INTRODUCTION

"THERE WAS ONCE A KING who had a horse that he wanted trained to speak," Abu Ali began. "A refugee came forward and said, 'I'll teach your horse to speak, but it will be hard and it may take many years—forty, fifty, maybe more—and meanwhile I'll need a salary and shelter.'" Abu Ali paused, letting his poor refugee's cleverness sink in. "His friends said, 'Are you crazy? How can you teach a horse to talk? When the king finds out you lied, he'll kill you!' But the man responded, 'A lot can happen in forty years. The horse can die, the king can die, and in the meantime I'll eat, drink, and have a roof over my head.'"

I have listened to countless narratives, real and fantastical, of wiliness and survival in my years of research in Shatila, a Palestinian refugee camp in the southern suburbs of Beirut, Lebanon.[1] I was struck by what might be called the trickster element of such stories: the quick eye, audacity, and cunning that enable an underdog to outwit his masters. The business of survival in Shatila is often presented as one of stealth, mischief, willfulness, and an odd blend of humility and bravado. Shrewd resilience can be captured in set-piece narratives like Abu Ali's, ritually performed in everyday life or tactically deployed in response to the exclusions and privations of camp existence.

Such displays of cunning were not what I had expected to find. In the stereotypes of nationalist discourse, refugees are the stoic, "steadfast" (*sumud*) embodiment of a people who refuse to disappear; exiled subjects who would be citizens, upholding the right to return to their land.[2] The strugglers I encountered in Shatila seemed far more fractured and embattled, but also far more pragmatic. My interlocutors were more willing to question—and even subvert—the nationalist *doxa* of "perseverance and resistance" (*israr wa-muqawama*) than to

adhere to it dutifully regardless of where it was taking them. Refugees' accounts of everyday survival strategies not only reveal tactical resistance to nationalist orthodoxy but also foreground the economic and existential—as opposed to purely political and cultural—dimensions of their struggle.

Shortly after moving to Shatila, in the context of a freewheeling discussion of camp politics, I heard another tale of mythic pragmatism. Before the advent of Islam, said Mahmud, a young man who lived in a neighboring building, the Bedouin tribe of Banu Hanifa created a pagan god. This deity, made of dates mixed with clarified butter, was worshipped for centuries as a source of power and oracular knowledge. When famine struck the tribe, they had no alternative but to eat their god. Mahmud related this story to illustrate why he no longer had time for politics. Extremity of circumstances, he said, was forcing him and his peers to adjust their aspirations and renounce certain closely held beliefs. The struggle to get by was now all-consuming, leaving little time for political or cultural life and muting nationalist aspiration. Refugees in Shatila had been left little choice but to "eat their god."

The image is both disturbing and paradoxical, evoking as it does not only disenchantment and defeat but also pragmatic agency and resourcefulness. It haunted me for the duration of my research and throughout the writing of this book, which aims to examine the interplay between canonical narratives of return to Palestine and local material realities of camp life. While Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have, in the last two decades, experienced new extremes of poverty, powerlessness, and political disillusionment, these conditions appear to be producing new forms of agency and subjectivity. This book is an attempt to understand how these everyday struggles affect Palestinian refugees in Shatila and to see the forces structuring social and political life through a phenomenological rather than ideological lens. Attending to what has been renascent in the wake of deprivation and disenfranchisement has been analytically central to my work.

The material and ideological crisis facing refugees today is often traced back to the departure of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1982, which marked the end of an unprecedented period of political ascendancy and institution building for Palestinians in Lebanon (Brynen 1990). The arrival of the Palestinian Resistance Movement (PRM) in Beirut in the 1970s had opened a new era—commonly referred to as "the revolution" (*al-thawra*)—transforming camps from poor, marginalized communities into politically active, vibrant economies.[3] Almost overnight, ostracized refugees were turned into major

power brokers and political players, within both the Palestinian community and Lebanese society.

