well as his regret over his "youthful mistake" in not getting a work permit may seem to be at odds with a commitment to national liberation through a workers' revolution. At the same time, they highlight the ways in which the difficult political economic conditions of his life shaped—but did not fully determine—his agency.

The political economy of the regions that formed the United Libyan Kingdom in 1951 had been shaped by the violence of Italian settler colonialism, as well as by protracted resistance to it, led by the Sanusi Order (Collins, 1974). Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Italian traders had formed small, prosperous communities on the North African coast. Soon after the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861, the Italian government encouraged Italian businessmen to purchase existing commercial and manufacturing interests in the region, as well as controlling interests in shipping lines serving regional ports, with the view to "buy" Libya as a colony for the settlement of Italian labour.

After World War One, these tactics were replaced by military "pacification" involving the poisoning of wells, bombing of tribal encampments, and the slaughter of their livestock. During the 1930s, most of the nomadic population of Northern Cyrenaica was forced into concentration camps. The policy of land confiscation for the settlement of Italian workers was continued into the 1940s. While some attempts were made by the colonial state to provide health care, the indigenous inhabitants of the conquered territories were prohibited from attending Italian schools, and from holding a post or practicing a profession that would result in Italians being their subordinates (Collins, 1974).

Similar to the UAE, until the discovery of oil in the 1950s, Libya was of interest to Britain and the United States primarily for its strategic geopolitical location (Birks & Sinclair, 1980; Collins, 1974). In the early 1950s, the newly independent Libyan monarchy entered into military agreements with Britain and the US, by the terms of which the two powers secured the rights to establish military bases on Libyan territory in exchange for economic assistance. Similar to the UAE, oil production generated a demand for the construction of infrastructure as well as for formally educated "skilled" labour. As in the case of the UAE, this demand was met by importing "skilled" and "unskilled" labour from the region.

However, significant differences emerged between the two after the military coup led by Colonel Qaddafi in 1969, which had the stated goal of nationalizing and Arabizing Libya's political economy in order to reclaim it from "Western imperialism." The government of the UAE, by contrast, chose to maintain close ties with the United States and Britain. Moreover, unlike Saudi Arabia and the UAE, a Palestinian diaspora elite closely tied to the oil economy did not emerge. Rather, UNRWA educated Palestinian camp refugees who migrated from Lebanon to Libya in the 1970s–1980s, were able to establish middle-class lives there. This is brought out in

the following quote from an interview conducted by Kholoud al-Hussein with a second-generation refugee in 2024.

There was no difficulty for a Palestinian to find work, as I told you. The Palestinian was treated like a Libyan citizen worker. The Palestinian was not excluded from anything. There was no difficulty for Palestinians to travel to Libya... There was no difficulty in finding housing. Each of us lived in his own house. We lived in rented houses, but I learned that many of the Palestinians there had bought houses and no longer lived in rented accommodation. But this decision was issued during the rule of Muammar Gaddafi. Palestinians were given special treatment. A decision was issued for the right to own and buy houses, and some of them even owned villas. I will tell you how we had special treatment. Every Libyan citizen was given a ration card. No other resident of the country was allowed to obtain this card, but every Palestinian in Libya had this ration card. Also, for housing, we paid a nominal rent, and the house was spacious. We were allowed to rent and own houses... It made things easier. Free medicine, free treatment, and free education until the completion of university studies.

Abu Imad's account highlights parity in the social services provided by the Libyan state to its own citizen workers and those extended to Palestinian refugee workers. This was not the case in the UAE. Moreover, by the late 1970s, many Gulf states had introduced restrictions on the family members that a labour migrant was permitted to bring with them by binding this permission to the salary earned by the migrant worker.

The military coup that brought Colonel Qaddafi to power was led by young, junior army officers from lower middle- and working-class backgrounds. Many had grown up in informal urban settlements. Reportedly, the code word for the coup was "*Falaṣṭīn lanā*"—"Palestine is ours" (Collins, 1974, p. 15). The economic policies that were implemented after the coup aimed at securing Libyan autonomy through the rapid development of formal education, provision of healthcare, industrialization, and the modernization of agriculture. As in the case of the UAE, this development was to be accomplished through the re-distribution of oil profits. However, unlike the case of the UAE, there was a firm commitment to limiting Western investment in the Libyan economy. As Abu Imad's account indicates, Palestinian refugees deemed "skilled labour," as well as their families benefited from these policies, and from the Libyan state's use of migration diplomacy to further its regional ambitions.

Some scholars have argued that notwithstanding the formal restrictions placed on refugees' employment in nation-states considered "the Global South," integration is facilitated by their sharing race, language, and religious traditions with host nation-state citizens (Fitzgerald & Arar, 2018). Consider the following excerpt from an interview with a second-generation Palestinian woman living in Burj al-Barajneh camp in 2006, when the interview was conducted.

Imm Ali: I didn't see, and I didn't live the war. When I got married, I traveled to Libya.

Nadia: Which year was that?

Imm Ali: 1973.

Nadia: How did you meet your husband?

Imm Ali: He was a schoolteacher. He used to pass by our house, so he saw me. Then he came and proposed...

Nadia: How long were you engaged?

Imm Ali: We were engaged for 1 month. He had vacation for 1 month, then he had to return to his job.

Nadia: What was his job?

Imm Ali: He was a teacher of Arabic language.

Nadia: How did you feel when you arrived in Libya?

Imm Ali: It was strange. That's how I felt, and I didn't know anyone there. I spent a while alone. I was only with him, so sometimes I used to feel bored. We used to go out together, to the sea, to walk on the corniche, to the park, to the market, because we didn't have children yet. I used to feel bored. Then later I had neighbors, so I started to visit them, and they would visit me.

Nadia: Were they Palestinians too?

Imm Ali: They were Palestinians, Syrians, and Libyans. The Libyans were very good and generous. Their manners were very good.

Nadia: Where did you live in Libya?

Imm Ali: In Benghazi.

Nadia: Were you happy in the neighbourhood you were living in?

Imm Ali: Yes, I was happy.

Nadia: Were you comfortable?

Imm Ali: Yes, I was entertained by the kids. I gave birth almost every year. After they were born, I didn't have time to feel bored. I would bathe the kids, cook, clean, iron, do the laundry, comb their hair. When I got sick, I didn't have time to go to the doctor, even though the doctor's house was close to my house. I would get medicine from the pharmacy.

Nadia: The neighbours didn't help you?

Imm Ali: The neighbors would come to visit.

Nadia: There weren't close relationships?

Imm Ali: No. Then, the children grew up. When the girls grew up, and became your age, there was a neighbour. She would come with her children, and sit with the girls and with us, before we returned from Libya.

Imm Ali's account provides a window into the experiences of the wives of Palestinian camp refugee men deemed "skilled" labour, who were permitted to accompany their husbands. On the one hand, Imm Ali was able to leave behind the privations of the Lebanese civil war and raise her children in a place of relative peace and security. This "privilege" was made possible by her husband-to-be possessing sufficient capital to be deemed "skilled labour" and to access formal mechanisms of migration for himself and his family. The match itself may have been facilitated by the social capital Imm Ali had acquired as the daughter of a Palestinian refugee family with the means to live outside the camps and send her to school, as her reproductive labour was not required at home. However, Imm Ali's account underscores the isolation and loneliness she experienced in a "brother" Arab country, where she knew no one and had no kin other than her husband, whom she had just met.

Her answer to my question about whether she had felt comfortable in the neighbourhood where she lived in Benghazi deflected to a wry remark about being "entertained" by the reproductive labour of child-rearing. If she had remained in Lebanon, the war notwithstanding, this labour could have been made easier by the help and companionship of her female neighbours, friends, and kin, assistance that she would have been in a position to reciprocate. This is highlighted by her answer to my question about the social relationships she was able to establish with her neighbours. Imm Ali's account problematizes the claim made by some scholars that the integration of migrants in nation-states considered "the Global South" is different from

their experiences in “the Global North,” given shared “cultural similarities with the native populations” (Fitzgerald & Arar, 2018). Perhaps, integration is only possible when migrants and locals are able to establish reciprocal relationships of relatively equal exchange.

5.4 Educational Migration to the Eastern Bloc

During the 1970s–1980s, young Palestinian women and men refugees travelled from Burj al-Barajneh camp to the USSR, Cuba, and Eastern Europe for higher education. Scholarships were made available by those states and dispersed through the particular political parties of the PLO that they had diplomatic ties with. The provision of the scholarships was briefly mentioned in older scholarship that was primarily concerned with macro-scalar “political” relationships between the PLO and Eastern Bloc states (Sayigh, 1997). The scholarships were also briefly mentioned in more recent work on Palestinian collective memory, as evidence of Third World internationalism—a transnational social movement whose memories are claimed to have been erased by neoliberalism (Khalili, 2007). Both studies privileged a macro-scalar perspective concerned with establishing causes for and consequences of the PLO’s failure to establish a Palestinian nation-state. The experiences and accounts of individual refugees were not foregrounded, as the primary focus was the delineation of a collective narrative.

Recent work has examined the comparative experiences of Palestinian and Sahrawi camp refugees of higher education in Cuba (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015). Palestinian camp refugees from Lebanon interviewed for this study were reported to have been suspicious of being approached to speak about their experiences in Cuba. This was understood as indicative of their desire to distance themselves from a “revolutionary” past that might negatively impact their current positions, especially those contracted to work for UNRWA. Findings from the interviews suggested that the scholarships were disbursed on the basis of the political affiliation of the recipients’ families, rather than students’ academic aptitude. The researcher concluded that scholarship recipients’ understanding of their experiences did not align with the Cuban state’s goals of molding graduates sympathetic to its form of socialism and facilitating the development of a people seen as fraternal through shared experiences of Western colonialism and imperialism. According to the researcher, this was evinced by interviewees stating that the reason they returned to the camp was in order to serve their people. Yet, they also spoke of trying unsuccessfully to get employment in other nation-states or outside the refugee camps.

In 2025, during the Israeli attacks on Lebanon, Kholoud al-Hussein conducted interviews with a number of her compatriots from Burj al-Barajneh camp, about their experiences of receiving scholarships and studying in the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc states. Her interviewees indicated an awareness and anticipation of both narratives; i.e. Eastern Bloc solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for national liberation during the Cold War, as well as criticisms of the PLO’s disbursal

of scholarships as “neopatrimonial.” Consider the following quotes from interviews that al-Hussein conducted with compatriots who continue to work in Burj al-Barajneh camp, but now live elsewhere.

I knew about the scholarships by chance. One of my father’s friends in the political party told my father about them. This friend was responsible for the scholarships, and asked my father if he wanted to send one of his children through these scholarships... So that’s how I got the scholarship... I do not remember if there was an official announcement about the scholarships. In those days, announcements were circulated among the people, while now everything is announced through social media and WhatsApp. When they granted us the scholarships they set up a gathering camp for us. The young men in the Bir Hassan area, and the girls in Beirut. A good number of girls traveled with us.

The scholarships were offered during the time of PLO. They would assess the needs of families who needed scholarships for their children, and offer them based on the application... They were given to everyone without discrimination. Whoever completed the application process, their application was reviewed, and they were accepted based on that.

As far as I know, the scholarships were obtained through *wāṣṭa*, and also through grades. Those who received high grades were rewarded with scholarships. Also, some students who belonged to certain organizations were helped by them in obtaining scholarships.