Despite the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975, what came to be known as the "Palestinian sector"—the committees and productive institutions established by the PLO—grew dramatically, soon absorbing 65 percent of the Palestinian workforce (Sayigh 1994, 17). The PLO's immense power and influence at that time afforded protection, and the wealth flowing into the organization funded a multitude of services. Shatila was the epicenter of these transformations, effectively functioning as the headquarters for the Palestinian leadership; residents who lived through this critical moment in the camp's history recall this period as a time of considerable prosperity and conviction.

All this ended in 1982, when the PLO was forcibly evacuated from Beirut in the wake of Israel's invasion of Lebanon. The Palestinian sector was dismantled, leaving the community vulnerable and jobless. The relocation of the leadership to Tunis has come to be seen as the turning point in the fortunes of refugees in Lebanon, marking the onset of radical political and economic instability and a collective crisis of faith whose effects have deepened with time. This watershed, which paved the way for the PLO's betrayals during the 1993 Oslo Accords—when refugees, formerly the core of the national movement, found themselves erased from the political arena—forms the historical context for this ethnography and is central for understanding the existential impasse that, for many, now characterizes camp life. The residents of Shatila today are refugees not only of "the catastrophe" (*al-Nakba*)—their 1948 expulsion from their homes in Palestine—but of *al-thawra*.[4]

The problem I am addressing, however, is more than a conflict between a nationalist metanarrative and local contingencies. It is something specific to Palestinians in Lebanon in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, where any form of assimilation is taboo, because it is seen as forsaking nationalist aspirations and legitimizing historical dispossession. In the discourses of both nationalism and international diplomacy, refugees have been reduced to symbols of a historical and political grievance awaiting redress, and their political and legal claims are almost always discussed with reference exclusively to Israel. The Lebanese government has exploited this situation as a pretext for withholding everything from health care, education, and social security to the basic right to work and own property. Lebanese politicians argue that extending civil, political, and economic rights to the Palestinian community will lead ineluctably to its naturalization, which they unanimously oppose. At the level of state

rhetoric and policy, opposition to civil rights for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon is inextricably linked to support for their national rights in Israel/Palestine. Refugees, meanwhile, live lives existentially shaped, on the one hand, by their enduringly temporary status and, on the other, by the gathering infrastructural and institutional permanence of the camps.

A subtle version of this same logic has made its way into scholarship on Palestinians in Lebanon, ironically through the conduit of solidarity. In an effort to underscore the historical dimension of their case, much of the work on Palestinians in Lebanon addresses identity as a function of memory, a relation to the past. Remembrance is seen not only as central to contemporary Palestinian identity but also as constituting refugees' primary form of resistance (Abufarha 2009; Davis 2010; R. Khalidi 1997; Khalili 2007; Sa'di 2002; E. Said 2003; Slyomovics 1998; Swedenburg 1995). Camps are presented normatively as mnemonic communities held together by a shared memory of the villages and towns in what is now primarily Israel, from which they were ethnically cleansed during the Nakba, and by the collective demand for return. A physical reminder of the cataclysmic events of 1948, camps "represent the core of the problem as well as being the symbol of it" (Tuastad 1997, 105). Upholding the "right of return" (*haq al-'awda*) and "refugee" status over naturalization or permanent exile has become a core tenet of the community's political identity. The phrase "lest we forget" (*hatta la nansa*) encapsulates this sentiment and is often invoked both to express steadfastness and to forswear naturalization.