Since Brevet (ninth grade), I had an obsession with cinema and an ambition to open a cinema. Before I received the scholarship, I traveled to Germany and tried to obtain residency and join the film institute there. But many things happened in the first 2 weeks that I was there. So, I decided to return to Beirut, because I felt that this country was not for me... I was chosen after my brother was martyred, and my other brothers were not in the country. At the funeral, there was a person in a position of authority who offered condolences to my father. So my father said to the official, “I have a request for my son to leave the country.” That’s where the scholarship came from... Unfortunately, the scholarships were not fair, they were affected by *wāṣṭa*.

These quotes indicate the speakers’ anticipation of the criticism that the scholarships were disbursed unfairly. In assessing their anticipation, it is important to consider the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewees. Though the interviewer and the interviewees knew each other from growing up in Burj al-Barajneh camp, their lives had taken very different trajectories with the interviewees having completed professional education and secured salaried employment, which enabled them to move out of the camp. Unlike the interviewees, the interviewer was unable to complete high school, in large part due to the civil war. The quotes are also significant for emphasizing the fact that the scholarships were open to young women, as well as to young men.

Unlike the scholarship recipients interviewed by Fiddian-Qasmiyeh about their experiences in Cuba, those approached for interviews about their experiences in the Eastern Bloc states did not express any misgivings. Given the fact that most of them were doctors, and the interviews were conducted in 2025, when the Israeli military were targeting Palestinian medical professionals in Gaza and Lebanon, their willingness to participate in the study was likely due to the fact that the interviewees knew the interviewer well through her residence and community-based activism in Burj al-Barajneh camp.

Interviewees spoke highly of the education they received and warmly of their experiences with the faculty and students with whom they had worked over the course of their studies. Scholarship recipients were permitted to choose their field of

study. However, most scholarships were in the fields of medicine, journalism, engineering, videography, and piloting. This supports recent re-assessments of the Cold War as a competition between “socialist” and “capitalist” conceptions of development (Bernard, 2023; Griffiths & Cardona, 2015; Katsakioris, 2021). Scholars have argued that the Eastern Bloc’s scholarship programs for students from “the Global South” aimed to prepare “human capital necessary for national economic development” in newly independent states seen as having been “underdeveloped” due to imperialism and colonial rule (Griffiths & Cardona, 2015, p. 226).

Interviewees’ replies to questions about the impact that the scholarships had were wide ranging. Some interviewees emphasized the contributions they were able to make to the well-being of their communities and to the struggle for Palestinian liberation. Others spoke of the ways in which the scholarships enabled them to access higher education and secure salaried employment. This is brought out in the following quotes:

There is something beautiful. If we go back a little in the interview to the part when I thanked the Ukrainian people that I got to know their culture, and I introduced them to my culture. I, by being part of this large group. At that time, there were students from eighty-six or almost ninety cities from countries all over the world. So, I got to know many cultures, and I broke all the barriers between myself and the world. I had the ability to travel because I moved through my work to many countries, and I did not feel like a stranger. Through my profession, I introduced people to Palestinian efficiency and people got to know Palestinian ethics and belonging. Also, whoever belongs to his profession will belong to his homeland.

Let’s talk about the fact that if I had stayed here, I would not have been able to study at the university. Financially, I could not... I would have resorted to the *thaura*. It is a positive thing that I traveled, and I studied. Also, to be honest, no one in my family was able to complete their studies except for me. Since we had a stepmother and I felt discriminated against. This encouraged me to prove to them that I was different from them. Even when my father retired and took his compensation from UNRWA, he did not give me anything from it. My stepmother wanted that. They used to travel to Greece and other countries without me. They didn’t even help me to get married. I married with my own money. After 1997, my financial situation improved. I opened a medical clinic and my father went bankrupt. I supported him financially because I felt that my father needed me and I did not need anyone else. I do not deny my wife’s help and support for me. I worked day and night for no less than 9 years until I was able to rely on myself. I bought an apartment and a modern car, and I try to compensate for the deficiency that I experienced through my relationships with my daughters and my grandchildren. Thank God, I have a private clinic.

Without these scholarships we couldn’t continue our education or graduate. It also helped our people by serving them and taking care of their health.

These quotes highlight the different ways in which Palestinian refugees from Burj al-Barajneh camp have come to reflect on the impact of the scholarships they received. The speaker of the first quote described an experience of reciprocal exchange that was simultaneously individual and collective. The speaker also emphasized the ways in which the professional education he received and the social relationships that he was able to build through it enable his cinematic work to travel across nation-state borders, despite his statelessness.

The second quote similarly complicates the claim that the Palestinian political parties’ disbursal of scholarships served primarily to reinforce their neo-patrimonialism. This is highlighted by the speaker’s reply that, if he had not received

the scholarship, he would have had to “resort(ed) to the *thaūra*. In other words, he would have had to enlist with one of the military wings comprising the PLO in order to earn his living and establish his livelihood. The quotes also suggest that analyses of development led by conceptualizations of “governmentality” and “biopolitics” may preclude a nuanced understanding of power relationships if they approach them as the encounter between a monolithic subject—the state, the PLO, NGOs—and a homogenous object—the refugee/migrant.

5.5 Remittances and Returns

Earlier scholarship on labour migration from non-oil producing Arab states to oil producing Arab states came to the conclusion that it did not appear to contribute to the development of the sending nation-states (Halliday, 1977, 1984). Similar to the position of migrant labour in the political economies of the US and Western Europe, labour migrants in Arab oil producing states tended to form the bottom of the working class. Employed on a temporary basis and often lacking the requisite work permits, they were vulnerable to deportation and extortion. Since they were allocated unskilled work, they did not acquire expertise that would contribute to the economic development of their sending nation-states. Moreover, migrant remittances appeared to exacerbate inflation in the sending states as they were primarily used for consumption and to purchase land.

Recent scholarship, on the other hand, has emphasized the significance of migrant remittances for the survival of refugee households in “the Global South,” given the insufficiency of humanitarian aid and the limited duration of its provision (Hajj, 2021; Monsutti, 2020; Omata, 2017; Trapp, 2018). Some scholars concur with humanitarian aid organizations in viewing camp refugees’ transnational social networks as playing a positive role in maintaining community and solidarity in difficult circumstances (Hajj, 2021; Monsutti, 2020). However, others have argued that since access to remittances is not evenly distributed among camp refugees, it leads to increasing inequality between those with regular access to remittances and those without (Omata, 2017; Trapp, 2018).

Social relationships within long-term refugee camps have been valorized by refugees and humanitarian aid agencies as indicative of the strength of “cultural” obligations to other members of the community, whether biological or fictive kin. This is problematized by researchers’ observation of the power inequalities that emerge between those who receive remittances and those who engage in unequal exchanges with them, in order to access some of what recipients are able to acquire through the remittance, such as food, water, electricity, education, and healthcare (Omata, 2017; Trapp, 2018). Moreover, humanitarian aid organizations’ commendation of remittances as evidence of the strength of community ties and as facilitating refugee self-reliance enable these organizations to discontinue assistance despite evidence of persisting needs.

The interviews conducted by Kholoud al-Hussein with compatriots from Burj al-Barajneh camp who migrated during the 1970s–1990s to oil producing states in the region indicate that remittances primarily assisted in the survival of family members who remained in the camp. Consider the following quotes from interviews with men who migrated to Libya and the UAE.

My family consisted of seven young people. Some of them were working, some of them were studying. My father was not working. It was necessary for me to help my family. I would send three-quarters of my salary to my family. The part of my salary that I kept was so that I could support myself. I stayed for a long time helping my family.

We did not send money to Lebanon because we lived happily like Libyan citizens. We did not imagine that we would leave that country. We owned homes and cars and lived a decent life. My father used to send money to our relatives here in Lebanon... We did not save anything at all. When we returned here, his bank account, may God have mercy on him, was in Lebanese pounds. Due to the economic crisis in Lebanon, the lira lost its value, so we lost everything. We were saving our money here in Lebanon and not in Libya, but we lost everything we saved. All the money we have in the bank is not worth \$500.

The quotes indicate that camp refugees who migrated to Libya were more likely to have secured salaried employment. That along with the Libyan state's provision of social welfare to Palestinian labour migrants on parity with its own citizen workers enabled Palestinian refugee/migrants to secure middle-class lives in Libya. The second quote also highlights some of the difficulties that Palestinian camp refugees have experienced in maintaining residency rights in the Arab states to which they migrated for work. Soon after the conclusion of the Oslo Accords between the PLO and Israel, the work permits and residency rights of thousands of Palestinian refugee migrants were revoked by the Libyan state, ostensibly to rebuke the PLO's leadership for the compromises it agreed to, particularly with regards to the refugees' right to return (Nasrallah, 1997; Sirhan, 1996/1997). Those expelled were refused entry by the Egyptian authorities to the Gaza Strip, while the Lebanese government prohibited the entry of all Palestinians from Libya unless they were in possession of a Lebanese travel document and could obtain a re-entry visa. Similarly, in 1991, when the PLO did not condemn Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, thousands of Palestinian refugee/migrants were expelled from Kuwait.

5.6 The "Securitization" of Migration

...So, this is the situation. The wars caused unemployment. There are many people who aren't working now. Many men and youth aren't working. The single and the married ones who have families aren't working. Also, there were some people working in Kuwait, and they were sending money to their families here. Now they kicked them out of Kuwait. So, when they returned, they couldn't find work. Some of them found work, others didn't. We are deprived from pursuing seventy-five kinds of jobs. At the end, they allowed us to pursue fifty kinds of job, but the problem is that there is no work. The Lebanese say that there is no work for us, so how about the Palestinian...

This quote from an interview conducted in 2006 with Haj Saeed, a second-generation camp refugee regarded as a religious authority within Burj al-Barajneh camp, highlights the consequences of changes in the migration policies of Libya and the Gulf states during the 1990s. Measures such as these, on the part of oil producing states, may be understood in terms of “migration diplomacy” (Tsourapas, 2017) and/or the corrosion of pan-Arabism through the spread of neoliberalism (Chalcraft, 2011).

At the same time, a pronounced shift over the course of the 1980s has also been noted, with a marked preference for migrant labour from South and East Asia over migrant labour from the region. Some scholars have viewed this shift as a response by receiving states to the “national” and “security” threat posed by the political activities of Arab migrants, often couched in the discourse of Palestinian liberation (Chalcraft, 2011; Jamal, 2017). Other scholars have pointed to continuities with the nineteenth century system of indentured labour from South Asia, administered by the British colonial government (Wright, 2021). Yet others have highlighted the hostility and opposition of local workers and local entrepreneurs to competition, real and/or perceived (Halliday, 1984; Rouleau & Paul, 1985; Smith, 1984, 1986). These debates underscore the importance of considering shifts in the role of states, local labour, and employers in the segmentation of labour markets shaping the experiences of refugee/migrant labour over time.

The last part of the quote refers to recent changes in Lebanese labour law, increasing the number of categories of work for which Palestinians may obtain work permits. However, as the quote indicates, the law has little efficacy in the face of the collapse of the post-civil war political economy. Spearheaded by Lebanese (Sunni) Muslim entrepreneurs who had amassed large amounts of capital through the links they formed between Lebanese militia leaders and local elites in the Arabian Peninsula during the Lebanese civil war, this political economy was driven by real-estate development and financial speculation (Baumann, 2016; Hourani, 2015). As Haj Saeed’s quote highlights, changes in the migration policies of receiving states in the region have been followed by the collapse of Lebanon’s postwar political economy. Hence, wage labour opportunities for third and fourth generation Palestinian camp refugees have diminished, while families continue to do their best to make higher education possible for their daughters and their sons.