While oral narratives of the expulsion, the politics of memory, the right-of-return movement, and deracinated nationalism continue to figure prominently in ethnographies, the material conditions of refugee existence have tended to be occluded. Commemorative practices that invoke primordial attachments to land and cultural heritage are often viewed as central to maintaining membership within the Palestinian polity (Khalili 2004). Although this scholarship has enriched our understanding of the persistence of certain pre-1948 forms of social organization and cultural practice in exile, parallel transformations in the way identity and belonging are conceived and practiced locally—and the conflicting loyalties and attachments that have evolved after more than sixty years in exile—have been underestimated.[5]

This retrospective scholarly gaze has also been latently prescriptive, subsuming and replicating the ideological matrix of Palestinian nationalism. The pre-1948 Palestinian homeland is the normative focus of narratives of belonging, yearning, and political attachment. Refugees are presented as the living

remnants of a way of life that abruptly ended in 1948, the visible proof of cataclysmic events that drove an estimated 750,000 Palestinian Arabs from their homes, the abject symbol of unrealized national claims, and the embodied reminder of a historical injustice awaiting redress. The ethical imperative that many scholars feel often leads them to emphasize the continuities of attachment in exile rather than the discontinuities. By focusing on camps as temporary communities, where refugees ready themselves for return, scholarship has tended to uncritically interpellate refugees as national subjects and to neglect forms of social and political organization and identification that have developed in exile.

Within the implicit logic of this canonical account, moreover, the past is a moral condition and a fixed inheritance rather than a sequence of events and contingencies that have brought the Palestinians to where they are. Refugees must inhabit the condition and pass on the inheritance in order to retain their political identity. Meanwhile, the question of what it would mean for three generations born in exile to return to a place they never left is not explored, obviated as it is by the need for historical restitution. Throughout this book I attend explicitly to the nuances and generational distinctions shaping discussion of this issue among refugees themselves, and implicitly to what I think is a growing gap between the maximalist positions of Palestinian (and Israeli) nationalists and the pragmatism of refugees, who often distinguish between a symbolic recognition of the right of return and its actual implementation. Although home and homeland are related concepts, they are not synonymous: dynamically evolving solidarities and attachments that have developed in camp communities unsettle the alignment of people and place, complicating our understanding of Palestinian identity and belonging in this context. Motivated by the need to rethink solidarity rather than forsake it, this ethnography considers the various ways in which refugees are pushing back against the assumptions and impositions of nationalist discourse.

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and elsewhere are almost always discussed in ideological terms, as if they dwelled entirely within a political realm, as if their aspirations and inner lives lacked the fractured complexities of Western consciousness and identity, and as if their crucial needs were spiritual and ethno-national but not material and economic. Everyday matters such as work, health, and homemaking have received very little scholarly attention; even politically valenced issues such as power dynamics, grassroots action, and notions of futurity are recognized only when the frame of reference is large-scale,

national, and symbolic. An important aspect of my research has therefore been to study the dynamic material worlds refugees inhabit in Shatila, attending to the range of local factors and forces shaping existence at the granular level. I consider several interrelated questions: How do residents experience camp life and relate to one another? What are the dominant relations of power in the community? What forms of agency exist? How do individuals and households in the camp deal with the challenges they face? How do they plan for the future? How are continuity and social renewal conceived? Addressing—and redressing—this pattern of effacement in the literature on Palestinian refugees has been the principal aim of my work.

This book is not making a normative argument about the need to forget, to "let go" or "move on." Even as I critique the canonical emphasis on Palestinian identity as a function of collective memory and collective claims making, I am committed both to the importance of shoring up the historical—and oral-historical—record of 1948 and to augmenting rather than tamping down awareness of it. Specifically, I believe that preserving historical awareness of these events by recording refugee memories of 1948—at this point of transition from history as lived to history as text—is critical. Since 2002 I have worked on an archival project recording filmed testimonies with first-generation refugees in camps around Lebanon about their villages prior to the Nakba and their experiences during the expulsion. The Nakba Archive was initially to have been the subject of my research.[6] Based on the interviews I recorded in Shatila in 2001, I hypothesized that these narratives would shed light on the contingent processes by which displaced Palestinians in Lebanon construct a history and identity in exile, and how they articulate a sense of belonging, both to a diasporic community and to a Palestinian homeland. While I expected to find counternarratives of the 1948 war (narratives, for example, subversively inflected by gender, class, place of origin, and political division), I did not expect to question the essential originary power of eyewitness testimonies, much less their political and social significance within the community. I assumed that these stories were the primary means by which the paradigmatic motifs of Palestinian refugee identity—expulsion, collective dispossession, and displacement—as well as the sustaining structures of belonging and attachment, were transmitted to subsequent generations who had not lived the events of the Nakba.

Only a few months into my fieldwork I had already grown more critical of this view, and the experience of working on the archive while living in Shatila

was to radically alter my understanding of the ways 1948 is remembered and forgotten, publicly and privately. Over the course of the next two years, the process of recording several hundred testimonies while I lived and conducted ethnographic research in the camp revealed stark discrepancies between how refugees recalled these experiences in the course of formal archival interviews and how they spoke of them in casual, everyday contexts. During informal conversations, nationalist imperatives would often give way to aspirations conceived in terms far more personal. The gravitational pull of the Palestinian nationalist master narrative became clearer, easier to discern, and I was able to track the trajectories of life stories as they fell into and out of discursive alignment with it.

More troubling were the residual experiences and local histories of several generations of refugees born in exile that seemed to have been silenced or left unassimilated by this renascent nationalist history. My friends and colleagues in Shatila tolerated, but did not always share my enthusiasm for, the salvage ethnography in which I was engaged. While elders were usually happy to be interviewed, often lamenting that we had not come sooner when their memories were sharper, second- and third-generation refugees were skeptical about the usefulness of such a project and cynical about the intentions that lay behind it. "Why are you documenting the problems of the past and not looking at how we are suffering *now*?" I was frequently asked, and many wondered why anyone would find these stories interesting after so many years. The most persistent question, framed more as a challenge, was how the archive would help the community. This I could not answer.

Such exchanges forced me to reevaluate certain assumptions that had informed my thinking about the archive and to think critically about the politics of what we do and do not witness in the field. What was at stake in these acts of remembrance for refugees in camps like Shatila? In making an archive that searched for certain kinds of national "truths," was I implicated in the structural forgetting of other, less usable pasts?[7] Was I engaged in a coercion of memory? Because I approached eyewitnesses as living links with Palestine, and their narratives as tools for regenerating collective meanings within a political field, did such quasi-institutionalized initiatives in some sense prevent elders from mourning their losses in more personal terms? By helping to codify this event as the core of national identity, were my colleagues and I making it harder for subsequent generations of refugees to articulate a sense of identity and belonging in their own terms? These and related questions haunted me. I have

never been able to answer them, but the matrix of reflection, inquiry, and fieldwork they created form the critical substrate of this book.

As an anthropologist and activist, I was particularly unsettled to see how outsiders—not only ethnographers but also nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and solidarity networks—play a key role in articulating and sustaining this metanarrative, often at the expense of more dynamic and diverse forms of remembering. In my interactions with local, civil, and political institutions, in Shatila as well as other camps, I became aware of the extent to which they have mobilized a nationalist narrative and minted its coin, often for the very pragmatic reason that cultural heritage projects invoking the right of return generate investment and support from global solidarity networks.

To an activist committed to the right of Palestinians to national self-determination and to restitution and recognition for displaced refugees, an archive documenting the events of 1948 seemed compelling and important. Justice for Palestinians will inevitably entail a historical reckoning with and acknowledgment of past injustice: documenting the events of the expulsion is therefore of critical importance. However, the ethical obligation that those of us in sympathy with the aims of Palestinian nationalism may feel does not entitle us to speak politically for those whose lives have been determined by these events.