Debates regarding the “securitization” of migration are often underpinned by an unexamined distinction between forced/“political” and voluntary/“economic” migration. The assumptions underlying this binary do not coincide with the life experiences of refugees/migrants themselves, since earning a living is never merely an economic matter. This chapter has attempted to demonstrate that the consequences of the forced/voluntary binary for refugees/migrants and their families can be productively problematized, by foregrounding ways in which those formally accorded the status of “refugee” attempt to earn their living and ensure the social reproduction of subsequent generations. The multi-generational accounts of Palestinian women and men inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh camp analyzed in this chapter highlight the significance of refugee “labour migration” in shaping the local political economies of long-term refugee camps in regions deemed “The Global South.” This concurs with the findings of other ethnographic studies on the

importance of migrant remittances to refugee camp communities located in postcolonial states in Asia and Africa (Monsutti, 2020; Omata, 2017; Trapp, 2018). As demonstrated in this chapter, refugee remittances have complex and shifting effects on local political economies. They may prove essential in enabling the survival of family members “back home” during periods of protracted conflict. They may also contribute to the emergence of new inequalities and hierarchies within refugee camps, as well as between camps and their host state environ.

Lastly, the chapter problematizes the claim that refugee integration in nation-states deemed “Global South,” is facilitated by presumed similarities between refugees and host citizens in terms of race, religion, language, and “culture.” The experiences of multiple generations of Palestinian women and men inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh camp highlight the consequences of labour market segmentation in Lebanon, the UAE, and Libya not only for Palestinian refugee labour migrants but also for their families in refugee camps in Lebanon. A primary focus on the formal restrictions placed by host nation-states on refugee mobility may obscure the shifting social relationships of unequal exchange that emerge in the long run connecting the local political economies of refugee camps to regional political economies. At the same time, while these social relationships facilitate the circumvention of formal restrictions, they do not necessarily ensure the recognition of refugees’/migrants’ rights.

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Chapter 6

Consumption



Popular and academic discussions of digital media over the last decade have tended to revolve around dichotomies of freedom and control, increased connectivity and social isolation, increased access to information and surveillance. Protestors' use of these media in organizing and live-streaming mass demonstrations against governments deemed authoritarian and corrupt, as well as in garnering international solidarity, appear to support the claim that digital media furthers political change and global connectivity (Idle & Nunns, 2011).

At the same time, support for the competing, dystopic claim has been provided by nation-states and multi-national corporations' use of digital media for surveillance (Lessig, 2006) and cyber-warfare, as well as by well publicized cases of social withdrawal and isolation. This has been attributed to social atomization produced by the use of digital technology (Turkle, 2011). By identifying digital media as an agent of social transformation, these dichotomous positions engage in technological determinism abstracting the technology from its human producers and consumers as well as from the local and global political economies of which they are part. The unequal exchanges comprising these economies and the unequal subject positions they give rise to are thus rendered hegemonic.

The scholarship on Palestinian refugees' use of digital media has made an important contribution to explorations of how these media have been deployed to articulate Palestinian national identity and claims to nationhood under conditions of dispossession, surveillance, and military occupation (Aouragh, 2011; Khalili, 2005; Khoury-Machool, 2010; Tawil-Souri, 2007). However, since this body of work focused primarily on the assertion of national identity, the imbrication of digital media in local and global processes of commodity production and consumption was left unexamined. Thus, the historically shifting connections between these processes of contemporary capitalism and ways in which different anti-colonial nations have been transnationally imagined were also unexplored.

My goal in this chapter is to examine these connections in the particular context of Palestinian inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh camp during the period of protests

that international media referred to as “The Arab Spring” (early 2010s). The contradictions generated by connections between projects that would appear to be at odds—anti-colonial, national liberation versus contemporary capitalism—were not lost on the Palestinian inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh camp. This was evident from their debates regarding the effects of their use of digital media on the moral and social fabric of their community. The chapter places these debates, couched in terms of the impact of *tṭawar*—progress—within a “glocal” political economic context. The contours of this particular discourse of *tṭawar* are explored in order to highlight some of the paradoxes that Palestinian inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh camp experienced, negotiated, and reflected on as “exemplars” of Palestinianess in Lebanon during “The Arab Spring” (Goldhill, 1994, 2017).

6.1 Being Palestinian, Representing Palestinian

From May 10th to May 15th 2011, protests were held in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Palestine/Israel marking the *nakbā*, the Palestinian designation for the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. The demonstrations were notable for the large number of participants. In Lebanon, Syria, Gaza, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights, thousands of Palestinian refugees demonstrated at the borders. They were fired on by the Israeli army with tear gas and live ammunition. When I arrived in Burj al-Barajneh refugee camp a few days later to conduct fieldwork, I was told by my interlocutors that many of the camp’s inhabitants had participated in the demonstrations, logistical information for which had circulated word of mouth, as well as through announcements on al-Manar, a TV channel associated with Hizballah and located in close proximity to the camp. These media, rather than social media, appeared to have been the means by which Palestinian refugees from Burj al-Barajneh camp had learned about the organization of the demonstrations.

The Palestinian inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh camp amply documented their march to the border and subsequent casualties through their cameras and cellphones, uploading images and video clips to Facebook and other social media sites. A number of my young adult interlocutors also showed me images of the protests that they had found on the internet and downloaded on to their own computers. A large number of the images were of the teenaged boys who were shot by the IDF. Some of these boys were from Burj al-Barajneh camp. “Look at the martyrs! Look at what the Israelis did to us!” my interlocutors repeated as they showed me the images.

However, there did not appear to be a consensus amongst Palestinian camp refugees in Lebanon regarding the significance of the demonstrations and what had been accomplished through them. Moreover, unlike news coverage of the demonstrations which attributed an agential role to Facebook and Twitter in organizing the protests, Palestinian camp refugees’ own assessments of the demonstrations focused on the actions of the various participating groups and the IDF. Digital media and their use were not even mentioned, let alone ascribed an agential role.

The day after I arrived, Safah took me to a donor's meeting outside the camp. The donor turned out to be a foundation established by a wealthy Palestinian family to do educational and cultural activities in Gaza. The donor representative was a man in his 50s from Ramallah. Safah told me later, before he said where he was from, that she thought he might be Lebanese. According to him, the situation in Shatila camp is worse than the situation in the camps in Gaza. He hadn't yet visited other camps in Lebanon. At one point, he said, "Do you think that the revolutions that have taken place in Egypt and Tunisia are inspiring people here to mobilise?" The question was addressed to me. I said, "You should ask them (gesturing towards Safah and Muna). They're best able to tell you." Safah said, "Well, people here believe that these 'revolutions' are a plot on the part of the US to destabilize the region." Later, the conversation moved to the demonstrations that had taken place on *yaum al-nakba*. Muna voiced strong criticism against what had happened. "The sheikh was inciting them (our youth). 'Today is your day. Today you will regain Palestine.' And look at what happened. We were taught from when we were young not to move like that, like a mob." Safah did not agree with her. She said, "Yes, the politicians were sitting in the back while the *shebāb* marched to the front. But it was something important. Something heartening. The Israelis fired because they were afraid. We frightened them."

As the above extract from my field-notes indicates, despite Palestinian camp refugees' mass participation in the 2011 demonstrations marking the *nakba*, there were a variety of positions with respect to the significance of what had taken place. Muna and Safah, both second generation refugees, were children during the *thaūra* (the armed struggle for Palestinian national liberation based in Lebanon during the 1970s–1982), and young adults during the "War of the Camps" (the Amal militia's sieges of several Palestinian camps throughout Lebanon at the behest of the Syrian government during 1985–1988). In Muna's view the demonstrations had been hijacked by Hizballah, whose leadership had spurred the Palestinian youth to their death—a death, not a martyrdom, as the loss of life had achieved nothing. For Safah, the size of the demonstrations and the mass level of participation hearkened to an era when Palestinian camp refugees in Lebanon were the vanguard of the struggle for national liberation—a time when the Lebanese were in solidarity with the Palestinians, and return not only appeared possible, but imminent.

Another point of significance appeared in the contrasting views of Safah and the Palestinian donor representative with respect to the mass protests and overthrowing of governments in the Middle East that took place during the early 2010s. Safah considered the portrayal in international media of a revolution and an Arab Spring to be an attempt on the part of the US government to de-stabilise the region, a position that many Palestinian inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh camp appeared to hold, particularly with regards to the war in Syria. Thus, differences in Safah and the Palestinian donor representative's views on those political struggles could in part be attributed to the differences in their experience of being Palestinian, differences in which class and gender played no small a role. This was evident from Safah mistaking the representative for a Lebanese citizen, and the representative asking me rather than Safah or Muna for 'expert opinion' regarding their political participation.

There appeared to be a comparable lack of consensus among third generation Palestinian camp refugees as to the manner in which political action should take place and the ways in which it should be represented. The following extract from field-notes written in June 2011, records a trip to a popular tourist spot, a half-hour

bus ride from Burj al-Barajneh camp. The trip took place on the day of the *naksa*, the Palestinian designation for the 1967 war as a result of which Israel occupied Gaza and the West Bank. Though there was an attempt to organize demonstrations at the border in order to continue any momentum built by the earlier *nakba* protests, they were prohibited by the Lebanese army. Before meeting us at the fortress, Huda had spent the morning with her parents and younger sister, attempting to drive to the border. Huda's father told us that they had managed to clear all the checkpoints but when they got to the very last one, the soldier asked for his car registration document. The document identified him as Palestinian, and he was told to turn back.

Today when we went to the crusader fortress in Saida, the girls spent the time posing for each other's pictures. Huda took one of me making a funny face. "I'll put it on Facebook for you," she said. In one set of pictures, Huda arranged the kaffiyeh she was wearing to cover her face. "*ʿĀmil fidāʿī*," she said. After we finished, an elderly man called out to us, "Are you Palestinians, *yā šabāyā*." They said yes, cautiously. "I am sheikh so and so visiting from Australia. I'm from Sabra." At which piece of information we all relaxed and exchanged pleasantries. The girls took their leave with, "*Allah yaḥāmīna*."

My field-notes point to an imperative to use digital media to document everyday activities prevalent among younger generations of Palestinian camp refugees. What gave rise to it remains a subject for further research. Pointing to the drop in the price of image capturing technology and the ease with which it is globally available merely points to another effect. It does not identify a cause. The imperative to document, however, appears to be one that younger generations of Palestinian camp refugees share with other members of their generations around the globe (Feldman, 2011; Turkle, 2011).

My field notes also indicate that what was being documented was the self, performing a variety of representations that appeared to be unconnected or even at cross-purposes. The young women posed in the way veiled models and actresses posed on satellite TV in advertisements for various globally marketed products. But then Huda also posed as a *fidāʿī*, a fighter in past iterations of the Palestinian struggle for national liberation, her kaffiyeh masking her face in a way as to only reveal her eyes. For a *fidāʿī* this was a way to conceal his identity, for a Muslim woman, a way to inhabit public space without compromising gendered and classed norms of respectability. In performing and documenting middle- and upper-class womanly piety, transnational model for global commodities, and *fidāʿī*, the young women juxtaposed historic images associated with the armed struggle for Palestinian national liberation with those associated with contemporary capitalism, as well as those associated with regional opposition to Western imperialism.