Empathy may draw us into history and nourish a desire that the Nakba be neither denied nor forgotten. Empathy may also cause us to lose sight of distinctions—the ways the past does and does not continue to shape the present. Commemorative projects that peg remembrance to nationalist politics have created a hierarchy of events worthy of remembrance and witness. Occluded are the everyday forms of suffering experienced by refugees, and emergent subjectivities not conforming to the communitarian ideals of nationalism. Lacking the moral and political clarity of the 1948 expulsion, or the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre, everyday histories of grinding poverty are elided because they not only do not further but in some cases actively subvert the goals of Palestinian nationalism.[8]

There were several moments in the course of my fieldwork that highlighted tensions between nationalist orthodoxy and the irreducible particularity of local concerns. One such turning point for me occurred at a Civitas meeting convened in Shatila's main hall in July 2004. Funded by the European Union (EU), Civitas's stated aims were to examine the nature of relations between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and refugee communities living in exile; to bolster the

credibility of the PLO as the primary institution responsible for representing Palestinian refugees; and to strengthen relations between the PA and the Palestinian diaspora (undermined as these had been by the 1993 Oslo Accords, which effectively removed refugees from the political arena).

Though the event was open to the entire community, the residents who attended were primarily men in their forties and fifties who had been former Fatah cadres and had helped organize the meeting. Almost no women or youth were present. The friend who accompanied me to the meeting speculated that Islamist groups and Syrian-backed opposition factions had intentionally not been invited, and it was clear that the event had not been widely publicized. When the audience was invited to respond, an elderly woman seated at the front named Umm Rabbiya stood up and after briefly asking the organizers to relay her greetings to Abu Ammar (Arafat's nom de guerre), launched into a narrative of personal loss and hardship beginning with the death of five sons and the loss of two homes, the first during the siege of Tel al-Zaʿtar camp in 1976, the second in Shatila during the 1982 Israeli invasion. She then described the harsh living conditions she faced as an elderly widow living alone. Offering a wish list for improvements, she said that Shatila needed a new transformer to solve the electricity problem, better health services for the elderly, money for schools, and free drinking water. "Our youth have no work; they have nothing to do." She concluded, "They sit and smoke nargileh outside my house the entire day. Their lives are being wasted—what can be done about this?"

When I spoke with Umm Rabbiya after the event, she was skeptical about the initiative's usefulness. "This kind of thing is talk without taste [*haki bala taʿmeh*]. We can keep talking from now until the moment we die, and then what? We are on our own [*surna la-halna*]. It's like when a dog barks and no one responds [*zayy al-kalb ʿamm biʿawwi—ma hada bi-ridd ʿalayh*]," she told me. Her sharp intervention revealed the gap between refugee needs and institutional prerogatives, between the exigencies of camp life and a rhetoric of national unity and political participation. For Umm Rabbiya and others with whom I spoke, improving the mechanisms of political representation, while important, was less pressing than solving electricity problems, rebuilding camp sewers, and generating employment opportunities for youth, which were seen as imperative for communal survival and, in some ways, a more relevant form of national entitlement. These demands were directed not only to the national leadership but also to their host government, and claims to services and civic

benefits in Lebanon were not regarded as incompatible with the right of return or with national liberation.

Other members of the audience shared Umm Rabbiya's reservations. "Every year we have these kinds of initiatives funded by the EU or others, and nothing changes for us," said one young man. "Why should we waste our time believing in them? They paint a nice picture, and that's it." As camp politics become increasingly mired in local struggles, these confidence-building measures seem ever more abstract.[9] Civitas's presumption of a stable continuity of national identity, belonging, and aspiration in the diaspora struck me as rooted in a fundamental misrecognition of the stakes—both political and existential—of life in Shatila.

The debate that Civitas generated within the Palestinian community in Lebanon revealed, more generally, the deep anxieties that foreign-funded initiatives provoke among refugees. Some said the lack of a clear statement in support of the right of return indicated that Civitas was part of an EU proposal to settle refugees in Lebanon. Others said Civitas was undermining rather than underscoring the relevance of the PLO, that if they truly wanted to strengthen the institution, they could have funded the PLO to conduct the survey. Many I spoke with in Shatila, however, saw it as yet another well-funded scheme that would enrich its organizers but bring no significant improvement for refugees. The range of speculation and rumor Civitas generated is symptomatic of the vulnerability refugees experience, cognizant as they are that their fates are decided for them behind closed doors.

PALESTINIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

By the early summer of 1948, about 750,000 Palestinians had been displaced from their homes by Jewish militias and forced into neighboring Arab states; about 110,000 people, mainly from the Upper Galilee and from the coastal towns of Mandate Palestine, sought refuge in Lebanon.[10] Most of these refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the UN apparatus established in 1950 to provide relief and work for Palestinian refugees, and were admitted to one of the dozen camps operated by the organization around the country.[11] The most recent population estimate provided by UNRWA (2012) suggests that there are currently 465,798 Palestinians living in Lebanon,[12] of which 233,509 are registered as living in camps.[13] This community hovers in an ill-defined space, out of place and between states, as Lebanon denies their naturalization and Israel rejects their return. The "peace

process" has reinforced the view prevalent among international actors that the right of refugees to return to their homeland is expendable in the service of statehood; indeed, the international community has increasingly viewed forfeit of this right as a precondition for peace. Meanwhile, the majority of Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon have no citizenship of any kind and hold only temporary travel documents issued by the Lebanese authorities.[14] As objects of political negotiation, speculation, and back-room deals, refugees—and the intractable "refugee problem" they have come synecdochically to represent—cast a stark light on Israeli, Palestinian, and international intransigence as well as Lebanese discrimination.[15]

Their vulnerability in Lebanon is complicated by a history of troubled relations with their hosts, a history of extreme violence in which Palestinians have been at once witnesses, perpetrators, and victims. Few Lebanese can forgive or forget the PLO's role in their fifteen-year civil war in 1975–1990 (Fisk 1991; Hudson 1997; Picard 2002), and Palestinians are regularly blamed for the political turmoil of this period. The 1969 Cairo Agreement, brokered between the PLO and Lebanese authorities, saw the lifting of the repressive policies of the Lebanese Sûreté Générale, and later the Deuxième Bureau (al-Maktab al-Thani, the office of military intelligence), which had banned everything from political activity to professional work to arms possession. Many Lebanese chafed at the political and military power Palestinians accrued during this period and accused them of creating "a state within a state." Their sudden prominence was also regarded as having destabilized the fragile sectarian balance in the country and precipitated the civil war (in which they sided with the Lebanese Nationalist Movement against the Lebanese Forces [LF] and Christian militias backed by Syria).

In 1978 Israel invaded South Lebanon, intent on destroying the PLO's military bases, and established therein a "security zone." The attempted assassination of the Israeli ambassador Shlomo Argov in London on June 4, 1982, provided the casus belli for the Israeli invasion (Operation Peace in the Galilee).[16] After six weeks of heavy shelling, much of the PLO's infrastructure had been destroyed, several camps had been wiped out, and thousands of civilians had been killed. The PLO agreed to evacuate on condition that international protection be provided for Palestinian civilians. On September 16, two weeks after the PLO's leaders and cadres had been evacuated to Tunis, Lebanese Christian militias carried out the massacre of Sabra and Shatila under the passive watch of Israeli forces, murdering at least thirteen hundred Palestinian and

Lebanese civilians in retaliation for the assassination of Bashir Gemayel, the leader of the LF and newly elected president.[17] This was followed by a period of internecine fighting between Palestinian factions, fueled by Syria as part of its bid to gain control of the Palestinian national movement. In 1985 the Shi'ite militia Amal—with Syrian support—attacked and besieged the camps in Beirut in an effort to root out forces loyal to PLO chairman Yasser Arafat, igniting what came to be known as the "War of the Camps" (*Harb al-Mukhayamat*), which raged until 1988.[18] The departure of the PLO and the fedayeen forces in 1982 is therefore viewed as a critical turning point for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon; it deprived them of an important source of employment and protection, marking the beginning of a period of political, economic, and humanitarian instability continuing through the present day.[19]

The other defining moment in the history of Palestinian refugees in the Near East was the 1993 Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO. When Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin signed the Declaration of Principles on the White House lawn, Palestinians living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) imagined themselves a step closer to self-rule and statehood, but the agreement turned out to put off the discussion of the fate of refugees displaced in 1948 to a later date (Brynen 1997). The right of return was never even on the table.