And yet, commodity consumption was not always foregrounded in Palestinian camp refugees' own interpretations of the representations that they produced and consumed through their use of digital media. The following example is a case in point. Huda's cousin Manal showed me a video she had downloaded on her cell phone, of a young Lebanese soldier gyrating in a highly sexualised, feminine manner to a popular new song by the Syrian singer Rowaida. The lyrics of the chorus were: "Ai! Ai! He dumped me, and left." Manal and her mother found the dancing soldier "Cute," "Someone with a sense of humour," "Bored out of his mind as young

men are on compulsory military service.” Manal’s aunt, on the other hand, responded with, “It’s disgusting.” Her subsequent remarks indicated that she was referring to the soldier’s exaggerated feminine mannerisms. The question this example raises is whether my interlocutors’ consumption and dissemination of the song in this manner could be understood as the consumption of a process of consumption (Jameson, 1991)? Unpaid advertising that is enjoyed in its own right as a cultural commodity?

In addition to providing the researcher with an abundance of ethnographic material, the production and consumption of these representations raise ethical questions regarding power and the production of knowledge. Adolescents and young adults around the globe document and stream the minutiae of their everyday lives in forums that even when not deemed public, are accessible in ways they may not be aware of and/or have control over. The ways in which Palestinians’ use of digital media in Palestine/Israel is monitored by the Israeli state has been well documented (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2011a, 2011b). While conducting field research in Burj al-Barajneh camp in 2011, a number of my interlocutors showed me text messages they had received on their cell phones in Arabic, offering a large reward for information about dead or missing Israeli soldiers. Surveillance of the Palestinian inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh by the Lebanese, Syrian, and Israeli states, as well as by Hizballah, precedes the emergence of digital media and its use by Palestinian camp refugees. However, what has changed is the greatly increased potential for self-incrimination provided by the documentary and disseminative capacity of digital media; a capacity most producers/consumers are unable to control.

During field-research I learned of a reported recording of a gang rape of a disabled young woman from the camp by young men from the camp, one of whom had powerful family ties to the popular committee of Burj al-Barajneh camp at the time. How should the perpetrators’ recording and dissemination of such self-incriminating evidence via BlueTooth be interpreted? The “traditional” norms, that many Palestinian camp refugee men and women avowed as ideal, deemed such an act dishonourable in the extreme. For those who had lived in the camp for several generations and fought to defend it during the War of the Camps (1985–1988), it pointed to broader and widespread moral disintegration in the fabric of Palestinian camp refugee life in Lebanon. The sons of those who had become powerful through the blood and sacrifices of multiple generations were abusing power they had done nothing to earn, or to deserve. Yet, given the post-civil war marginalisation of Palestinian political parties in Lebanon, the only space in which lower-ranking leaders of Palestinian political parties who had remained after the PLO’s withdrawal in 1982, could exercise power in such a manner was the particular refugee camp where they and their families had managed to maintain a presence. Perhaps it is the occurrence of such demoralising episodes of intra-communal violence, that led Ghada, a third-generation inhabitant of Burj al-Barajneh camp to declare to me that it would be better if the Lebanese army came and cleaned up the camp.

This extremely troubling episode of violence, as well as Ghada’s response to it, may be contextualised by the following extract from an interview I conducted with her in 2011 regarding her use of digital media.

I: What about the news? Do you believe the news on the internet and the T.V?

Ghada: I don't follow the news.

I: Why?

Ghada: Because if anyone listens to the news these days, he'll have a mental breakdown.

I: You are right.

Ghada: Anyone who wants to read [the news], he'll know how many problems there are. How much conflict. Who threatens whom. Israel's plans to attack. So, why should I bother myself by listening to the news? Whatever happens, it will be intended by God. When I die, I'll die. So why create a headache for myself? I don't like politics.

I: But you chose to study anthropology and it includes politics.

Ghada: Yes, it includes politics, but if I want to speak in the political field, no one will accept it. I must agree with them, or I am against them. I can't make myself be a humble person. I faced many problems at university. I can't take the side of the Amal movement, or Hezbollah, or any of the other (Lebanese) parties. If I'm against them, I won't talk to them at all. For me, I don't like to belong to anyone. They always say to each other, "You are wrong, and you are wrong." Why are you saying that you are right, and the other is wrong, when both of you are wrong? What makes me angry is that because I'm Sunni, it means only the Sunni are right, and Hariri is right, and the Shi'a are wrong.

I: Why?

Ghada: Because he is Sunni like me. The Shi'a are the same. "That one is doing something wrong, and the other is doing something wrong." Why don't they admit their mistakes? If you told them this, you would become their enemy, and they would start to hate you. So that's why I don't deal in politics. In Lebanon whoever speaks in the political field has to take a side. We don't have people who don't like to take sides. Each one belongs to some party here, and the problem is that when they know that I'm Palestinian, they start to talk badly about Palestinians, just because I don't take a side. Once a girl said to me that she had heard about Palestinians, that they aren't good people, and they are *wiskhīn*, so I said to her, "Thank you very much, and goodbye." This happens all the time. It's normal.

Ghada qualified her remark about her dislike for politics with the explanation that the Lebanese political economy rendered it impossible to participate without being compelled to take a sectarian position. Participants were unable to pick a political position based on whether it appeared right or wrong to them. Rather they were slotted into positions based on the sectarian background ascribed to them. After the Lebanese Civil War, the only subject position a Palestinian camp refugee could occupy was that of the undesirable responsible for the civil war, as well as subsequent conflicts and economic instability. The contempt with which Palestinian camp refugees continued to be held in Lebanon was underscored in the above excerpt by the word *wiskh* which means filth in a physical as well as a moral sense.

6.2 Are we Still Poor?

Marx's analysis of capitalism posited the confrontation of two classes: those who control the means of production (the bourgeoisie) and those who own nothing but their own bodies and their capacity to labour (the proletariat) (Marx & Engels, [1845] 1998; Marx, [1867] 1977). Scholarship at the turn of the twentieth century argued that these classes were no longer identifiable in contemporary capitalism, which was characterised by new international divisions of labour and, hence, the

emergence of new classes (Jameson, 1991, p. xix; Graeber, 2014; Standing, 2011). Revolution as the global overthrowing of capitalism no longer appeared viable, with the nation-state as the primary terrain and framework for political action (Jameson, 2000). Furthermore, since culture itself appeared as a consumable commodity forming the content of media images, a new form of consumption had emerged: consumption of the process of consumption (Jameson, 1991, pp. ix–x). How then has poverty come to be experienced and represented by Palestinian inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh camp in an era of digital media production and consumption?

“Are we still poor?” Summayya said to me after we finished the interview. “We have four cellphones in the house. Are we still poor?” A few days later we were having coffee with her in-laws. The conversation was regarding the difficulty of making ends meet. The cost of education. How expensive it is to send the kids to university. To build a house. “*Ehnā fuqara*,”—“We are poor”—they kept saying.

“Are we still poor?” and “We are poor”: these remarks from fieldnotes recorded in 2011 have to be placed within the historical context of Burj al-Barajneh camp’s particular political economy. Under Lebanese law, Palestinian refugees have historically been formally restricted from owning property and practicing most skilled professions. *Wāṣṭa*—literally “mediation”—has facilitated the circumvention of these legal restrictions, but on precarious and unequal terms (Gilsenan, 1996; Latif, 2011, 2023; Picard, 2002; Sayigh, 1997; Traboulsi, 2007).

The upheaval that accompanied the forced dispossession of Palestinians in 1948 with the establishment of the nation-state of Israel did not level class distinctions even among those who ended up in the refugee camps. Moreover, as the period of forced dispossession increased, new class distinctions between camp and non-camp refugees emerged, as well as new relationships of unequal exchange. A second-generation interlocutor told me that in the early years of forced displacement, due to the Lebanese state’s prohibition on the construction of private toilets in the camp, her father had had to bribe the *deuxième* bureau officials in charge of the camp. As a prominent member of his village community, he felt strongly that he would be dishonoured if his guests had to make use of the camp’s communal toilets. The fact that some camp refugees had the social and economic capital to circumvent the Lebanese state’s dehumanizing regulations points to the presence of class stratification in the early history of the camp. At the same time, the demand for increased bribes and the accompanying threat of permission being withdrawn was constant.

Most of the first-generation of Burj al-Barajneh camp’s inhabitants originated from the villages of the Galilee. In the early years of dispossession, women and men engaged in precarious labour in the Lebanese owned orchards surrounding the camp. Over time, women found positions as domestic workers in Beirut, and men began to ply the construction trade. In the 1970s–1980s, large numbers of camp refugees migrated to Libya and the UAE. The remittances they sent made it possible for their families in the camp to purchase electronic appliances, engage in house construction, and invest in the education of their children.

During the 1970s, opportunities for labour in the booming Gulf countries and participation in the *thaūra* (the PLO led armed struggle for national liberation)

provided an important source of income and means of upward mobility. The political parties constituting the PLO, provided scholarships for higher education to selected members and their families. Many of these scholarships were for study in the USSR and its Eastern European allies. The skilled labour generated by this access to higher education was able to find employment not only in “the state within a state” established by the PLO in Lebanon (Brynen, 1990; Rubenberg, 1983), but also in other nation-states around the world.

The PLO period was also significant for establishing the presence of migrant labour from other nation-states in the camp. Originating from South Asia and other parts of the Middle East, these migrants were employed as unskilled labour in Lebanese enterprises as well as by the Palestinian political parties, sometimes in the capacity of fighters. One of the paradoxes of this period is that Palestinian camp refugees participated in the struggle for national liberation and their right to return at the cost of their lives while at the same time investing in more durable homes in the camps. This paradox may be understood in light of the competing imperatives generated by Lebanese hostility towards Palestinian refugee presence in Lebanon—the imperative on the one hand to attain class mobility that would mitigate the experience of structural violence in the meeting of everyday needs, as well as the imperative on the other hand to return to a homeland where this mobility could not legally be thwarted, where a better, fuller life could be secured.

After the withdrawal of the PLO from Lebanon in 1982, and particularly during the War of the Camps (1985–1988), enlisting as a fighter for one of the Palestinian political parties became the primary means of supporting oneself and one’s family in the camp. During this period, there were large waves of migration from the camps, particularly to the Scandinavian nation-states, which opened their doors to Palestinian asylum seekers from Lebanon, especially after the brutality of the Sabra-Shatila massacre and the War of the Camps. These migrants have maintained their ties to family members who remained in the camp through remittances, periodic visits, inter-marriage, and more recently the use of digital media. In the decades after the end of the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1991), women more so than men were able to gain “skilled” employment primarily as humanitarian labour in local NGOs. For several years after the War of the Camps, under the Syrian military’s control of the camp, young and adult men were unable to leave the camp for fear of being detained at the Syrian army checkpoints and sent to political prisons in Syria, or worse.

After the end of the Lebanese Civil War, local and international NGOs began to provide much needed medical, educational, and social services in the camps. With the termination of the PLO’s “state within a state” in Lebanon, the decline in the regional demand for Palestinian migrant labour, and the global hardening of borders against labour migration, these NGOs have come to provide necessary services as well as employment opportunities to Palestinian camp refugees in Lebanon. In most cases, local NGOs were building on the structures created by the Palestinian political parties. However, their agenda for action was set by international development and humanitarian agencies since these agencies were now the chief source of funds. Given gendered norms regarding the caring professions, women more so than men

were able to gain “skilled” employment through NGO work. The lowest strata in Burj al-Barajneh camp has come to be constituted by refugee/migrant labour from nation-states in Asia and Africa, such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Sudan, and Syria, as well as by Palestinian camp refugees from Syria without strong kinship ties in Lebanon.