For Palestinians in Lebanon, the majority of whom trace their displacement to 1948, the sense of betrayal and exclusion from the national movement—after years of struggle and sacrifice—was acute. Quick to exploit the rift between the national leadership and Palestinian refugees in the camps in Lebanon, the Lebanese government justified its policies of nonintegration and exclusion through a renewed commitment to the right of return and Palestinian nationalist aspirations (Tamari 1996). The maximalist demands of the international right-of-return movement, which gathered momentum in the late 1990s in the wake of Oslo, unwittingly helped reinforce the claim that naturalizing Palestinians would undermine their national rights. The government's pro-return stance has shaped not only the legal status of refugees in Lebanon but also the physical environment of camps. Until 2005, there was strict regulation of infrastructural development and camp rehabilitation, as the government sought to limit residents' social and spatial assimilation and underscore their temporary status.[20] Ironically, the discourses of Palestinian nationalism and Lebanese sovereignty have, with respect to the refugee question, increasingly come to resemble one another. Both understand the identity of Palestinians in historical terms and champion return as the only durable solution.

LEGAL DISCRIMINATION IN POSTWAR LEBANON

The Ta'if Accords that ended the civil war in 1989 did so at the expense of Palestinians, who were—and continue to be—cast as the principal troublemakers. Within postwar Lebanese politics, Palestinians have remained the indigestible element—in the words of one minister, Michel Murr, "human waste"—a "sect" without a place in a sectarian system (Sayigh 1995, 42). Animated by fear that absorbing the refugees, who are overwhelmingly Sunni, would destabilize the sectarian balance, successive governments have opposed "nationalization," colloquially referred to as "implantation" (*tawtin*), on the grounds that it would infringe on Lebanese sovereignty. This anti-*tawtin* position, which is shared by the majority of Lebanese and regarded as a "national constant" (*al-thawabit al-wataniyya*), precludes Palestinians from access to basic civil rights, which are obtained through nationality.[21]

In 1990, the Lebanese constitution was modified to include formal rejection of permanent resettlement of Palestinians in Lebanon, a stance that has enjoyed unprecedented consensus within Lebanon's various sectarian communities. A 2001 law forbade Palestinians from owning property outside the camps (Law 261).[22] The tenacity of the *tawtin* taboo was also manifest in the near hysteria generated by reconstruction of Nahr al-Bared camp and the debates surrounding proposed changes to the labor law in 2010, both of which have been interpreted by Lebanese commentators as precursors to naturalization.[23] Some even argue that persistent refusal to naturalize Palestinian refugees, along with the tendency to view them as a fifth column, has itself become a constitutive element in the formation of postwar Lebanese identity (Peteet 2005, 174; Sfeir 2010). As a friend from Shatila put it, "When the Lebanese civil war ended, all the Lebanese who were left behind were angels, and the only ones with dirty hands were the Palestinians. All hung their bloodstained clothes on us."

In the wake of the Ta'if Accords Palestinians were without a military presence, and subject to laws that curtailed their freedom of movement and restricted their participation in the labor market. Suhail al-Natour, a legal theorist in Beirut, described Ta'if as having marked the end of civil war and the start of the legal war against the Palestinians: "What we now face is a war of hunger. . . . The idea is not to allow Palestinians to work or make money because then they'll settle and forget Palestine—keep them poor and they'll want to return."[24] Since then, Palestinians have been treated as stateless foreigners, requiring a permit to work in almost all professions except agriculture and construction.[25] Palestinians fortunate enough to obtain permits are not com-

pensated in the event of injury or layoffs, are not eligible for social security, but nonetheless pay taxes from their salary for social welfare services they do not receive. Various efforts to promote economic integration of refugees have met with considerable resistance, not only from Lebanese but also, initially at least, from refugees themselves, who feared that such measures might lend permanency to their condition (Peteet 2005, 63). These structures of legal exclusion, by which the Lebanese government has sought to marginalize refugees from social and economic life and confine them to camps, are seen by most as part of a concerted effort to force refugees out of Lebanon (Peteet 1996; Sayigh 2001).