Given this context, it is significant that when Summayya’s in-laws referred to themselves as poor, their point of comparison was the lives led by lower and mid ranking leaders of various Palestinian political parties in Lebanon, as well as mid-level program officers in local NGOs. They were not comparing themselves to other Palestinian and Syrian refugees in Burj al-Barajneh camp who did not have the social and economic capital to send their children to university. Neither was their point of comparison the non-Palestinian refugee/migrant labour living in the camp. Nor was it their compatriots living in the rural camps in Lebanon and Syria where economic opportunities are even more limited. Interestingly enough, the point of comparison was also not the family members who had been able to migrate and/or gain asylum abroad. Hence, the comparison not only served to disavow class mobility on the part of the speakers, it also attributed responsibility for poverty and inequality to the leadership of Palestinian political parties. My point is not to deny the prevalence of corruption within Palestinian political parties and local NGOs. It is, rather, to highlight some of the ways in which a nationalist framework for political action struggles to mobilize across fault lines of class, as inequalities increase within Palestinian camp refugee communities.

Given the failure of multiple efforts to secure a sovereign Palestinian nation-state and Palestinian camp refugees’ right to return, class mobility has historically emerged as the way forward. For the Palestinian inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh camp, class mobility as signified by an increased capacity for commodity consumption continues to compete with the signification of class mobility through the acquisition of higher education and the practice of a skilled profession. This is brought out in the following extract from field-notes recorded in 2011:

Summayya said the other day, in the context of a conversation about how common internet use has become in the camp, that it has become ‘*ayb*’ not to have a computer in the house, although there are still families that don’t have one. Kamle was telling me about two of the kids her husband tutors. The father is a Syrian and works as a day labourer in construction. The mother is Palestinian from the camp. In Syria, Kamle says, they made less than a dollar a day, but here they can make a lot more. They have seven children, and *harām*, all the girls care about is eating junk food. The little one is so fat. Kamle puffs up her cheeks to demonstrate. Instead of paying attention to the special lessons her parents are working themselves to the bone to provide her, all she cares about is stuffing her face and trying to escape the lessons by asking to use the bathroom.

The word “‘*ayb*” denotes something shameful and connotes something dishonourable. It is frequently used in the context of disapproved behaviour and clothing for young women. It is also used to chastise children when they misbehave, or speak in an impolite manner. The word “‘*haram*,” not only connotes dishonourable/disgraceful/shameful but has the added shari‘a association of legal prohibition. It is also used as an expression of sympathy for someone’s good or bad fortune. In this context,

denying one's children access to digital media would be *'ayb* as it has become something that is necessary for doing well in school and securing employment. Kamle's use of the word "*haram*," to refer to the young girl's behaviour underscored her perception of the child's disobedience and ingratitude to her parents (and to a lesser degree, to her teacher). Her use of the word also connoted sympathy for the struggling parents whose situation Kamle felt she shared, as a parent struggling to secure a better future for her own children.

Digital media use in this context not only signaled upward mobility, it was also associated by younger generations of Palestinian camp refugees with personal freedom in relation to the social norms of their community. This is brought out in the following extract from the interview with Ghada cited earlier:

I: For your generation, do you feel that new media technology opens up more opportunities for young women?

Ghada: Yes. More freedom.

I: Tell me more about that.

Ghada: Freedom, it's normal. I told you. It's become a fashion for girls to carry a cell-phone. In addition to make-up, high heels, and clothes, comes the phone. There is a style for the phone, whether it's a new phone or not.

I: What is the style?

Ghada: For example, you often change your phone.

I: If you couldn't buy a new one, what would you do?

Ghada: If I can't buy a new one because I don't have the means, I buy according to my means, but something that is newer than my old one. So it's a way of renewing it in front of my friends whether it is the newest model, or a little older. People who have a big budget, they can buy the newest one. I want a new one now.

Ghada's reply to my question about whether the use of digital media opened up more opportunities for women of her generation was, "freedom." But this freedom was immediately associated with consumption, both freedom to consume and freedom to indicate a particular style through choices regarding what is consumed. The way in which freedom, consumption, and style were associated in Ghada's reply immediately suggested ideologies of "postmodernism" which have been theorized as obscuring shifts in class hierarchies and maintaining their hegemony (Jameson, 1991). But this possible interpretation was complicated by the normative importance placed on young Palestinian camp refugee women's dress, appearance, and comportment as markers of their individual moral character and by extension, their family's reputation within the camp community.

In the aftermath of the Lebanese civil war (1975–1991), wearing the *hijab* came to be "formalized" as not only signifying adherence to these gendered and classed norms of respectability, but also as an assertion of opposition to Western imperialism. Thus, in the early 2010s, from a young Palestinian camp refugee woman's perspective, carrying the latest model of cell phone with all its associations of freedom and choice appeared liberating—and oppositional—without compromising local norms of propriety and respectability.

The role local norms regarding comportment play in all this is also highlighted in Ghada's remark about being able to "renew it in front of my friends." The word "it" while directly referring to the cellphone, also appears to indirectly refer to

something less tangible—the representation of a self. The words, “in front of my friends,” supports this reading, in addition to suggesting that in those local contexts in which respectability is signified by adherence to norms of gender segregation, women family members, neighbours, and friends constitute a “women’s public” (Meneley, 1996).

6.3 “Right Now, There Is no War”

Palestinian camp refugees’ experiences and representations of class stratification and upward mobility have frequently contrasted with the ways in which they have been represented in global and regional media as the objects of humanitarian assistance. Consider the following extract from an interview conducted in 2011 with Nimr, a second-generation camp refugee working as a chauffeur for a wealthy Palestinian family in Beirut.

Nimr: Most people are interested in war. Right now in Gaza there is no war going on. So, it isn’t being shown on TV that much and you won’t hear from the people there. But, there are problems there. It isn’t over, but people don’t hear about it. People listen to where there is a war. There are problems in the camps in Lebanon. People are not living comfortably. They are not happy. There are problems with the educational system. There are problems with medical care. There are problems with housing. There are a lot of problems, but there is no war. That’s why there is no attention to this area. Now, if a war happens in any camp, or any area, or any street, all of them will come. A few days ago, there was a battle in a street in Tripoli. And, of course, not all of Tripoli, a small part of Tripoli. All the media, all the channels put it on the news. The problem is not the media, it what the media is interested in. It gives priority to the place that has war and catastrophe.

The shift in this excerpt from “people listen to where there is war” to “the media gives priority to war” is significant. It raises the question of who privileges media coverage of violent conflict: media producers, consumers, or both? This debate reminiscent of older debates over the popularity of low-brow entertainment aired on television. As Fredric Jameson and Raymond Williams pointed out, what this debate failed to consider was that popular entertainment is produced in relation to an imagined consuming public. Thus, various versions of the same become the pre-selected options for the consumer (Jameson, 1991; Williams, 2003).

Parallels between debates over the production of “popular” culture and debates over what sorts of political economic problems receive media attention—violent conflict versus the historic conditions for its possibility—also raise questions about the consumption of representations of another’s suffering. These questions have been raised in the scholarship on humanitarian organizations’ representations of suffering humanity in their attempts to mobilise donations (Fassin, 2011; Feldman & Ticktin, 2010; Keshgegian, 2009; Redfield, 2008; Rozario, 2003). The criticisms of these representations range from the view that the portraits are caricatures and victimize those on whose behalf they claim to speak (Fassin, 2011; Feldman & Ticktin, 2010; Keshgegian, 2009; Redfield, 2008) to the view that the representations satisfy a

repressed sadistic pleasure in the pain of others and provide a smug reassurance of the charitable donor's material and moral superiority (Rozario, 2003).

These criticisms are extremely important in questioning self-representations of humanitarianism. However, they not only beg the question of how the object of humanitarian representation experiences and interprets his representation as suffering humanity, they also raise the question of the political economy from which humanitarianism emerges as the appropriate response to the suffering of a human other, as well as the libidinal needs it satisfies in the humanitarian subject.

Returning to the relationship between media attention and the popularity of a humanitarian cause, it can be argued that since the logic of contemporary capitalism plays out in the organizational structure as well as the charitable activities of formal humanitarian organizations, and digital media both facilitates consumption and is itself consumed, the popularity of media coverage of catastrophe provides consumable images of human suffering enabling consumers to occupy the subject position of a material and moral elite. Some of these consumers may be prevailed upon to donate to the humanitarian organizations providing assistance to those affected by the catastrophe. At the same time, the production and consumption of these images perform an important role in normalizing the particular histories and experiences of structural violence simultaneously signified and obscured by these images. By providing the humanitarian subject with an object of pity, whose life makes the subject's own life appear "privileged" by comparison, these images obscure the structural violence of intersecting inequalities in which the humanitarian subject is implicated as perpetrator and victim. At the same time, the dilemma remains that the welfare services provided by humanitarian organizations, though shaped by the logic of commodity production and consumption, can make the difference between life and death.

Nimr's remarks about the media popularity of catastrophe demonstrate that the objects of such kinds of representation are well aware of the ways in which images taken of them become consumable commodities. This in turn raises the question as to whether the objects of humanitarian representation are indeed reduced to the "bare life" they are claimed to signify (Agamben, 1995, 1998). "*Shahdū 'alynā*, they beg in our names," was something my interlocutors frequently said about Palestinian NGOs and the leaders of Palestinian political parties during the period referred to as "the Arab Spring." Again, what is interesting about this remark is its indication as to where responsibility for the unjust state of affairs was being placed—local representatives of the nationalist leadership—but not necessarily the local and global capitalist economies that Palestinian camp refugees are a part of, though on unequal terms.

6.4 Tṭawar

In an essay on globalization, Fredric Jameson argued that given turn of the twentieth century transformations in global production and its representations, any struggle against capitalism could now only be cast in nationalist terms as a "defense of "our

way of life”” (Jameson, 2000). Since a way of life has to do with the everyday, representing it without reducing it to an essentialized “culture” in contradistinction to an equally essentialized “progress” associated with “the West” poses challenges. These representational problems are brought to the fore in the following excerpt from my 2011 discussion with Ghada’s about the impact of digital media use on gendered and classed norms of propriety in Burj al-Barajneh camp.

I: Why did your family decide to get wireless internet? Is it because all of you use internet at home, and it’s easier if you have wireless?

Ghada: This is my last year at university. I have to do a lot of research and I have to type it up. Last year it was difficult for me to get the information I needed for my research. Also my parents don’t like me to go to internet cafés because it’s full of *shebāb*.

I: Where did you used to go to use the internet? Inside or outside the camp?

Ghada: I used to go outside the camp. To Haret Hreik.

I: Why?

Ghada: Because the connection in the camp is very slow and there are many bad things that happen in the internet cafes. They are full of *shebāb* and some of these *shebāb* say bad things. I never felt comfortable, so it’s better outside. It’s true I pay more, but it’s better and no one interferes. Also, no one dares to say a word.

I: But if they know that you are from the camp and they know the family you’re from, do they still talk to you like this? Why?

Ghada: They don’t talk to me directly. For example, two boys are joking with each other. They use very bad words. I don’t have to listen to this kind of talk. Or they like to show off by saying, “I’ve met a girl.” You know this kind of talk.

I: Why they don’t respect themselves? They are in the camp and there are girls present.

Ghada: Someone who doesn’t know how to respect himself, you can’t teach him how to respect others.

I: That’s true, but don’t they know that they can’t talk like this? Do you feel that something has changed? Do you think that your dad’s generation spoke like this?

Ghada: Definitely, they didn’t talk like this, because there wasn’t *tṭawar* like now. They weren’t open-minded. Now, while someone is sitting in his home, he can talk to or see whoever he wants to. In the past it wasn’t like this. If someone wanted to flirt with a girl, he had to think that he has a sister too. Also, there might be a fight if he flirts with a girl. At the same time, he cares for his sister and he might fight if someone flirted with her. We were exposed to a lot of flirting in the area around the university. They stop girls a lot and invite them for lunch, or ask for their phone numbers, or they give their own phone numbers. I was invited many times. If I had responded to their invitations I would be very fat, but I refused every time.

I: Things have become so bad.

Ghada: Things are bad for the people who want them to be bad. For me, I have internet at home and my parents gave me freedom but under conditions. When I sit in my room, I close the door and my parents don’t know what I’m doing. I might open bad websites and look at them. But I don’t do this. So it’s an individual freedom and it’s up to the person to use it as he wants to. It depends on the person. What he wants from *tṭawar* and the internet. I think if it wasn’t a *mujtama’ fādī* and looking for depravity, we could use *tṭawar* in a good way. That’s what I think.

The word “*tṭawar*” denotes development/progress/advancement/evolution. Ghada’s use of the word is drawing on its usual connotations of change that produces advancement in political, economic, and social fields. But *tṭawar* here is not only associated with the disintegration of norms and values thought to govern social relations in “traditional” society, it is also associated with an increased possibility of

sexualized violence against young women. The word “*fāḍī*” means empty of content/meaning/purpose, while the word “*mujtama*” refers to both a gathering and a community. Ghada was holding her community responsible for choosing not to make good use of the possibilities opened up by *ṭṭawar*. Ghada understood young men from her community choosing to use digital media in order to watch pornography, and speaking and acting in ways that violate local norms of dignity and mutual respect as signifying how a weak community avails itself of *ṭṭawar*. In other words, if the community were full of content/meaning/purpose, *ṭṭawar* would not result in the disintegration of its moral fabric.

Ghada’s discussion of the effects of *ṭṭawar* raises a number of questions: is the violation of local norms of dignity and mutual respect the only way in which the young men’s actions can be understood? Was the sexualized violence of watching pornography and boasting of their conquests in front of female community members, from the perspective of young men, an assertion of the freedom *ṭṭawar* had afforded them, given that political economic conditions precluded the freedom to choose how to earn a livelihood? Lastly, if *ṭṭawar* consists of political, economic, and social changes, could the moral fabric of any community remain unchanged? Or did Ghada’s use of the term *mujtama*’ *fāḍī* suggest that *ṭṭawar* was being experienced by Palestinian inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh camp as something that was happening to them, rather than as something they had the power to actively shape? These tensions are highlighted in the following extract from same interview:

Ghada: My dad was against the idea of girls carrying cellphones. How could his daughter carry a phone? How could she use the internet? This is ‘*ayb* and *mamnū*’. These things hadn’t spread yet. They were limited to a few people. People looked at the one who had a cell phone as *hamūlī*. Or, if he used the internet, they considered him too open-minded. Not *hādī*’. Later, my dad bought me a phone when I was in grade twelve.

I: Why did he decide to get you one even though he was against the idea? What happened to make him change his way of thinking?

Ghada: People. He saw that everyone had cellphones and that it had become something normal. It wasn’t a big deal anymore. Also, after he saw that his friends bought phones for their daughters he was encouraged, and he bought it as a present for my doing well in my exams.

I: Were you happy?

Ghada: Yes. But I was already carrying a phone before because I used to take his phone and use it. But under conditions. It wasn’t allowed to call anyone. Even when he bought me the phone he was very strict. “Don’t give your number to anyone. Don’t make it international.” Even now when my phone rings he gets annoyed and upset. I barely make calls. The same thing happened with my sister Hiba, when she was in grade twelve. They also bought her a phone. But Abeer, she got one when she was in grade ten. When I was in high school, no one had cell phones, only when I got to college. In the meantime, things have developed. Now, when anyone finishes grade nine, he or she gets a phone as a present. So, by the time they start high school they already have phones. In the beginning my sister found it very difficult not having one. She started to ask for one. My parents got it for her so that she wouldn’t feel less than her friends and there would be a balance between her and her friends, especially my cousins. They are with her in the same class, and they all have phones.

I: Do you feel that *ṭṭawar* in any society, it happens in the same way? The reason why people change what they do is the same? They don’t want to feel different from others. Do you feel that’s how it happens?

Ghada: Yes. Not only with regards to communications and cellphones. There are many people, especially the older generation, they feel and think that phones are wrong because they don't know these things.

I: Because they don't know, or because they feel if they use these things, it might make their lives different?

Ghada: No, because they don't know. It's not only my grandmother, but the generation after her. Especially with regards to girls. A girl was always listening to her father, brother, and her husband. She had no opinion. But now she gets educated She carries a phone. Her friends call her. Now it's become something normal. Before it wasn't allowed. People thought it was unusual. For example, if I'm walking with my grandfather and my friend passes by and he says hi, my grandfather will ask, "Who is he?" They find it out of the ordinary because in their time they didn't do this. Now our generation, we are over-developed. We are in level two of development. We are not in level one and it has become something ordinary. They think that this is development. But there is another issue. For example, you smoke and I don't smoke. You invite me to smoke, but I say no. You ask again and I say no again and I tell you it's harmful and I don't like it. But you still insist so in the end I try it. It's the same with cellphones. For example, if I need something, I make a phone call and organize it that way instead of coming and going back and forth from different places. It's easier with phones to set things up. That's how the cellphone has spread.

As noted earlier, the word '*ayb*' denotes something shameful that brings dishonour not only on the doer but also by association on their kin for not raising/teaching/socialising them properly. From the perspective of older generations of Palestinian camp refugees, it was '*ayb*' for an unmarried girl to use digital media because it allowed her to communicate in ways that were removed from the purview of her family and community. In his work on gender and anti-colonial nationalism in South Asia, Partha Chatterjee argued that the nationalist struggle placed an imperative on women to demonstrate the preservation of tradition in order to ground its claims to sovereignty based on an autochthony that the colonial state could then be shown as lacking (Chatterjee, 1993). The struggle Palestinian nationalism continues to face in its attempt to secure recognition of its legitimacy, suggests that a similar imperative in part may explain the disproportionate burden placed on young Palestinian camp refugee women to embody the honour of their family and by extension, their community.

Another partial explanation may be provided by the normative association of power with dignity, both of which are legitimated by the particular public constituted by a local community. In this particular context, across generations, members of the local community viewed it as being knit together by "traditional" gendered norms and practices of kinship. Thus, the parents' *mamnū*^c was an interdiction that rested on the authority of the family as well as that of the community. What was at stake was the protection not only of the dignity of the family, the reputation of the girl, her marriageability and that of her sisters, but also her bodily well-being. If she were seen to comport herself with propriety, she could move freely within the community secure in the knowledge that no one would dare insult her, and by extension her family.

The word "*hamūlī*" denotes an individual who is frivolous and/or delinquent, while the word "*hādī*," often used as its antonym, denotes an individual who is calm, tranquil, and quiet. It is significant that Ghada used the masculine forms of the

adjectives, not the feminine. The qualities denoted by the words were associated with how a young man should comport himself in public in order to be considered worthy of respect—quiet, calm, and measured in speech as well as in bearing. Thus, it appears from Ghada's remarks that initially young men who used digital media were considered frivolous loud mouths by older generations. The price a young man would pay for appearing frivolous would be in terms of his standing within the community. Yet the penalty was lower than that for women, who risked not only their own personal reputation but that of their families.

Ghada's discussion of the *tṭawar* both facilitated and signified by digital media use was significant in suggesting that she saw "progress" as something that came upon the community. It was something that had happened to them, rather than something they were part of and had the power to shape. Hence, it was simultaneously good and bad. The positives were conveyed by the tone with which Ghada described the effect of "progress" in terms of young Palestinian camp refugee women's increased ability to make decisions independently of their older male relatives, as well as gain access to ways of communicating that were removed from their family's purview. These new practices and abilities were also connected to shifts in norms around sociability. According to Ghada, from her generation's perspective, it is "normal" and "usual" for unrelated members of the opposite sex from the local community, to be friendly towards each other in public. It is "normal" and "usual" for young, unmarried and unrelated women and men to have non-romantic social relationships. Normal and usual are contrasted here with the '*ayb* and *mamnū'* that would have been an older generation's response to such a view of social relationships.

Ghada described the process by which change is legitimated in terms of a snow-ball effect. More and more people do it, and so it becomes "normal" and "usual". Yet it is not only older generations that view change with doubt and suspicion. Ghada made an analogy between how the normalization of cellphone use took place and the way in which a smoker persuades a non-smoker to join her through repeated offers. The smoker's insistence not only wears away at the non-smoker's resistance, it also turns refusal into rudeness and rejection of the friendship. From the point of view of Ghada's generation's, this raised the question of whose insistence gave rise to "over-development?" Ghada's use of smoking as an analogy for "over-development" was significant, since for her mother's generation, smoking cigarettes and wearing Western style clothing was one of the ways in which young Palestinian refugee women in Burj al-Barajneh camp signaled both their own "development" and "personal freedom," as well as resistance to the authority of their families and the social norms of their community. Smoking by young women was considered '*ayb* by the generations before it. Women of Ghada's generation in contrast to their mother's generation are also opposed to smoking, but for health rather than for moral reasons.

There appeared to be a cross-generational consensus that the *tṭawar* that digital media both facilitated and signified was an inevitable process happening to camp refugees. Consider the following excerpt from the interview with Nimr cited earlier:

I: What about the series on TV these days? There are many of them now from all over the world. If someone wants to, they can watch a series from Turkey, from Mexico, or anywhere else. In your opinion, how does this affect the society in the camp?

Nimr: When you are transmitting a society that is different from the one you are living in, of course it will negatively affect the society that you are living in it. What is the purpose? The purpose might be the same: the one who is controlling the media, he is exporting this culture in order to ruin or turn the way you are living upside down. It will transfer... it will give something negative. It's different than if someone went and lived in that society. For example, if I watched a Mexican series. We are not against Mexican society. Mexican society is maybe good and beautiful in Mexico and maybe good and beautiful if I went and lived in Mexico. If I went and lived in Mexico I would see the positive things in this society as well as the negative things. I wouldn't only see what they have brought me. And there are stories that don't agree with the traditions and habits of our society. Like love stories. We have had these for a long time. Since my ancestors' time, there have been love stories, but there wasn't this...

I: Antar and Abla...

Nimr: But it never happened. In the series, they show stories, relationships in public. Maybe it's a relationship between a girl and a boy, a relationship in which everything is allowed and considered normal. This is rejected in our society. These things are rejected. Maybe if I was living there I might stick to my traditions and habits. I might search for a good thing in their society that fits with my traditions and habits. Yes maybe it is good. But if I brought something from outside and put it ... it's like medicine. If medicine wants to put a new organ in a body, if it wants to implant an organ in a human's body, maybe the body will reject it. It won't be compatible with it. Why? Because this body has its own nature. Maybe it will accept it, or maybe reject it. This is its nature. This is the same as if something came to me from outside. If it is something negative, I will reject it. If it is something positive, I will accept it. But the media, for example, the TV, the TV is found in every house. It is obligatory to have one.