Despite massive budget deficits during the last decade, UNRWA has continued to be the primary aid institution for refugees in the camps. Its role is fraught with contradiction. Because UNRWA's work is explicitly humanitarian rather than political, it is often accused of being "an avatar of colonialism" (Schiff 1995, 6), of depoliticizing the status of Palestinian refugees by deflecting attention from their current political and legal crises as well as from the historical cause of their mass displacement.[26] While the PLO used social welfare to promote political mobilization and galvanize collective military resistance, UNRWA draws on a politically neutralized discourse of "empowerment" through social development.[27] Although credited with enabling the continuity of camp communities, UNRWA is also blamed for undermining their will and initiative through a regime of "management and containment."[28] The ongoing resistance of the Lebanese government to economic projects for refugees has effectively removed the "W" from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency mandate, reducing camps to spaces of bureaucracy rather than production.[29] As the camp economy continues to worsen and emergency conditions become the norm, relief programs have eclipsed investment in "development" and microcredit schemes.[30]

Anyone who has spent time in a Palestinian camp will be familiar with the dissatisfaction elicited by discussion of UNRWA services, particularly in the field of health and education. Overcrowded classrooms, lack of resources, decaying infrastructure, and poor instruction have led to high dropout rates and encouraged many families to invest meager resources in private tutoring. Similarly, the perceived inadequacy of UNRWA clinics and distrust of local doctors have created a strong preference for private health care, an expense well beyond the reach of most. Dependency has engendered frustration and humiliation. Friends of mine described their elderly neighbor greeting the ar-

rival of the UNRWA ration van with a mixture of relief and outrage. Holding up the bag of flour so all could see its UNRWA logo, she exclaimed bitterly, "This is the price of Palestine, a kilo of flour!" (*hay haq filastin, kilo tahin*), a reminder of what might be called the moral cost of aid.[31] While refugees regard UNRWA's operations as determined by the political interests of third parties pursuing their resettlement,[32] they also fear cessation of its services, not only because it would leave them without any safety net but because UNRWA, for all its flaws, represents the last vestiges of international recognition of refugee status and rights.[33]

The growing number of NGOs in Shatila during the last three decades is similarly seen as ineffectual, as compromised by the political interests and agendas of foreign donors and invariably corrupt.[34] The very term "NGO" may be misleading insofar as it presupposes the existence of governmental or quasi-governmental institutions, which do not in fact exist in the camps in Lebanon.[35] This goes some way toward explaining the overlap between NGOs as social providers and promoters of civil society, on the one hand, and actors in the political arena, on the other. Although a small number of local Lebanese-registered NGOs are independent, the majority are affiliated with leftist political factions and were established in the post-Oslo period as part of a bid to create a separate institutional power base in relation to the PA, and many are run by former faction leaders.[36] This has led to considerable blurring of the lines between the social, economic, and political activities carried out by such organizations. Although many of the NGOs in Shatila are run by sincere and dedicated staff and provide important services in the fields of culture, vocational training, and education (particularly for women and children), access to these resources will often depend on membership in affiliated political factions, making welfare a thinly disguised "means to a political end" (Hammami 1995, 55). This has undermined their credibility as charitable societies serving the broader community and hampered the development of civil society.[37]

A cursory review of recent statistics for the Palestinian camps in Lebanon reveals the extent of economic duress in these communities. Unemployment levels in all camps are now extremely high. It is estimated that approximately 56 percent of Palestinians are unemployed and more than a quarter of refugee households are without any employed members (UNRWA 2011b). Approximately two-thirds of Palestinian refugees subsist on less than $6.00 per day, and 6.6 percent of the population on less than $2.17 per day (UNRWA 2011b).