I: Why it is obligatory?

Nimr: It is obligatory

I: Why?

Nimr: You want to turn on the TV. Slowly, slowly they will get used to it. It will become a normal thing. At the beginning you will say no. Then you will accept it a little bit. Then you will accept it more and then more, and then it will become normal. "What's wrong with it? There is nothing wrong with it." In the past, if the media, in the TV, if someone was kissing a girl, children if they were watching the TV, would turn their faces. It is *'ayb* to watch this and it is not from our culture. Now, they are watching and it is a normal thing. The whole family is sitting and watching, the young and the old. It's normal. They have gotten used to it. Western culture or another society that is different than us, they start to accept it slowly. They started to accept Turkish series. Why? Because they are used to the accent. Because it is dubbed into the Syrian dialect. The Syrian dialect might be accepted. Slowly, slowly, people got used to the series.

Nimr analysed the process by which social change occurs in the following terms: new and foreign practices and values are introduced through representations disseminated through media; upon being frequently encountered, they become a new norm. Nimr's discussion of romantic love indicates that it is not that such love did not exist as a concept or as a representation in the camp's community, but that the content of the representations disseminated by satellite television appeared as alternatives that threatened the moral order and social fabric of the local community. Nimr's remarks suggest that in part this perception of threat stemmed from the representations being de-contextualised from the groups of people who produced

them, as well as from the spaces in which they were produced. In part the perception of threat emerged from the association of the medium—satellite television—with (foreign) imperialism. Hence, not only the representations but also the means by which they were disseminated appeared suspect. Nimr’s analysis echoed Frantz Fanon’s observations regarding what he perceived to be a rejection of the radio on the part of impoverished Algerians during French colonial rule, as a way of resisting colonial enculturation (Fanon, 1965, pp. 69–95).

Nimr’s analysis of the effects of digital media production and consumption on Palestinian inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh camp, similar to Ghada’s account, presents a vulnerable community under attack. This view is justified not only by the violent history of the struggle for Palestinian liberation, and the dispossession that Palestinian camp refugees continue to experience in Lebanon, but also by the struggle of attempting to make ends meet as a stateless “precariat” in the contemporary global capitalist economy. In his writings on globalization, Frederic Jameson argued that since the nation-state emerged over the course of the twentieth century as the primary framework for political mobilization and struggle, the political economic shifts that took place at the end of the century—referred to as “globalization”—were understood in terms of US imperialism (Jameson, 2000) and represented as the destruction of (local) “tradition.”

There are multiple ironies in the association of cultural commodities originating from the nation-states of Turkey and Mexico during “the Arab Spring,” with imperialism. It raises the question of the current location of these nation-states in the contemporary world order of global capitalism, as well as shifts that have taken place since this interview was conducted in 2011. In a contemporaneous article on public debate generated by some of the Turkish TV series that were dubbed into Syrian Arabic (referred to by Nimr), Christa Salamandra argued that this debate should be placed in the context of the Turkish nation-state’s representation of itself as an exemplary blend of Islam and modernization (Salamandra, 2012). Such a self-representation presupposes binaries of East and West, Islam and secularism, tradition and modernity which obscure the intersecting inter and intra national inequalities generated by the political economic processes of global capitalism.

Since the development of digital media technology and its use are part of political economic processes that span the entire globe, any analysis of its local effects must be placed within this global context. Attributing political mobilization and transformations in local and transnational social relationships to a medium or to the technology that enables it, abstracts the medium from its human producers and consumers, as well as from the political economic processes they are part of. Similarly, focusing primarily on one use of a medium may obscure other uses to which it is put by its producers and consumers—uses that may appear to be at cross purposes and yet are intertwined. As the chapter demonstrates, the self-representations third-generation Palestinian camp refugees produced and consumed in their use of digital media during “the Arab Spring,” simultaneously indexed commodity consumption, opposition to US imperialism, and the struggle for Palestinian national liberation.

This suggests that the political economic processes that allow for these projects—which appear to be at odds with one another—are actually intertwined at local, regional, and global scales in complicated and shifting ways that require further study.

As this chapter has demonstrated, third-generation Palestinian camp refugees' participation in processes of cultural commodity production and consumption during "the Arab Spring," must be placed in the particular political economic context of multiple generations' experiences of forced displacement in Lebanon, as well as their participation in the armed struggle for Palestinian national liberation during the 1970s–1980s. The formal and informal restrictions placed on Palestinian camp refugees' class mobility, which would mitigate the structural violence of striving to meet everyday needs as a stateless precariat in a segmented labour market, recast class mobility as patriotic duty. This imperative has been sharpened by global barriers to migration. Since both opposition to global capitalism as well as assertions of anti-colonial national identity were articulated through the discourse of "tradition" and "defending of our way of life," a gendered burden was placed on young Palestinian camp refugee women to embody the moral and social integrity of their local communities. Hence, third-generation Palestinian camp refugee women's production and consumption of digital media, while participating in global political economic processes of consuming consumption, appeared from their perspective to be a way of asserting their personal freedom without transgressing local social norms of respectability and propriety.

At the same time, these contradictions gave rise to inter and intra-generational debates regarding the impact of digital media use on Palestinian camp refugee communities in Lebanon. Significantly, the debates were couched in terms of the effects of *ttawar*—progress/development—on the social and moral fabric of the community, rather than in terms of thwarted class aspirations and the necessity of upward mobility. Thus, *ttawar* was posited as a necessary evil happening to the community, rather than as political economic processes—both local and global—that community members were part of. The sense of collective vulnerability indicated by the terms of this debate, should be placed in the historic context of Palestinian camp refugees' multi-generational experiences of structural and spectacular violence as bearers of a national identity that continues to struggle for nation-state of its own, as well as in the context of a stateless precariat in the world of global capitalism.

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Conclusion

September 30, 2003

Why am I here?

Visted one of the UNRWA secondary schools for boys today. The teacher introduced me to the more than fifty students in her class (some of whom I already knew as neighbours' children) as, "Miss Nadia, whom I told you about. She is here to help Palestinian children, to help you succeed in your exams." The boys asked me what I thought of them. Lacking confidence in my ability to respond in Arabic, I replied in English, "You are all very intelligent." Did I mean what I said? Did they think I meant what I said? Later the teacher asked, "Do you have any Palestinian friends? Why do you come to help us?" I talked about having watched the news about the First Intifada when I was growing up in Pakistan. My tone was rather passionate. I was given a polite smile.

These field notes were written a few weeks after my arrival in Burj al-Barajneh camp. My aim was to conduct preliminary research for my doctoral dissertation while living in the camp and volunteering with a local NGO. I wanted to earn the trust of potential interlocutors by giving them the opportunity to observe me in their own neighbourhood. I also wanted to reciprocate in the way I knew I could. The NGO that I volunteered with ran a creche and a kindergarten, in addition to providing after-school classes and activities to primary and secondary school students living in the camp. The parents' struggles that I observed, in their attempts to ensure that their children received formal education, were familiar to me from my own nuclear family that struggled to maintain "middle-classness" in Karachi.

As the child of leftist political activists, who, notwithstanding the differences in their respective families' class, linguistic, and religious backgrounds, concurred in viewing higher education a necessity for both their female and male children, I had been socialized to regard the acquisition of formal education as the path out of impoverishment. Within this worldview, the problems facing postcolonial nation-states, were, on the one hand, the historic consequences of colonial states' refusal to "develop" the territories they had occupied. On the other hand, many postcolonial states that emerged after national independence, had chosen to ally with the US in its Cold War, prioritizing the expansion of their military capacity at the expense of

public expenditure on building roads, electrification, supplying potable piped water, and providing primary healthcare and basic formal education.

The worldview I had been raised with and brought with me to fieldwork had been shaped by the post WWII development paradigm, shared across political divides, that saw the state as the primary agent of “development” (Bernard, 2023; Bernstein, 1971; Portes, 1976). However, within the particular strand of “developmentalist thought,” that I had imbibed from my upbringing, underdevelopment in parts of the world formerly ruled by the US and European powers, was attributed to the machinations of “Western” capitalism. This was in contrast to those understandings of development that attributed “failures of modernization” to deficiencies in cognitive frameworks deemed “traditional” (Portes, 1976). At the same time, the particular strand of “Third Worldism” that had formed my young adult worldview tended to conflate racial and religious difference, and equate them with class inequalities instead of seeing these as shifting over time and intersecting in particular ways in particular parts of the world during particular time periods. This particular strand of “Third Worldism” made it difficult to apprehend “the Global North” and “the Global South” not as fixed geographies, but in terms of historic shifts in regional political economies and their interrelationships. It also made it difficult to pose—and hence examine—the question of why, notwithstanding religious and pan-nationalist solidarities, particular groups of forcibly displaced people—such as Afghans in Pakistan and Palestinians in Lebanon—continue to experience hostility from host citizens even after several decades of “informal” integration into local political economies.

As the preceding chapters have attempted to demonstrate, the Palestinian refugees who “self-settled” Burj al-Barajneh camp were quickly incorporated into local and regional political economies despite the Lebanese state’s formal prohibitions on Palestinian employment and ownership of property. This “informal” incorporation was made possible by the unequal relationships of exchange that Palestinian camp refugees entered into with wealthy compatriots who were able to secure naturalization and with host state citizens. These social relationships of unequal exchange took the form of Palestinian camp refugees’ precarious wage labour and consumption. However, their “informal” incorporation into Lebanon’s political economy has not provided Palestinian camp refugees unequivocal recognition of their rights under national or international law. Similar predicaments have been observed by other scholars who have also conducted ethnographic research in refugee camps located in postcolonial nation-states in Asia and Africa (Alimia, 2022; Monsutti, 2021; Omata, 2017). This problematizes the binary distinction between forced/“political” and voluntary/“economic” migration underlying contemporary refugee and migration regimes by highlighting ways in which earning a living is never merely an “economic” matter.

A concerted scholarly effort to examine the inner workings of spaces that had been established as temporary and transitional responses to war and the “collateral damage” of development in postcolonial nation-states located in Asia and Africa began in the late 1980s. The perception among scholars and policymakers that the continued existence of these spaces necessitated further analysis was preceded by a marked shift from the preeminence of industrial manufacture to that of service

production in the political economies of the US and Western Europe. The last decades of the twentieth century also saw the implementation of neoliberal policies aimed at creating and “freeing” markets around the world, along with corresponding changes in international migration flows, as well as a decided shift in the international refugee regime from resettlement to repatriation.

Early ethnographic research on the spatiality of refugee camps was conducted in Southeast Asia and East Africa (Hitchcox, 1990; Hyndman, 2000; Malkki, 1992, 1995a, 1995b; Mortland, 1987). These camps facilitated the provision of humanitarian aid to refugees of Cold-War conflicts in those regions and enabled asylum claims to be processed for refugee resettlement in parts of the world perceived as “First World.” Reflecting prevailing understandings of globalization as an increased porosity—for some, the weakening—of nation-state borders, the problematics of this body of scholarship was articulated in terms of the assertion of “local” identities in response to the political power of formal institutions of governance. The relationships between what was deemed “political”—nation-states, international organizations, and the provision of humanitarian aid—and what was considered “economic”—local forms of production and consumption, global commodity and financial flows, and migration in search of work—was not systematically analyzed. This mirrored the distinction between “political/forced” refugees and “economic/voluntary” migrants institutionalized through law and policy making after WWII (Karatani, 2005; Long, 2013; Venturas, 2015).

With the inception of the U.S. led “War on Terror” in 2001, a succession of global economic crises, and a decided shift in international refugee and migration policy towards “securitization,” the organization and administration of refugee camps have come to be analyzed in terms of “encampment” (Diken & Laustsen, 2003, 2005; Pandolfi, 2003; Perera, 2002) and “humanitarian governance” (Fassin, 2012, 2013). In addition to the work of Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1991, 1995), this body of scholarship has drawn on philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s critique of “the Western” state (Agamben, 1995, 1998, 2005). Agamben has argued that given the dual nature of exceptions, the very assertion of the sacredness of human life in opposition to the exercise of sovereignty, places that life squarely within the realm of the state’s power. In other words, the citizen can only come into existence by exchanging their right to participate in political life with an unconditional subjection to the state/sovereign’s power of death over their life. According to Agamben, the legal status of refugees reveals this hidden relationship between the modern state (whether totalitarian or liberal-democratic) and “bare life” (Agamben, 1995). The “camp,” then, is the space that is opened when the state exercises sovereignty, since the “state of exception” becomes the norm, and the only possible life is “bare life.” Claiming Auschwitz as the exemplar of both refugee and concentration camps, Agamben argues that it is the “paradigm” of contemporary politics (Agamben, 1998).

A large number of scholars have drawn on Agamben’s work to criticize the securitization of migration policy in the US and Western Europe and the establishment of detention centers for the containment and processing of migrants and asylum seekers. In order to highlight the abuse experienced by those detained while the (il)legality of their migration is verified, scholars argue that they are reduced by the

states that detain them to “bare life”. According to these scholars, “Western” states seek to resolve the ambiguity of the migrant/asylum seeker’s status by including them in their own sphere of authority. They do so by containing migrants/asylum seekers in detention centers until their documentation and claims are verified. This, then opens up a “space of exception,” in which the abrogation of the detainees’ rights is the norm. Some scholars have extended these claims to their analyses of refugee camps by arguing that humanitarian aid organizations facilitate the containment of refugees within camps where anything is possible and the “state of exception”—a lack of rights—is the norm (Diken & Laustsen, 2003, 2005; Pandolfi, 2003; Perera, 2002).

Imprisoning migrant/asylum seekers is a grave injustice. The overt and covert violence exercised in migrant detention camps, regardless of who is formally in charge—“liberal democratic” nation-states in the US and Western Europe, or their sub-contractors in Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific—has been well documented (Boochani, 2018; Conlon & Hiemstra, 2014; Gueguen-Teil & Katz, 2018; Pandolfi, 2003). At the same time, Agamben’s work raises serious questions about the implications of claiming the Nazi concentration and death camps to be the paradigm of contemporary politics. On the one hand, the analogy banalizes by universalizing (Latif, 2008b). On the other hand, this appropriation of (an)other’s experiences uses their suffering and death in a manner similar to the use of slavery as a trope in Enlightenment critiques of absolutist monarchy (Latif, 2018). It narrates a total and totalizing order in which the omnipotent state inexorably exercises power to expand its sphere of authority and strip those within it of their humanity. The only history that can be told within this paradigm is the history of the state’s development of more effective technologies of subjection and the concomitant reduction of human beings to “bare life.” Such accounts may be effective in mobilizing solidarity for all those deemed to have been reduced to “bare life.” They do not, however, permit an understanding of the particular experiences of particular groups of migrants/refugees in particular parts of the world. Neither do these accounts facilitate an examination of the particular ways in which a given “space of exception” is connected to the local political economy of its environ, as well as to the global capitalist economy.

Other scholars, such as Didier Fassin, have highlighted links between the US led War on Terror and the global shift towards the securitization of migration by focusing on ways in which both have been legitimated by reference to a “moral economy” of humanitarianism (Fassin, 2012, 2013). Fassin has argued that both humanitarian aid and humanitarian intervention are justified in “the West” by mobilizing emotions across political divides through appeals to a common humanity and shared suffering. According to Fassin, this “politics of compassion” originated with the emergence of “moral sentiments” in Enlightenment thought, and since the 1990s has been used to justify the establishment of ministries of humanitarian assistance and humanitarian aid organizations in “Western” liberal democracies, “that claim the right/duty/authority to intervene in situations deemed “humanitarian crises.” (Fassin, 2012, p. 5).

Hence, Fassin argues, a lexicon of moral sentiments has come to take the place of an older vocabulary of social critique. “Inequality is replaced by exclusion, domination is transformed into misfortune, injustice is articulated as suffering, violence is expressed in terms of trauma” (Fassin, 2012, p. 6). This “politics of compassion” is simultaneously a politics of solidarity in its recognition of others as fellow humans, as well as a politics of inequality in that it focuses on the most vulnerable. Moreover, the very terms of the social relationship between benefactor and recipient—good intentions notwithstanding—preclude the possibility of reciprocity, as grateful compliance is all that the recipient can offer as a counter-gift. Thus, according to Fassin, humanitarian governance is a politics of precarious lives, lives that are “not guaranteed but bestowed in answer to prayer” (Fassin, 2012, p. 4).

Fassin’s work highlights the privatization and out-sourcing of the provision of social welfare, development and humanitarian aid that have accompanied the global implementation of neoliberal policies. Consequences that, as Fassin’s scholarship demonstrates, continue to be legitimated through the discourse of “moral sentiments.” At the same time, the findings of my long-term fieldwork, conducted while living and volunteering in Burj al-Barajneh camp, raise questions about whether the analysis of the social relationships between refugees and humanitarian aid workers, many of whom are fellow refugee inhabitants of camps, through the concept of sovereignty—a claim to absolute power—may be insufficient to the task of understanding the operation of these unequal relationships and their shifts over time.

Many of the “formal” refugee camps still inhabited by Palestinian refugees in Lebanon came into existence due to the mass expulsion of Palestinians during the founding of the nation-state of Israel in 1948. Prior to the establishment of UNRWA in 1950, humanitarian aid to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon was provided by the League of Red Cross Societies (LRCS), of which the Lebanese Red Cross, founded a year prior to national independence from French Mandate rule in 1946, was a member. Research in the archives of the LRCS and the ICRC located in Geneva along with my fieldwork in Burj al-Barajneh camp, revealed that the emergence of Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, involved both organized transfers of refugees under the supervision of the League, as well as movement on the part of refugees themselves. The location and settlement of the camps, similarly, entailed both refugees’ own initiatives and interventions on the part of the League (Latif, 2008a, 2008b). According to League reports, the Lebanese state viewed those refugees who were in need of humanitarian assistance as a threat to its sectarian balance of power between Muslims and Christians and relegated the provision of relief to the League. The League reports also reveal that the Lebanese Red Cross was more interested in assisting Christian Palestinian refugees.

Burj al-Barajneh camp came into existence in 1949, near the village of Burj al-Barajneh on the southern outskirts of Beirut. A notable family from the village of Tarshiha in the Upper Galilee had taken refuge in the village of Burj al-Barajneh, as they had economic and social ties with a notable family from the village. Over time, they were joined by fellow villagers and kinsmen from neighbouring villages in the Galilee, who looked to them for leadership. As the number of refugee families grew, the LRCS began to provide assistance in the form of tents, food rations, and basic

health care. After the establishment of UNRWA in 1950, primary education was also provided to children in the camp. The League's reports of its work, as well as subsequent UNRWA reports from the 1950s, make clear that the aid provided was never sufficient to meet the refugees' basic needs. These circumstances, the loss of the land refugees had cultivated in Palestine as small owners and as sharecroppers, alongside the Lebanese state's legal prohibitions on their employment necessitated informal work on the part of adults and children. At the same time, fieldwork revealed that the refugees' possession and dispossession of economic and social capital was not uniform or constant. Hence, the camp was never an unstratified space.

Lebanese employers' demand for cheap labour, as well as some refugees' possession of the requisite social capital, enabled the circumvention of the Lebanese state's prohibitions on Palestinian employment from time to time. UNRWA provided salaried work for some refugees, which made it possible over time for some to accumulate enough capital to move out of the camp or migrate to the Gulf countries that were importing labour in response to the boom in their economies. Opportunities for salaried employment and the provision of social services increased after the PLO's establishment of its base of operations in Lebanon in the late 1960s. University scholarships made available by Cuba and the Eastern Bloc and disbursed through the PLO enabled some party members in the camps and their relatives to migrate for higher education to Cuba, the USSR, and the Eastern European bloc. Burj al-Barajneh camp became an important military base for Fateh, and a number of Fateh fighters who originated from Gaza, Morocco, and Algeria intermarried with camp families. Intermarriage also took place between Burj al-Barajneh camp's Palestinian inhabitants and their Syrian and Lebanese class counterparts who had migrated to Beirut in search of work. Hence, similar to long-term refugee camps located in Asia and Africa, Burj al-Barajneh camp has experienced considerable in and out migration over the course of its history and has been inhabited by impoverished and stateless Palestinians, as well as by impoverished citizens of different nation-states seeking precarious employment (Alimia, 2022; Jansen, 2018; Monsutti, 2021; Omata, 2017).

The PLO's withdrawal from Lebanon after the Israeli invasion of 1982 and the Oslo Accords of 1993, which led to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in West Bank and Gaza, contributed to the reduction of social services in the camps in Lebanon and their limited re-provision by local and international NGOs. Donor driven focus on women's empowerment along with NGOs primarily providing educational and health services initially generated more opportunities for women refugees' salaried employment than for men. However, this employment remains precarious, as it is made possible by the donor funds that NGOs are differentially able to secure for their projects. Steady outmigration from the camp to "better" neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Sidon and the influx of Palestinian and Syrian refugees from Syria since the beginning of the war in Syria in 2012 have dramatically changed the composition of Burj al-Barajneh camp since I initiated fieldwork in 2003.

This abbreviated history of Burj al-Barajneh camp demonstrates how analyses led by conceptualizations of "encampment" and "humanitarian government," do not

facilitate a multi-scalar analysis of the historical shifts that shape the local political economy of a particular refugee camp located in a particular part of the world. Neither do those paradigms enable a nuanced understanding of generational shifts in the experiences of particular groups of refugees. Those who were school aged children when I began fieldwork in 2003 are now adults. Many have married and have children of their own. Others were unable to earn enough to build a family of their own. Yet others sought asylum in Western European nation-states and are waiting for their claims to be processed. Similar to the first generation that was forcibly displaced in 1948, this generation also struggles to secure employment that remains precarious. However, unlike the first generation, not only is this generation formally employed, many of its members—regardless of gender—have acquired higher education through the hard work and sacrifices made by their parents. The predicament they face can only be understood in light of shifts in Lebanon's political economy as well as changes in the global political economy since the turn of the twentieth century. The consequences of Israel's reoccupation of South Lebanon, the brutality of its concerted efforts to eradicate Hizballah, as well as the conflict between the US and Iran over control of the State of Hormuz for the Palestinian inhabitants of Burj al-Barajneh refugee camp requires further research. It is hoped that the theoretical framework proposed in this book will facilitate the work of other researchers, not only in Burj al-Barajneh camp, but also in other long-term refugee camps located in regions that have been impoverished by the terms of their integration into the global capitalist economy.

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